

CONFERENCE REPORT

GCEC: Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers 2017

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**GCEC Global Consortium of
Entrepreneurship Centers 2017**

Halifax, Nova Scotia
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<https://gcec2017.ca/>

About GCEC

Founded in 1997 as the National Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers with the mission of serving as the “premier leadership organization addressing the emerging topics of importance to the nation’s university-based centers for entrepreneurship,” the now-expanded Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC) today includes a global membership of around 250 centers, representing both well-established and new centers. The consortium is administered by staff at the Jones School of Business at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

Nature of the GCEC Conference

An organizational membership in GCEC is a prerequisite for associated individuals to attend this conference, which in 2017 drew around 300 entrepreneurship program coordinators and professors and three entrepreneurship librarians. A small number of attendees hailed from outside North America. There were apparently no graduate students present, since this conference does not have a research track. Around 40 people attended the “New Conference Attendee” preconference orientation.

The goal of the conference is to “share information, develop programs and initiatives, and collaborate and assist in advancing, strengthening, and celebrating the contributions and impact of individual centers—as well as the overall role of university-based entrepreneurship centers.” GCEC covers entrepreneurship education as well as on-campus incubators and start-up accelerators.

GCEC member campuses apply to host the annual conference. While the host school is responsible for all conference expenses, it retains 100% of registration fees as well as any

sponsorship funding the school is able to recruit. A GCEC “request for proposal” flier noted that a school could, “in theory,” make money by hosting the annual conference. The conference registration fee was \$450, lower than other entrepreneurship education conferences.

The 2017 conference marked the second time in recent years that the event was held outside of the United States. Hosted by Dalhousie University, Saint Mary’s University, and the University of New Brunswick, the main conference days were Friday, October 13, at Dalhousie and Saturday, October 14, at Saint Mary’s. Conference buses were provided, but some attendees walked since both campuses are downtown. The official conference hotel faced the harbor and hosted conference breakfasts and a late-evening hospitality suites. A Thursday-evening social was held at Pier 21, the Canadian Museum of Immigration.

The conference began on Friday morning with a plenary talk, a debate, lunch with a keynote speaker, followed by concurrent sessions organized into five tracks:

1. Social innovation and entrepreneurship
2. Engaging the community
3. Fostering the entrepreneurial university
4. Managing the centre
5. The role of incubators, accelerators, sandboxes, and maker spaces

The sessions were 50 minutes long and included two sets of speakers or panels covering a related topic, a format that resulted in brisk presentations and panels offering many new ideas and points of view. Common themes included experiential learning, collaboration and engagement with local entrepreneurial ecosystems, mentoring and counseling programs, creating cross-campus programs, and how to measure and assess programs.

Saturday’s programming concluded with plenary panels and the presentation of GCEC annual awards. A dinner party at the Halifax Discovery Center (and one more late-evening in the hospitality suite) ended the conference.

Opening Plenary and “Great Debate”

After the three host universities chancellors’ welcome, plenary speaker Gururaj “Desh” Deshpande, president and chairman of Sparta Group LLC, discussed social entrepreneurship programs in India and the vital role of educational centers in supporting such entrepreneurship.

After a morning break, a “great debate” was staged on the topic of “Education versus Acceleration: Be it resolved that the role of a university entrepreneurship center should be either education or start-up acceleration.”

The debaters were entrepreneurship program directors from four large U.S. universities, two debaters per side—a format that served the purpose of reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneur classes and campus accelerators. Among the points made:

- Students first need to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skill sets (core competencies) as well as critical thinking and decision-making skills.
- Experiential learning is vital (whether through classroom work or through an accelerator). Entrepreneurship is about action.
- An emphasis on creating startups while taking classes excludes certain kinds of students (such as lower income students, students with dependent children, and student athletes).
- Practice is required to get good at something.
- Students working through an incubator get much free support: space, technology, infrastructure, even legal advice. Does that free support make for a privileged cocoon that doesn’t prepare entrepreneurs for operating in the real world?
- Young adulthood is often not the best time to start a company; student debt, limited resources, family needs, and a lack of management and supervisory experience are limiting factors.
- As university educators, our job and our passion should support teaching and education.

