Beloit Alumni Among Most Entrepreneurial

Beloit ranked 41st on the list of Forbes Top 50 Most Entrepreneurial Colleges. Using LinkedIn, each school’s entrepreneurial ratio was scored by finding the number of alumni who identified as founders or business owners, divided by the total student population of the school.

While success is not measured by magazine mentions, this is an opportunity to highlight the fact that the liberal arts are fertile grounds for inculcating entrepreneurial thinking. Over the years, students and alumni have proven that broad-based knowledge, self-selected ends, and creative marshalling of resources yield results and impact lives.

This speaks to the ethos of CELEB. Whether founders of lifestyle businesses or huge companies, the common thread is self-agency, confidence, and the ability to learn what you need to know when you need to know it. This is the power of the liberal arts. Since its inception as an entrepreneurship center hundreds of would-be entrepreneurs have walked through our doors and more still took trailblazer Jerry Gustafson’s entrepreneurship classes even before he founded CELEB.

The magazine also profiled Stewart Butterfield, the founder and CEO of Slack, the knowledge management software. Noted Butterfield, “...real added value comes from people who can sell and humanize.” After all, relating to others is key to business success. Butterfield went on to credit his liberal arts education for everything he learned about management. So, to the hackneyed cliche, “What do you do with a philosophy major?” The answer: start a prosperous company.

Dodgers Call Up Davis’10

The Los Angeles Dodgers, the iconic Major League Baseball franchise, will have Joe Davis’10 call 50 televised road games this season. Davis will tag-team with Hall of Famer Vin Scully, who, in his 67th year in broadcasting, is abbreviating his schedule. For Davis, 28, the contract is the fruition of a major goal, beyond even his prior work for ESPN and Fox Sports.

At CELEB, Davis took his love of sports and media and founded Big Game Videos, a student venture where he produced recruiting tapes for high school athletes. Davis also broadcast various Beloit College sporting events, eventually leading to an internship as play-by-play announcer for the Schaumburg Flyers, a professional baseball club of which John Hughes of the Coleman Foundation was an owner.

Davis recently returned to Beloit to participate in the Spring Advising Practicum, a day devoted to student advising and planning. Reacting to the presentation, first-year Michael Boyland said, “It really hit home for me. Hearing his story makes me realize the importance of the things, like networking, that we practice all the time at CELEB.”

Boyland was not alone. Davis displayed his abundant talent as he locked in the audience of aspiring media students in the Neese Theater during his 30 minute talk. Along with many anecdotes, including taking voice lessons from Theater Professor Amy Sarno, he learned about management. So, to the hackneyed cliche, “What do you do with a philosophy major?” The answer: start a prosperous company.

He also put goals in place early on—and on his refrigerator. “I put my goals where I could see them all the time; I wanted that reminder to never let up and work hard every day at making progress,” he said.

His end game was ambitious: To have a spot in a MLB broadcast booth before his 30th birthday. While accomplished ahead of schedule, the path was not obvious. He told the story beginning with a bungled networking attempt with Cubs announcer, Len Kasper. A letter lost in transit, miraculously found its way to Kasper via a manager of a Taco Bell near Wrigley Field. He became an important mentor and his recommendation helped Davis bag his first post-grad position in 2010 as the voice of the Montgomery Biscuits. That proved to be his launch pad.

Then on a warm August night in 2013, Victor Mateo pitched a no-hitter for the Biscuits. A dream come true for any broadcaster, Davis made the most of the opportunity. He sent his pitch to ESPN (not enough room for that great story), and, as they say, the rest is history.
Macy Entrepreneur of the Year

Biology major Willow Macy’16 was awarded the 2015-16 John E. Hughes Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Named for the Chairman Emeritus of the Coleman Foundation, the award goes to the student who best contributes to the spirit of entrepreneurship within the academic community.

Last fall Macy attended the Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization Conference (CEO). Making great use of the conference, she returned with two internship offers, a student-venture team, and a special project proposal. Pursuing these three projects simultaneously, Macy accepted one of the internships with a startup in the fundraising management space called Classmunity, took on a student-venture with Co-founder Tom Porkka called Brew Swap, and pulled together resources and student leaders for MakerLab.

Macy’s up-bringing is deeply entrenched in making. Her parents are diplomats, so she lived all over the world, spent time on an off-grid farm in Central Wisconsin, attended a hands-on-learning boarding school, and designed her own high school internship in South Africa. When she came to Beloit, she was already well versed in blacksmithing, 3D printing, robotics, and woodworking.

She believes that learning with your hands, collaborating, problem solving, and skill sharing are essential in training young people to be innovative and entrepreneurial. This will serve her well in her fall honors term where she will use the makerspace to develop applications for teaching and learning.

