

The following information is an excerpt from the Letter of Intent submitted to the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in response to the RECODE Request for Proposals of Spring 2014.

## Georgian College

### OVERVIEW

Georgian College fosters a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, preparing students to become not only job seekers, but also *job creators*. Working together with industry and community partners, Georgian offers relevant, cutting-edge curriculum, quality work placements and co-op experiences. With more than 120 career-focused programs across seven locations in Central Ontario (Barrie, Midland, Muskoka, Orangeville, Orillia, Owen Sound and South Georgian Bay), Georgian serves 11,000 full-time students and 28,000 Continuing Education registrations annually. Advanced study options are offered through the one-of-a-kind Georgian University Partnership Centre.

Our refreshed strategic plan, *Focus 2015*, reaffirms our priorities, and renews our commitment to entrepreneurship and innovation. *Focus 2015* builds on our strengths, articulates aspirational goals and recognizes the important role we play as a community partner, a top employer and a significant contributor to economic development in Central Ontario and beyond. We believe our strategic plan is fully aligned with the Ontario government's vision for postsecondary education.

Georgian's **vision** is to be the most personally connected learning organization in Canada – a catalyst for individual, organizational and community transformation. Through partnerships, we will connect people from all walks of life to extraordinary learning experiences (i.e. Community Service Learning, applied research, student-run social enterprises) that will inspire innovation and prepare them for life and career success. With a reputation for excellence, Georgian graduates will be in demand by employers and will contribute in many ways to the economic vitality, sustainability and quality of life of their communities.

Our **mission** is to inspire innovation, transform lives and connect communities through the power of education. We will advance our mission and vision by living our **values** of excellence, entrepreneurial spirit, public accountability, fiscal and environmental sustainability, respect for all, and community connections. Georgian is committed to embedding social entrepreneurial learning outcomes into many of our 120 programs. New collaborations are being explored between departments such as business and culinary; policing and social service work; technology and health. Student and faculty teams are encouraged to engage with others across all relevant disciplines.

### Positioning Georgian College's Centre for Social Entrepreneurship

The non-profit sector is one of Canada's largest economic contributors. According to the Ontario Nonprofit Network, this sector contributes 2.6 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product (value of goods and services produced), more than the auto, agricultural and retail sectors. There are more than one million Ontarians employed in the non-profit sector and more than five million volunteers supporting it. Despite its large economic contribution and vast number of paid and volunteer workers, the sector faces significant challenges, including: increasingly complex social

issues, decreased government funding for social programs, increased privatization of government run programs, a growing gap in the number of traditional organizations that can address complex social problems, and increased competition for fundraising dollars.

In an environment of increased complexity, a growing number of non-profits are changing their traditional approach and turning to social entrepreneurial principles and practices to fund and meet their mission driven work. Social entrepreneurship is providing non-profit organizations with creative strategies to address complex issues, generating both social and economic returns. The adoption of social entrepreneurial strategies is on the rise. However, in order to scale social entrepreneurial activity, non-profits need to increase staffing and organizational capacity. This has been identified as an area of improvement and need (Inspiring Innovation, 2013). To create successful social enterprises, non-profits require a new type of employee; one who is equipped with a social entrepreneurial mindset and skills.

## Georgian College's innovative approach to social entrepreneurship

Social innovation is about new ideas, approaches and ways of delivering services to the community. As communities struggle with increasingly complex social issues, community members, public institutions, municipalities and businesses are looking for socially innovative responses to catapult social change processes and solutions.

Social innovation occurs when people from different disciplines come together in collaborative spaces that promote the generation of new ideas and networks, and open dialogue. According to the Centre for Social Innovation, "Space and community increase the likelihood for social innovation emergence." In order to create conditions for social innovation emergence, Georgian College introduced its Centre for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) in January 2012. The CSE is Georgian's version of a "Social Innovation Zone." It plays a critical role in meeting the needs of the community and developing new opportunities. With the support of RECODE Transformational funding, the CSE will be able to significantly expand its programs throughout Central Ontario.

The CSE is one of the only postsecondary centres in Ontario dedicated to social entrepreneurship. Its primary purpose is to provide students with opportunities to develop social entrepreneurial skills and mindsets through a platform of experiential learning and targeted curriculum. Through the CSE, Georgian College is primed to develop new social enterprises and/or intrapreneurial mindsets within community organizations. As a result, the CSE will ultimately contribute to the transformation of the non-profit sector by building the capacity of the future workforce; hence enabling non-profits to actively and innovatively participate in the social entrepreneurial ecosystem. In addition to supporting individuals with innovative, social entrepreneurial ideas, Georgian College is also focused on building the entrepreneurial capacity of its workforce, its organizational structures and its overall contributions to healthy local economies and communities. This enables Georgian College to affect change across a broader spectrum potentially addressing persistent and complex societal challenges.

According to a report released by the European Commission in 2013 (Entrepreneurship Education: A Guide to Educators), "Entrepreneurial education does not involve a specific subject. It requires a way of teaching in which experiential learning and project work have a main role...It is not simply about how to run a business, it's about how to create programs that contribute to an

entrepreneurial spirit, with or without a commercial objective.” According to Victoria Calvert (2011), intentional experiential learning opportunities are powerful vehicles to develop social entrepreneurial skills and mindsets. Using experiential learning, Georgian College aims to inspire an entrepreneurial spirit among students and stakeholders at all seven campuses across Central Ontario.

The CSE creates social innovators by ensuring students develop and excel in specific social entrepreneurial skills and mindsets (Miller, Wesley & Williams, 2012). Georgian graduates will stand out among their colleagues as they will have the necessary skills to create, develop and sustain successful social enterprises and activities as a result of Georgian’s unique social entrepreneurial educational platform.

