

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.

## Mount Royal University

Mount Royal University (MRU), led by the Institute for Nonprofit Studies, aims to strengthen and grow a culture of social innovation on campus, embedded within the Calgary community, and linked to an emerging cadre of post-secondary initiatives in Canada.

Social innovation weds the contemporary expectation of universities as generators of entrepreneurial thinking with the time-honoured recognition of universities as crucibles of active citizenship and critical thinking. These two pillars are fixed in MRU's "DNA", although there is considerable room to deepen, define and expand our commitment to marrying innovation with social purpose.

### ***Social Innovation in Alberta***

Alberta is poised to be a leading jurisdiction with respect to social innovation: Its reputation, and that of Calgary in particular, as a hotbed of entrepreneurship and unconventional thinking and action is well known. Entrepreneurship and the arts also share a close affinity, perhaps reflected in the fact that Albertans consistently spend more on the arts than any other province in Canada. Alberta also has a strong history of *collective* responses to meeting community needs, in such areas as cooperative agricultural distribution systems, food retail and savings and loans. While prosperous and exalting of the individual, the Alberta story is also one of resilience and mutual effort, most recently demonstrated in the response to the 2013 floods. In the April 2014 provincial budget, the Alberta Government announced the creation of the largest social innovation endowment in North America.

At the same time, the province's capacity to innovate is being tested: Access to export markets and environmental challenges weigh heavily, and visibly, on the energy sector's ability to fuel long-term prosperity. Endemic housing affordability challenges rob too many from partaking in the fruits of this prosperity, while the province experiences consistently stratospheric rates of domestic violence. Alberta's reliance on one sector as the engine of prosperity, and as a primary investor in social and community life, tests its broader capacity to support entrepreneurs, makers, and innovators who envision a more sustainable and resilient socio-economic model.

### ***MRU and Social Innovation***

Founded as a community college in 1910 and granted a university charter in 2009, MRU is one of Alberta's original post-secondary institutions. MRU has developed a reputation for community relevance – with Western Canada's premier music conservatory, the first applied undergraduate degree program in nonprofit studies in Canada, and operating one of Canada's largest centres of adult and continuing education. It also provides one of the most valued undergraduate experiences in Canada. The learning model at MRU emphasizes 2 years of liberal arts, plus 2 years of applied professional preparation, utilizing small class sizes (typically between 25 and 35 students, even in year one), and undergraduate exposure to research opportunities, opportunities that would be restricted to graduate students at most other universities.

While it may not have been identified as social innovation per se, many MRU Faculty and Institutes have developed a reputation for developing bold, untested approaches to addressing knowledge gaps and making community-involved pedagogical breakthroughs. Examples include Dr. Jennifer Pettit's extraordinary Treaty 7 Field Course (<http://treaty7.wordpress.com/>), the first "wiki" class in a business school in Canada, designed and delivered by "Innographer" Dr. Alex Bruton, the many

hands-on community-building initiatives led by Wendelin Fraser (see, for example <http://www.highrivertimes.com/2014/01/29/calgary-students-offer-helping-hand-to-high-river-businesses>), and the recent co-location onto the MRU Campus of the Miistakis Institute, bringing with it a portal for students and faculty to work directly with communities to ensure healthier landscapes and sustainable, resilient approaches to land use.

The Calgary 2013 flood response also highlighted the adroit community leadership of Mayor Naheed Nenshi, a Mount Royal University (MRU) Faculty member who designed and championed much of the current nonprofit studies educational programming. MRU's extensive relationship with Calgary's social economy community, embodied in Nenshi's approach, is a newly formed multi-agency working group on social innovation, catalyzed initially by Ashoka Canada. Other members of this group include Innovate Calgary, Trico Foundation, Social Venture Partners, United Way, First Calgary Financial and the City of Calgary.

In 2013, MRU officially adopted a whole-of-campus *Community Service Learning* (CSL) program to recognize and encourage additional links between classroom learning and real world experience. Twenty one CSL courses have been approved so far, with a goal of over 30 courses and over 200,000 hours of documented CSL in this inaugural year. More than 250 community partners have signed up to provide CSL student experiences. Over 2,000 students are enrolled in CSL courses, and 500 students have already been awarded the CSL Citation. MRU will also host the next Canadian CSL Conference (June, 2016).

MRU is also beginning to build campus-wide enthusiasm and support to apply to Ashoka U for recognition as an *Ashoka Changemaker Campus*. A small internal team of those interested in social innovation and change leadership has been formed within the Bissett School of Business, and we plan to soon convene a cross-campus working group of students, faculty and administration, developing a multi-year campus-wide strategy, and demonstrating MRU's contribution to entrepreneurship, innovation and social change leadership. The Institute for Nonprofit Studies and the Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship have pledged to share the cost of the 360 degree campus review, the first step in the Ashoka designation process. The remainder of the costs associated with the review and designation process are pledged from The Calgary Foundation.