Alumni & Guests Visit

Guest speakers made an impact in the 2015 –16 school year. Visitors included DeVon L. Wilson’90 of the Real Sports Guys podcast, serial entrepreneur and benefactor David Myers’49, eminent trumpet player Tony Scodwell, Rashad Devoe of Men’s LaCrosse, Coleman Fellow Rongal Nikora, Sustainability Coordinator Lindsay Chapman, Niko Skievski of Redox, a startup in the electronic health records space, Spiritual Life Director Bill Conover, Parker Newman, Adam Newman, and Jonathan Mandell of Tiz and participants in the startup boot camp gener8tor, and Jaxon Klein’09, Cayetana Polanco’11, Delna Sepoy Straus’09, and Tiago de Almeida of biometric startup Keyo.

As luck would have it, two of our guests share an interesting link: both played surprise performances with Frank Sinatra. In 1950 David Myers, who made his spending money playing piano during his time at Beloit, was in London visiting his father. David and his brother were invited to a party hosted by the Commander of the United States Third Air Division in Britain. That night Frank Sinatra popped in and asked for a piano player. Dave volunteered and the two played a few songs for the party. Then, in the 1960’s Tony Scodwell played with Frank Sinatra, Jr., as a traveling member of his band. During one show in 1969 Ol’ Blue Eyes, himself, and Nancy Sinatra were in the audience. Coaxed on stage for a song, the father and son performed “All or Nothing at All” accompanied by Scodwell and the band. A rare and remastered video of the performance can be found on YouTube.

Enter MakerLab

When Willow Macy’16, turned up in Introduction to Entrepreneurship this fall, no one could have predicted how fruitful her time at CELEB would be. Well into the semester, after attending the Premier Night at gener8tor, a startup accelerator, and getting signed up for CEO, a college entrepreneurship conference, Macy asked us an exciting question, “I’m getting a 3D printer; can we put it in CELEB?”

The answer was a resounding yes! She secured funding and pulled together support from other students with interdisciplinary interests and made it happen. Macy even exercised her negotiation skills to get the most she could within budget. She procured not only a top of the line 3D printer with the largest print volume available, but also an additional smaller desktop printer, a digitizer, and enough PLA filament to last the school year.

In keeping with CELEB’s founding principles, namely to have labs chock-full of technology for student use, CELEB is proud to host this equipment. Design thinking and ideation have little point without the capability to rapid prototype. It’s important to make things. A student organization to oversee the maintenance of the machines is recruiting and training students who may want to use the equipment for projects of their own design.

Bamgbose’13 Directs Buildout of Co-Working Space

Isaac Bamgbose’13 learned first-hand through CELEB the value of space, mentors and programs designed to assist entrepreneurs in jump-starting their ideas. Now, only three years after graduating, he is putting that experience into practice in his role managing the Hendricks Commercial Development’s design and construction of Irontek, a combination co-working space, business incubator, and startup accelerator. Located in the massive Beloit Ironworks Campus, Irontek is part of a $38 million renovation of the former Beloit Corp buildings, which also houses a number of heady startups including Fat Wallet, now a division of Ebates, and Comply365, a leading compliance software for airline pilots.

Bamgbose and Irontek Community Manager, Erin Clausen hosted students for a tour as a part of the college’s Advising Practicum, a full-day dedicated to student development of academic priorities and plans for activities at Beloit and beyond. Bamgbose said, “This will be a resource for students to get exposure to startup companies, gain valuable work experience and have the chance to network.”
Gustafson '63 Receives SEA Founders Award

Before the Self Employment in the Arts Conference (SEA) was conceived, another endeavor connected the link between artists, self-employment, and entrepreneurship education. This was the Coleman Council on Entrepreneurial Awareness and Education (CEAE), whose original members explored the possibilities for the emerging field. These included Jerry Gustafson '63 of Beloit College, Gary Ernst of North Central College, and Joe Roberts, then at Columbia College and now at Webster University.

With entrepreneurship just beginning to show up in course listings, directing artists to these classes was on no one’s agenda. However, Gustafson argued that artists are close cousins of entrepreneurs. “Creating something from nothing is de facto entrepreneurial; artists must promote and market their work much as any business,” he wrote. Aspiring artists needed to learn business acumen from working artists. A few workshops and later a full blown conference emerged from these ideas.

Gustafson recalled one of the first guests of SEA, J.R. Sullivan ’72, whose experience of theater as a business was extensive. For 16 years SEA has presented similarly savvy visual artists, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, and other self-employed working practitioners. SEA is now the most attended conference by Beloit students.

