

**University of Houston | C.T. Bauer College of Business**  
**Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship**

**Category: NASDAQ Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence**

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### **1. National prestige of the entrepreneurship program/center (national rankings or other recognition).**

- Since 2007, WCE has consistently been ranked as one of the top 10 undergraduate entrepreneurship programs in the nation by The Princeton Review, and currently ranks #1.
- Received the 2019 Entrepreneurial University Award from the Deshpande Symposium recognizing exemplary commitment to, and success in, developing and offering innovative educational courses and/or programs that foster entrepreneurship education across the institution as well as encouraging student leadership and engagement in developing innovative extra and co-curricular activities that support the development of entrepreneurial awareness, skills, and practice.
- Received the 2018 Excellence in Entrepreneurial Student Engagement Award from the Deshpande Symposium, and was a finalist for the 2018 Excellence in Entrepreneurial Curriculum Innovation Award.

### **2. National/State recognition achieved (awards, achievements, recognition from other outside organization - e.g. U.S. Association for Small Business & Entrepreneurship, Academy of Management, previous GCEC awards).**

- Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner issued a proclamation recognizing Bauer College as a leader in entrepreneurship in the nation for its world-class programs, officially naming March 3, 2020 as Bauer College of Business Entrepreneurship Day in the City of Houston. Our program was recognized for “great dedication to supporting entrepreneurship through initiatives that seek to support innovation with an entrepreneurial spirit and mindset”.
- In 2015, the Texas State Coordinating Board for Higher Education recognized WCE for excellence in entrepreneurial education. According to the Board, the purpose of this recognition was to identify UH as an example for other schools in the state to emulate. WCE shares best practices with other Texas universities through the Texas University Network for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (TUNIE) and as a member of the Leadership Circle for the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC).

### **3. Entrepreneurship breadth of programming, program quality and longevity of the program (Ph.D., MBA, BS).**

- Entrepreneurship courses offered at UH since 1982, Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation (now Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship) created in 1994.
- At least 38 undergraduate entrepreneurship courses across campus, including 22 offered by WCE, and at least 12 graduate entrepreneurship courses as well as I-Corps seminars.
- Program offerings include an undergraduate major, undergraduate certificate programs in Corporate Entrepreneurship, Technology Entrepreneurship, and Social Entrepreneurship, and a graduate certificate program.
- Content offerings include RED Labs Accelerator for technology-based businesses, RED Labs Pre-Accelerator, Women in Entrepreneurship, Cougar Venture Fund (where student teams make investment recommendations for live early stage deals), the SURE Program (where students

serve as consultants to aspiring entrepreneurship from under-represented populations in the Houston area), Mayor's Design Challenge (where students identify problems facing the Houston area and propose sustainable solutions), Creativity and Innovation (where students use "design thinking" to solve problems and spot opportunities for innovation) and many more.

- Extensive mentoring with over 500 participating mentors last year.

#### **4. Entrepreneurship curriculum development (courses specifically designed for major/minor programs).**

- Our undergraduate cohort program has a unique lockstep curriculum that crosses three semesters and is coordinated with a wide variety of experiential activities.
- Students in the first semester take Entrepreneurial Revenues, Entrepreneurial Profit and Cash Management, and Entrepreneurial Values and Leadership. Their principal experiential is the creation of Amazon stores funded by the program, in which student teams are responsible for choosing product categories, sourcing products, marketing products (including branding, packaging, pricing, search engine marketing, social media marketing, and website support), and returning the program's investment. These Amazon businesses give students hands-on experience in running a product-based business, an e-commerce business, and being accountable to investors.
- Student in the second semester take Entrepreneurial Capital, Entrepreneurial Perspectives, and Entrepreneurial Values and Leadership. Their principal experiential is IP projects, in which student teams develop commercialization plans for technologies developed at UH and NASA and then have the opportunity to license the technologies and launch businesses. These projects introduce the students to technology deals.
- Students in the third semester take Entrepreneurial Implementation and Entrepreneurial Values and Leadership. Their principal experiential is Wolffest, a 3-day pop-up restaurant competition in which student teams plan and operate food stands. Teams have to bid on locations, set branding and marketing, negotiate relationships with local restaurants and food vendors, set prices, manage inventory, and manage operations. The team with the largest bottom line at the end of this three-day period is the winner. Proceeds from the competition are used for funding scholarships and student activities. This is no small project: in 2019, our students raised a total of \$280,000 through food sales and donations, and in the past five years, they have raised a total of \$1.14 million. This number would have been even greater for 2020 if the students could have completed the project. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic they were unable to finish the project with the intended scope. They instead began facilitating donations to support first responders and front line workers along with assisting and creating small businesses.

#### **5. Contributions to entrepreneurship research (Publications/Books/Etc).**

- Our university is a Carnegie One research institution and our faculty members are actively engaged in research, but our entrepreneurship program does not sponsor research for purposes of publication. Research is used for internal purposes; for example, exit interviews are

conducted with all students completing the cohort program, and those findings have led to various changes in the curriculum including the creating of our Amazon projects.