### ***The Partners***

The MRU-led Calgary Social Innovation Zone will be led by the **Institute for Nonprofit Studies** (described in the next section), with a wide variety of key collaborators, including the following confirmed partners:

#### *Internal to MRU*

- **The Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** The Institute works to create and foster an entrepreneurial mindset, marked by imagination, a readiness to take on new projects, and perseverance to overcome all obstacles. It works to develop students as innovators that transform small and large companies, drive social enterprise, create new ventures and build dynamic communities.
- **Design4Change:** An award-winning, boutique marketing agency, essentially a social enterprise based out of the Bissett School of Business. Design4Change utilizes the brightest student and alumni minds to create intelligent brand solutions for real world clients.

- **Enactus Mount Royal** – A student club dedicated to building a better tomorrow through entrepreneurial approaches. See <http://www.enactusmountroyal.com/> for additional information on Enactus MRU.
- **The Students Association of MRU (SAMRU)** – The government body that represents and serves Mount Royal University students. SAMRU is a charitable organization that owns and operates the student centre and many related/co-located social enterprises, such as Hub Catering.
- **The Bissett School of Business** – The business school will host or co-host many of the activities outlined in this letter of intent, and is committed to helping support and shepherd the development to the BBA Social Innovation Concentration, described later.

**The Faculty of Continuing Education and Extension** – The Faculty, which already offers an online certificate in nonprofit management, is already partnering with the Institutes to develop extension certificate programs in corporate sustainability/CSR, community investment, advanced nonprofit leadership and is interested in developing offerings in social innovation and/or social enterprise.

We are also developing partnerships with a large number of community organizations, including nonprofit sector and commercial entities. Partners to date, with respect to the concept of the Social Innovation Zone specifically, include the following:

- Trico Foundation (confirmed funder of Social Enterprise Survey; collaborator on multiple fronts)
- The Calgary Foundation (confirmed funder of Ashoka Changemaker Campus preparatory work)
- Social Venture Partners (“Calgary Innovators” partner)
- Suncor Energy Foundation (“Calgary Innovators” partner)
- United Way of Calgary and Area (“Calgary Innovators” partner)
- First Calgary Financial (“Calgary Innovators” partner)
- REOS Partners (social innovation curriculum consultants)
- Commix (Calgary social innovation network mapping)

***Zone Convener - The Institute for Nonprofit Studies***

The Institute for Nonprofit Studies was founded in 2000 with the purpose of creating Canada’s first undergraduate program aimed at understanding the nonprofit sector, as well to develop professional educational offerings in nonprofit management. Over the following decade, and as MRU evolved from a community college to a university, the Institute focused its efforts on developing a research infrastructure for the social economy in Canada.

Under the leadership of its new Director, James Stauch, the Institute has developed a new strategic focus based on over 100 exploratory interviews and meetings during the course of fall 2013, then revised and affirmed during a planning retreat with over 25 community and on-campus practitioners and thought leaders in early March of this year. These encounters have helped lay the groundwork for a much more expanded circle of “zone partners” than what is confirmed here. Going forward, the Institute will be guided by the following operating principles, which can be viewed as functional ‘commitments’: Systems thinking, praxis and policy, knowledge and mobilization, and Aboriginal engagement. Marrying these principles with a tri-partite focus on students, the community and research, the Institute is being re-organized to convene and develop three major “learning hubs”:

- **Social Innovation**, the focus of which is described herein
- **Community Investment and Philanthropy**: To provide professional learning opportunities, as well as a research platform, for those involved in philanthropy or corporate community investment in Canada
- **Community Change Leadership**: Creating a multi-disciplinary program, developed for students wanting to understand and lead community-building or social change efforts, who will understand and source their passion to make the world a better place, understanding how to design, collaborate, motivate and effect systems-level change.

Each of these three learning hubs, while overlapping in many ways, has a different lead faculty partner and an identified set of current and potential partners and collaborators. Although all three learning hubs<sup>3</sup> are implicated in the creation of a Social Innovation Zone, the emphasis in this Letter of Intent will focus on the namesake learning hub.

The Institute's Charter is currently being revised to reflect this new direction, and over the summer of 2014, it is partnering with Design4Change to re-brand, re-name and re-launch.