The debate got more interesting in the question-and-answer period, when a Yale University professor asked all other women in attendance to stand. She then pointed out that the moderator and the four debaters were all men speaking to a conference that was about 50% female. In response, the moderator invited the Yale professor to join the group on stage as they fielded more questions. The debate structure was abandoned, and the conference attendees enjoyed a more nuanced discussion.

Sexism in entrepreneurship (both education and start-ups) sustained as a topic for the rest of the conference. Privilege came up less often: Students working 20 to 30 hours a week in a campus incubator on their business idea while also taking a full load of classes is only a possibility for well-off students who don’t need to earn income to pay for their education or support their families.

The lack of diversity in tech entrepreneurship came up as an issue, in contrast to more modest “main street” entrepreneurship, as did the vital role of immigrants in creating jobs and supporting

the economy. Speakers at the Friday lunch noted Canada's official support and encouragement of immigrant entrepreneurs, in contrast to recent trends in the United States.

Lunch Keynote on Entrepreneurship in Atlantic Canada

Over lunch in the Dalhousie University Student Union, Gerry Pond, chairman and co-founder of Mariner Partners, Inc., discussed challenges in creating entrepreneurship ecosystems in a large physical regions with small populations like Atlantic Canada. He discussed the roles of local and regional governments, funding, and taxation at the provincial and federal levels.

How Librarians Support Campus Entrepreneurs and Build Culture

On Saturday, Carey Toane, entrepreneurship librarian at the University of Toronto, and Christina Kim, senior manager of market intelligence of MaRS Discovery District, cross-appointed from the University of Toronto Libraries, spoke on "How Librarians Support Campus Entrepreneurs and Build Culture." Toane discussed how she supports students and startups across three campuses, 11 entrepreneurship programs, nine campus accelerators, and courses that span music, medicine, and computer science on a campus of almost 89,000 students. She reported providing consulting services, workshops, and co-teaching an introduction to communication class for the translational research program for the faculty of medicine. Following her conducted survey of these stakeholders, Toane reported her pending work on a summary article.

Kim coordinates the provision of research databases and datasets to the MaRS accelerator program and supports regional innovation centres across several provinces and campus-based accelerators in Ontario. The MaRS Discovery District opened in 2005, hired its first librarian the following year, and launched the market intelligence unit in 2008. Kim negotiates special licensing terms with each vendor, given the unique scope of MaRS clients. She first negotiated an agreement with Gartner, the technology research and advisory firm, and used that success to get other vendors on board, where smaller startups get more free access than larger startups. The librarians concluded their remarks with recommendations to faculty to reach out to their business or engineering librarians, provide links to library guides, invite librarians to class to support students' research, and reach out to local public libraries and economic development centers.

Empowering Disadvantaged Members of the Community

Mike Morris and Jamie Kraft from the University of Florida began their presentation with a review of failed efforts to reduce the poverty rate in the United States. With the hope that entrepreneurship can empower and transform poor neighborhoods, their business school now hosts the Gainesville Entrepreneurship and Adversity Program through a partnership with local and regional social and economic development agencies. The program works in high-poverty neighborhoods to promote self-employment, in contrast to more typical incubation programs that often focus on high-tech, big growth opportunities. Thirty-three entrepreneurs went through a boot camp series of workshops last fall, with 20 continuing to receive consulting through the following spring. Mentoring and microfinancing are also included in the year-long program. Morris would like to form a consortium of campuses to develop anti-poverty programs through entrepreneurship.

Building the Entrepreneurial University

Lewis Sheats and Jennifer Capps discussed breaking down entrepreneurship education silos at North Carolina State University's entrepreneurship programs that span 15 academic units, each with its own classes and physical spaces. Sheats and Capps' goal was to connect the silos through an interdisciplinary certificate program as well as student clubs and other programming. Eight of the academic units are now participating in these efforts to span silos. They had to find champions in each silo to make this happen.

David Rose discussed what the University of Waterloo campus did to be named the "most innovating" university in Canada by McClean's magazine for the last 25 years. Founded in 1957, the 36,000-student institution allows faculty and students who create intellectual property at the university to retain complete ownership. Through a community cooperative program, all students graduate with two years of experience working in a company. Many major technology companies now have offices in the Waterloo area.