This year SEA created the SEA Visionary Leader Award. Gustafson, who was among the first winners, offered his gratitude in a letter to the conference coordinator Amy Rogers of North Central College. “It has been an honor to be associated with this whole endeavor... I am truly honored by the recognition that many others deserve more than I.,” Gustafson wrote. Gustafson’s commitment to arts and entrepreneurship is wide-reaching as evidenced by his cultivation of the Myers Institute for the Art of Business and the Business of Art which houses Gallery ABBA, BATV, and Maple Studio on the first floor of CELEB. This suite of learning labs was Gustafson’s brainchild and has connected into the conference to provide an array of opportunities for generations of artists at Beloit.

Phan New Coleman Chair, Palmer Continues Upton

Professor of Economics, Diep Phan, has been appointed the Coleman Foundation Chair in Entrepreneurship. The chair, which was the first in the country to be established at an exclusively undergraduate liberal arts institution, also includes leadership of the Coleman Fellows Program. Coleman Fellows are professors from across the gamut of disciplines such as political science, health and society, chemistry, physics, art, and anthropology, who establish entrepreneurship principles as guiding features in their permanent course offerings. Phan, a Ph.D. in Economics, brings a unique perspective to the chair. Raised in Vietnam under communism, her father and brother became entrepreneurs against all odds. Phan looks forward to translating economic theory into the actionable world of entrepreneurship. “I have always been fascinated at the creation, growing, and running of a business. I welcome the opportunity to apply my economics background to that issue,” she said.

The new Coleman Chair has three foci as she begins. The first is a survey of faculty, staff, and students to determine the scale of entrepreneurial activity present in the college. The second is to develop a creativity and design thinking competition. The third project is to encourage students in the investigation of international entrepreneurship. CELEB welcomes Phan; we have already begun working together on the future of the Coleman Fellows.

Former Chair Warren Palmer now turns his full attention to the Upton Forum. He chaired his second forum in 2015-16 with the theme Entrepreneurship in the Chinese Economy. Yasheng Huang, International Program Professor in Chinese Economy & Business and Professor of Global Economics and Management at MIT Sloan School of Management, joined as the Upton Scholar, along with other international panelists including alumni Deming (Eddie) Tang ’84. As evidenced by the Upton Forum, Palmer remains a committed ally of the Coleman Fellows and promoter of entrepreneurship on campus.

Mowing Power Starts Up at Center of Hope

Riley Pearson ’17 and Will Marcus ’16 teamed up with Rockford’s Barbara Olson Center of Hope last summer to test a business idea that empowers adults with disabilities. The two students worked side by side with the Center of Hope team to certify adults with disabilities in landscaping best practices. They helped create marketing materials to communicate with customers. The green mowing business proved to have its unique challenges including difficulty with attention to detail and limited stamina of the participants. Creating mowing teams and pairing teams with coaches helped, and the Mowing Power teams began to find their stride. While the scope of summer 2015 was focused on testing the idea, this summer promises to offer socially conscious citizens and businesses a great way to care for their lawns and their community.

The Coleman Foundation, which supports both entrepreneurship education and programs addressing developmental disabilities, brokered the relationship between Beloit College and the Center of Hope.
“He’s considering a school with more of a business focus,” a mother, herself an admirer of Beloit, recently wrote about a son that needed some further convincing. A derivative of the perennial cliché about what can one do with a liberal arts degree, the parent was looking for ammunition to persuade him. Well, good news: there are plenty of considerations in support of her cause.

The liberal arts are a powerful ally in the business world. I can personally attest. After graduating from Beloit, I spent my career as an entrepreneur and business person in the beer industry where I encountered a wide range of issues. While these had business implications, most would never be taught in business courses. Imagine having a series of conversations spanning from quality assurance issues with a lab tech, to government affairs matters with a lobbyist, to aesthetic considerations with a graphic designer. No doubt each of these topics require someone with deep content knowledge (much of which was most likely acquired after leaving college), but my role was to ask good questions, determine what was important, and tease out nuances. Picking up the mechanics of business is relatively easy. The challenge comes with the judgment it takes to apply those skills to great effect. A liberal arts background helps develop that aptitude.

The Harvard Business Review agrees. In a recent article, “Digital Companies Need More Liberal Arts Majors,” the influential management magazine argued that possessing the capacity for creativity and empathy is essential. And the corollaries of having vision and listening skills are key to navigating the world going forward. Whether facing coding in the latest language or analyzing big data, these bedrock abilities will inform whatever the skill du jour may be.

Be it business, journalism, engineering or other major fields of concentration that the liberal arts don’t offer per se, the underlying skills - of computing, cyphering, persuasive writing, effective speaking, and careful reading - endure as the central activities and the skills needed for success. These fundamentals position students to take on new, unrelated challenges. By combining these skills with curiosity, perseverance, resourcefulness, and the ability to draw conclusions, students will possess durable skills and be prepared to thrive in the blinding velocity of change that marks the modern world.

We hope we’ll see him in the fall.

**From the Director**