In addition to the activities described herein, the Institute is currently undertaking the following activities:

- Serving as the secretariat for the Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Researchers (ANSER), and English language editor of the Association's namesake journal, the only peer-reviewed journal on the social economy in Canada.
- Hosting bi-monthly community research forums, where practitioners and researchers interact on a diverse array of topics.
- Providing an annual internship opportunity for senior undergraduate students in any discipline exploring a topic related to the social economy.
- Partnering with Transcanada Inc. and the Faculty of Continuing Education and Extension to develop a new certificate program for corporate community investment professionals, the first such program outside of Boston College.
- Co-leading, with Simon Fraser University, a Canada-wide survey of the scale, focus and function of the social enterprise 'sector' in Canada. [www.sess.ca](http://www.sess.ca) A corollary of this is participation in the International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) project, led by the University of Liege, Belgium.
- Partnering with the Université du Québec à Montréal, Community Foundations Canada, Philanthropic Foundations Canada and a host of other researchers across Canada to lead a SSHRC-supported investigation into the history, role, and key emerging trends and issues related to grant-making foundations in Canada.
- Researching approaches to social change leadership development, with support from the Pathy Family and Calgary Foundations.
- Working with Corey Olynik (leadership coach and trainer) and the Bissett School of Business to design a "master class" executive leadership approach to community purpose sector leadership in Calgary.
- Working with Max Bell Foundation and the Faculty of Continuing Education and Extension to develop a certificate program for nonprofit leaders aimed at understanding public policy and government relations.
- Advising the Bissett School of Business on the creation of a new Aboriginal Business program.

- Advising on the creation or scaling of a variety of new social enterprise initiatives, such as Agents for Change ([www.facebook.com/MakeMoveMakeDif](http://www.facebook.com/MakeMoveMakeDif)), Mealshare ([www.mealshare.ca](http://www.mealshare.ca)) and Biidly ([www.biidly.com](http://www.biidly.com)).
- Advising the Suncor Energy Foundation as it reshapes its approach to community investment.

The purpose behind the Social Innovation Zone at MRU is to enhance student knowledge of, commitment to, and practical experience related to community innovation, bolstered by a novel, applied, collaborative research agenda and deeper connections and supports to others working to advance social innovation in Calgary and elsewhere.

The Zone will focus on four major realms of learning - undergraduate curricula, co-curricular and extra-curricular student activities, research and community practitioner-focused learning.

Although the specific suite of initiatives will be adapted and massaged based on how the partnership evolves, as well as on prototyping and revisiting various ideas, a provisional core set of activities is described as follows:

1. Developing an undergraduate Concentration in Social Innovation
2. Developing an innovation hub for students, social-purpose businesses and new enterprises
3. Developing a campus-wide approach to community leadership development
4. Developing a design-based fellowship program for community practitioners
5. Seed fund student social entrepreneurship initiatives

## **1. Developing an Undergraduate *Concentration* in Social Innovation**

Most post-secondary programs focused on social innovation are offered at the graduate level. However, there is also a strong and growing cohort of undergraduates wanting to infuse their general business education with a focus on social purpose. Pink's "motivation trifecta", where students desire mastery, autonomy and purpose, is a useful way to look at the role social innovation education can play: A standard business education short-changes students on 'purpose', while a non-profit management focus short changes students on 'autonomy', at least from an economic security standpoint. A social innovation focus can serve both motivation masters. The task, then, is to deliver programming that then nurtures mastery.

The Bissett School of Business currently offers a *Minor in Social Innovation and Nonprofit Studies*, which is available to any student in any degree-track program at MRU. This program has a core of six classes from the entrepreneurship (ENTR) and non-profit studies (NPRO) streams, and a suite of electives spanning almost every faculty on campus.

In addition to the Minor, we also intend to create a *Concentration in Social Innovation*, which is the equivalent of a Major, offered under the Bachelor of Business Administration (General Management) Degree.

Although we are still in the workshop phase of the BBA-Management, the program will likely include some or all of the required courses currently offered within the Minor in Social Innovation and Nonprofit Studies:

- ENTR 2301: The Entrepreneurial Experience

- NPRO 2201: Introduction to Social Innovation and Values- Centered Management (name change pending; currently titled “Rebels With a Cause”)
- NPRO 3304: Agents of Social Change
- ENTR 3370: Society, Innovation and Enterprise
- MGMT 4470: Governance and Ethical Issues in Organizations
- As well as the currently optional NPRO 3730: The Art and Science of Storytelling

In addition, and subject to further refinement and MRU approval, the following courses will be developed (working titles only): Community Innovators Laboratory (2014-2015), Social Capital and Leadership Effectiveness (2015-2016), Transformative Consumer and Citizen Action (2015-2016), Social and Cooperative Enterprise (2016-2017), Social Finance (2016-2017), and Sustainability Strategies for Purpose-Focused Organizations (2016-2017)

Support from the RECODE Transformation Fund will strengthen the cohesiveness and depth of the of the program architecture and curriculum, by bringing in outside advisors and collaborators.

Note also that the materials developed, as well as in-kind Institute support, will be provided to the Faculty of Continuing Education and Extension, in the creation of a potential certificate program on social innovation and/or social enterprise development for community practitioners.