Since the CSE became operational in 2012, we have seen exceptional results in collaboration with local non-profit organizations, municipalities and community supporters who share mutual benefits in the communities we serve. The CSE has linked students with non-profits through intentional experiential learning opportunities that allow students to develop and reflect upon social entrepreneurial skill development. Intentional experiential learning opportunities include the unique Community Project Initiative (CPI), Community Service Learning (CSL), and work-related placements in the field of social entrepreneurship. Since 2012, the CSE has partnered with 750 organizations; placing more than 1,200 students annually in the community through work-related placements. In 2014 alone, more than 100 students completed 55 CPIs with interdisciplinary teams and supports, affecting 1,575 community members.

In addition to the CSE, Georgian College opened the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre (HBEC) in May, 2012. Its mandate is to deliver programs, experiences, and expertise to produce graduates who are entrepreneurial. In addition, the HBEC serves community-based entrepreneurs active in all sectors including social entrepreneurship. HBEC is developing two changemaker spaces to provide students from all disciplines opportunities to incubate new and innovative ideas and enterprises.

Georgian’s CSE also aspires to become a hub of support, connection and expertise for community organizations and social purpose businesses specifically interested in the development of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The CSE aims to become a sector leader in the area of social enterprise, with a significant presence at provincial and national networks, working groups and conferences. Engaging community influencers, as well as provincial and national leaders, is an essential element of the sustainability plan for the CSE. Georgian College continues to learn and participate in the social entrepreneurial ecosystem through conferences and collaborations and is positioned to contribute to a national network of thought leaders, practitioners and researchers.

- Georgian College presented its social entrepreneurship vision at three conferences in the spring of 2014; The League for Innovation in the Community College (California), the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Community- Campus Partnerships for Health international conference (Chicago) and the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning conference (Ottawa).
- Georgian College attended Rural Social Enterprise Constellation’s Social Enterprise Practitioners Institute, hosted by Trent University, on June 17-18, 2014.

- Georgian College, in partnership with the United Way of Greater Simcoe County and the Rural Social Enterprise Constellation, convened 30+ community leaders and intermediaries at the first Simcoe County Social Enterprise Stakeholders Forum. This gathering aimed to identify areas of mutual interest in growing support for social entrepreneurship development in the region. Georgian will facilitate further discussions in the fall of 2014 and aims to formalize a structure to build Simcoe County's capacity to work together to build the social economy.
- Georgian College sits on several social entrepreneurship-themed committees, chairs the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning and is extremely involved with the work of the Rural Social Enterprise Constellation.

Georgian College is a leading learning organization and hence envisions working with Ashoka U to begin the journey of becoming a Changemaker Campus. Ashoka U staff has expressed its excitement and support for Georgian College's vision and is prepared to help us begin the process, if funded. Upon success, Georgian College would be the first community college in Canada to achieve Changemaker Campus status.

## Intended activities, practices and programs

Through collaborative, authentic community partnerships, intentional experiential learning opportunities, the enrichment of our changemaker spaces, targeted curriculum and scholarly research activity, Georgian College's CSE is positioned to become the social entrepreneurial learning hub in Simcoe County and beyond.

With support from Ontario Rural Social Enterprise Constellation, Georgian College designed a *Theory of Change* to help tell our story and vision to internal and external audiences. Our *Theory of Change* depicts the engagement of Georgian College students, faculty and organizational structures as well as members from the surrounding community. Our vision includes but is not limited to:

- Increasing the capacity for experiential, cross-curricular and multi-disciplinary learning.
- Targeted curriculum development (graduate certificate in Social Entrepreneurship, diploma in Community Development and Social Innovation and a general education course in Social Entrepreneurship).
- Increasing the number of changemaker spaces across our campuses to incubate and grow new social enterprises and social innovations.
- Investigation and growth of innovative social finance options through increased alignment with financial and business institutions.
- Continued development of a strong culture of social innovation and social entrepreneurship within and in proximity to Georgian College along with various community stakeholders.

## Transforming the student, teaching and research experience

**Student:** The CSE offers an experiential learning model to develop the social entrepreneurial skills and mindsets required to build the organizational and staff capacities within non-profits and social enterprises. This will contribute to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem as well as help to

build an innovative, responsive non-profit sector. The CSE is a resource and hub for students in all programs to connect with community organizations to promote positive social change. There are a number of important benefits that the CSE will offer students, including:

- Increased differentiation in the job market
- Increased ability to apply innovative and creative problem solving to complex social problems
- Increased professional network and employment opportunities
- Increased community citizenship and engagement
- Increased skills, knowledge and attitudes required to become successful social entrepreneurs
- Increased skills, knowledge and attitudes required to develop social enterprises

Teaching: To support the college's vision, it is extremely important to focus teaching and learning methodologies and culture to be socially innovative and entrepreneurial. Georgian College is committed to working with its Centre for Teaching and Learning and its Academic Leadership Team to:

- Demonstrate how social entrepreneurship and experiential learning fit into the broader curriculum plan
- Build faculty's capacity to integrate learning as a horizontal approach across multiple disciplines
- Promote a culture that values strong internal networks, partnerships, risk mitigation, experimentation, investigation and action
- Develop resources and tools to help implement the vision across all seven campuses

Research: At Georgian College, we are committed to social entrepreneurship and innovation. As part of this commitment, we support a variety of research efforts college-wide. Our capacity to embark on applied research projects is highlighted by the following:

- Georgian College is eligible for funding from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
- College and universities have expressed interest in working with us in support of our CSE vision
- Georgian College's Research Analyst program contributes skills and expertise to community-based research projects
- Georgian College's Centre for Applied Research and Innovation provides students with alternative learning opportunities. All projects require student researchers