## **6. Outreach activities (significance & uniqueness to the entrepreneurship center).**

- NASA: Our students collaborate with NASA and their inventors in taking technologies into real world markets. Students are grouped in teams of five students, NASA provides us various technologies to choose from and students spend two semesters developing business models, customer discovery, with the intention of forming a business. One recent collaboration was a group of students that formed a company, PolarPanel, around a NASA technology of putting solar panels on rail cars to reduce the use of diesel generators in refrigerator cars. The team of five undergrad students place second in a MIT Clear Energy Competition at MIT. (The winning team was comprised of six PhD's from MIT.) The team also were placed on Forbes 30 Under 30.
- MDAnderson: Currently WCE Students are collaborating with surgeons and business development leaders from MDAnderson, the nation's #1 ranked cancer treatment hospital. The most recent collaboration centers around relieving the pain and discomfort of dealing with breast cancer surgeries. In this case the surgeons have invented a new bra that contains pockets and devices to hold ice to ease pain and functions to manage discharge seepage.
- Our RED Labs Accelerator for technology-based businesses is run jointly with Rice University's OwlSpark Accelerator and culminates in Bayou Startup Showcase, a joint demo day.
- See comments below regarding Prison Entrepreneurship Program.
- See comments below regarding the SURE Program

## **7. Community collaborations (specific to the entrepreneurship center).**

Our social and collaborative efforts take various forms, including:

- The undergraduate student population at UH is 45% African-American and Hispanic (and roughly 50% first generation in college), so our entrepreneurship courses serve non-majority populations simply by virtue of our student demographics.

In serving these students, we have a variety of external collaborations. For example, Porter & Hedges law firm hosts a mock term negotiation night that offers our students the opportunity to negotiate a mock term sheet while being coached by seasoned business executives and attorneys. Cadence Bank hosts a banking night where our students get tips on working with bankers. Every student in our cohort program also receives a paid trip to either Silicon Valley, New York, or a rotating third destination where they have been able to tour companies such as Google and Facebook, experience a company going public on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and engage in Q&A with Warren Buffett.

These external activities are motivated by the fact that many of our students come from humble backgrounds and have limited experience. They have never been in Class A downtown offices; they have never been in corporate headquarters; in some cases, they have never been on an airplane. Our goal is to introduce them to these environments so they will not be intimidated by them.

- We provide additional service to aspiring women entrepreneurs through a Women in Entrepreneurship course that provides specialized instruction and mentoring.

In serving these students, we collaborate with women entrepreneurs who share their stories and mentor the students. The goal is to build the students' confidence and encourage them to take risks, and to build soft skills including negotiation skills, portraying confidence, combatting bias, leading a team, and public speaking.

- We participate in the Prison Entrepreneurship Program where students mentor inmates at the Texas Department of Corrections' Cleveland Correction Facility during that facility's Business Plan Workshop, which is designed to provide convicts with inspiration and opportunities and hence reduce recidivism.
- We participate in various activities that seek to inspire middle- and high-school students, especially students in inner-city neighborhoods near UH. As a specific example, students at Edison Middle School, in a low-income neighborhood near UH created their own afterschool store, and our students have taught them about entrepreneurship, accounting, marketing, supply chain, and other business skills. More generally, our Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship has agreed to collaborate with Junior Achievement in hosting a JA business competition and inviting JA students to WCE events, with a goal of encouraging JA participants to go to college. We have our eyes set on an entrepreneurship camp for high school students in the Rio Grande Valley in 2021.
- We provide additional service to non-majority populations through the SURE (Stimulating Urban Renewal through Entrepreneurship) Program, in which students serve as consultants to aspiring entrepreneurs from under-represented populations. Participants in this program are referred through community organizations.

In serving this population, we have more than 30 community partners including Houston Mayor's Office, City of Houston Office of Economic Opportunity, Emancipation Economic Development Council, Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, various banks, and various social agencies and churches.

In the past five years, SURE alums – of whom 3/4 are women and 4/5 are minorities – have started more than 100 businesses. Among SURE's honors are the Higher Ed Community Impact Award from the Texas Governor's Office and the Women in Business Champion of the Year Award from the US Small Business Administration.

## **8. Special projects or accomplishments (unique to the particular center).**

We empower students through experiential activities, mentoring, and leadership experiences. Special projects include:

- IP projects, described earlier.
- Amazon projects, described earlier.
- Wolffest, described earlier
- RED Labs Pre-accelerator and Accelerator programs, described earlier.
- Cougar Venture Fund, described earlier.
- Prison Entrepreneurship Program, described earlier.
- The SURE Program, described earlier.
- Dream Teams, where groups of 5 students set career and personal goals and then work each semester to achieve life changing outcomes. Because we spend an equal amount of time on career development and personal growth, these teams serve multiple purposes as they help hold students accountable to their goals as well as offering support and solutions as they develop professionally and personally.
- And more.

#### **9. University/community commitment to the entrepreneurship center in terms of endowment, space, and presence.**

- The Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship (WCE) has dedicated space (with internal and external signage) consisting of 9 offices for faculty and staff, 4 conference rooms, 2 dedicated classrooms, and dedicated RED Labs space.
- WCE currently has endowments totaling roughly \$9.8 million.
- UH provides additional resources for entrepreneurship through an incubator at the UH Technology Bridge, a \$2 million Technology Bridge fund to support commercialization of UH intellectual property, and various other resources.
- Community entities such as Houston Exponential (an organization dedicated to promoting tech businesses in Houston) and Station Houston and The Cannon (Houston's two largest accelerators) support RED Labs and work with us.

#### **10. Commitment to the GCEC.**

- We are members of the GCEC Leadership Circle.