## **2. Developing an innovation hub for students, social purpose businesses and new enterprises**

The Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (IIE), the Institute for Nonprofit Studies and Enactus MRU have jointly identified a need to create a physical shared innovation space that would allow senior students and rent-paying community-partners can “collide”, converge and co-create. The hub would serve two purposes: Providing start-up enterprises and smaller, socially purposed business with office and workshop/training space, while at the same time providing shared hot desk, meeting and workshop/training space with third and fourth year students working on Enactus projects or on individual or group entrepreneurship or social innovation projects.

IIE has recently commissioned BBA student Dustin Paisley (who is also the incoming President of Enactus MRU) to research and report on incubator, accelerator and student-community organization co-location ‘hubs’ elsewhere in North America, including hubs located on campuses. As of this writing, Dustin toured a wide range of facilities in Boston, Vancouver and Ontario. Support from the RECODE Transformation Fund will enable the next step in this process: Identifying a suitable space on campus, lining up committed partners (including renovation sponsors), designing the programming model, business plan and fee structure, and setting in motion the design and redevelopment of the space.

## **3. Developing a campus-wide approach to student-driven community leadership development**

Many undergrads possess the ideals, energy and passion to “change the world” (implicit in this is that they are increasingly globally-minded, or at least globally-interested). The challenge is to help students create a learning path to act on this passion through forming and testing ideas, acting on those ideas and ultimately affecting real change – this involves cultivating “creative confidence”, an

entrepreneurial mindset, understanding policy, mobilizing community, communicating effectively, and array of other skills, in addition to managing change.

Co-led with SAMRU, we will convene a cross-campus process focused on developing a new undergraduate program of learning – framed at the outset as an eventual degree-track (potentially), inter-disciplinary program – on community change leadership. This program would draw from many Faculties and Departments, and likely entail an *organization management and leadership* cluster of courses and field work; a *social innovation* cluster; a *community engagement and knowledge mobilization* cluster; and a *public policy and social trends* cluster. Many of the courses required in such a program are already on offer at MRU, although some have prerequisites that could pose a barrier or are restricted currently to certain programs of study. These are not insurmountable barriers. There are also certain curricular gaps that would need to be filled, as well as the design of a community/field-based capstone experience. It is also vital that the program have a strong student imprint and involvement in its very design: To be innovative, such a program must be participatory and iterative.

While in its conceptual infancy, the student leadership program is designed to address three goals: the recognition of student leadership through experiential learning, the enhancement of students' understanding of community leadership through curricula, and the fostering of a campus community of student leadership through the creation of leadership cohorts. In order to further build this program, a symposium will be held in August to answer these four questions:

- What should student leadership at Mount Royal look like?
- How can we develop and maintain outstanding community leadership with students?
- What are the examples we can turn to for first-rate community leadership programs?
- What are the key elements of a successful leadership program?

Support from the RECODE Transformation Fund will build our joint capacity to lead and sustain the design of this ambitious undertaking.

#### **4. Leading by Design (working title):**

Co-led with Design4Change, we will provide an opportunity for select senior professionals and change agents to spend focused time at MRU exploring, writing and speaking, as well mentoring and coaching students. Framed as a kind of “reverse coop” opportunity, this program would be for those who are currently in or advancing into leadership positions of increasing responsibility (with a minimum of 10+ years of professional experience) within community purpose-driven organizations or business units. The program draws inspiration from IDEO’s Design Fellows, as well as the Muttart Foundation’s Fellowship (social sector sabbatical) program. Participants will come from a wide variety of professions and industries in the private, nonprofit and public sectors. Upon completion of this 5-month intensive program, professionals will receive a designation (e.g. as a Fellow in Innovation Leadership). Along with this designation, the program will offer the following:

- The ability to uncover, craft and express a compelling vision of future opportunities with the ability to develop a strategic action plan;
- A valuable, scaleable and feasible approach to a self-selected community issue;
- New skills developed in storytelling, presentation, communication and leadership;
- Experience integrating design and innovation practices into business planning and management;

- An appreciation of systems thinking and systems-based approaches;
- Admission and/or liaison with a “master class in social economy leadership” (in development)
- Membership in the wider community of Fellow and MRU alumni, with full access to our resources, networks and activities.

Support from the RECODE Transformation Fund will allow us to design and (with additional support pending) pilot this initiative.

## **5. Seeding student social entrepreneurship initiatives**

The final activity enabled through the Transformation Fund would permit us to support up to twenty small seed grants to help underwrite the costs associated with student social-purpose initiatives where they are interacting with real-life community partners/clients. The structure and process for how the award would be distributed will need to be designed, but one opportunity would be to partner with the existing JMH New Venture LaunchPad, hosted by the Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which provides small awards for MRU students, via a pitch competition, to kick-start their own ventures. Although these have tended to be mainly commercial ventures, an increasing number of students are creatively blending commercial and social-purpose ideas.