Rose mentioned one educational innovation at his university: students have to "pitch a problem," not a solution. The point of the exercise is to establish a better understanding the issues, focus on deep exploration and research, and expand students' knowledge of peoples outside of their own limited experiences. Waterloo librarians are very involved in this process. Winning students get money to pursue a solution to the problem they studied.

Teaching Students to Use Data to Make Better Decisions

As part of a combined session titled “Learning from Being on the Ground and Asking for Help from Those Who Know,” Carey Toane and I presented “Teaching Entrepreneurship Students to use Regional Industry and Market Data to Make Better Decisions and Reduce Risk.” Toane provided data from a survey she conducted on University of Toronto campus entrepreneurs’ research habits and needs. I discussed the roles of academic libraries and librarians in entrepreneurship programs and centers, emphasizing faculty’s key role in making sure students utilize quality research and data sources and their librarian research consultants. Toane concluded our talk with a walk-through of a Toronto-based case study in which students made significant decisions using Canadian consumer data via SimplyAnalytics.

Globally Locally: Building Local Ecosystems for a Globalized World

Rob Lalka discussed the early adoption of service learning as a student requirement at Tulane University, where most students are from out-of-state and represent a privileged economic background. The service learning component of their education helps students get involved in New Orleans communities and exposed to more diversity. The new entrepreneurship aspect of service learning reflects new, post-Katrina opportunities in New Orleans. Coaches help the students provide better service to local entrepreneurs, and establish realistic expectations of their limited value to those local entrepreneurs.

Sam Schanfarber of Global Entrepreneurship-in-Residence (EIR) discussed his organization’s efforts to support non-U.S. entrepreneurs who want to create a U.S.-based business and create jobs. Because of their difficulty in earning green cards, foreign entrepreneurs often can’t get funding to expand in the U.S. Global EIR partners with campus accelerators to help such entrepreneurs get H-1B visas. A discussion of the political situation regarding immigrants in the U.S. followed. Canadian members at this talk discussed how Canadian universities are involved in a national in Start-Up Visa, a program for foreign entrepreneurs to create businesses.

Breaking the Mold: Embracing Diversity in Advancing Entrepreneurship

Nora Perry discussed the Centre for Women in Business at Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax, Nova Scotia), which offers programs for women entrepreneurs in Nova Scotia and promotes entrepreneurship as a career to female students. Students are paired with local entrepreneurs and small companies. Rather than focus on creating ventures, the emphasis is on

growing student skills by instilling a risk-taking, entrepreneurial mindset and building personal networks. Perry reported that women in this program like learning and building support systems with other women. There was a discussion about the merits of embracing a same-sex networking silo or having a more integrated approach. One attendee noted that undergraduates of both sexes at his school think their young generation has solved the problem of gender inequality in the workforce (or will take care of it soon). But that professor shares with his students the statistics indicating that venture capital overwhelmingly goes to male-lead ventures. Perry believes that female students need programming to help them learn the challenges they will be facing in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Training needs to focus on building confidence, creativity, and mindful definitions of success.

What Should University Entrepreneurship Centres be Addressing?

Accelerator center directors from four Canadian and U.S. universities discussed whether students should pursue a venture full-time or scale up their businesses while completing their education. They noted that with student entrepreneurs no longer only coming out of business and engineering schools, centers need to be more flexible in their roles. Nicole Anderson from the University of Windsor explained the risk, from the Canadian public university perspective, of students dropping out of school to pursue ventures full-time. When that happens, has the government investment in that public university student been wasted?

Value for Librarians?

I have now attended five academic entrepreneurship conferences. All have been useful for learning but also in advocating for the roles and contributions of entrepreneurship librarians through networking with colleagues across the academic space. Additionally, these events provide librarians with an opportunity to attend a professional conference with end-users and those who manage the programs we support. GCEC proved distinctive for the expected emphasis on education and entrepreneurship support centers and the lack of research tracks (although research did inform some of the sessions). It was also noteworthy for the large number of ideas shared, given the paired speaker format. GCEC provided ample opportunities for networking with programming leaders and was less expensive than most entrepreneurship conferences. With the 2018 meeting in Chicago, it may be less expensive for many librarians to attend and it should be well worth the investment.