Center receives international recognition

Northern Kentucky University’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) is among the best in the world at launching and supporting student-led startup companies.

The Center was selected as one of the five finalists for the “Outstanding Contributor to Venture Creation” award at the 2016 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers’ (GCEC) annual conference last week in Rochester, New York.

Other schools selected as finalists were Arizona State University, University of Michigan, Northwestern University, and UNC Chapel Hill. The GCEC awards are judged by peer entrepreneurship directors to recognize the very best in entrepreneurship education. This year had a record number of applicants and more than 450 participants from around the world.

“At the Haile/US Bank College of Business, we not only educate and nurture our students, but also give them the tools they need to go out into the world and make a big impact,” said Dean Dr. Rebecca I. Porterfield. “We are proud that our Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship has helped student-led companies generate more than $2 million in capital.”

“At NKU, no dream is too big or too bold to be achieved. We work each day to help student entrepreneurs from across campus achieve their dreams, and we are proud those efforts continue to earn international recognition,” said Rodney D’Souza, Fifth Third Bank Endowed Professor of Entrepreneurship and Director of the CIE.

Last year, the CIE received the Exceptional Activities in Entrepreneurship Across Campus award from the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers. The GCEC is the nation’s premier organization for university-based entrepreneurship centers. With membership from more than 225 entrepreneurship centers across the globe, the organization links universities of all sizes to share best practices and to advance, strengthen, and celebrate university-based entrepreneurship centers and programs.

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JUMP START IDEAS...MAKE IDEAS REAL...MOVE IDEAS FORWARD

JANUARY 2017
Founded in 2012, the INKUBATOR at NKU is a 12 week business accelerator open to all current students and recent graduates. After 12 rigorous weeks, graduates were given the chance to pitch their idea to top leaders in greater Cincinnati’s startup world at the INKUBATOR’s fifth Annual Demo Day, July 28, 2016. The companies didn’t just pitch to the judges, members of the audience also voted for the best presentation of the night. The $1,000 prize for the winning company was awarded to Waiverhawk.

Crossbeam Consulting is an online test prep company that helps social workers pass the ASWB licensure exam. Social workers are required to pass this exam in order to be employed in the social work field. Crossbeam uses an innovative approach by offering a digital solution to this problem. We have been helping social workers pass the ASWB exam for over a year.

The ability to communicate well with other cultures is now an essential skill for students and individuals in the international workforce. At CultureX, we believe the best way to learn about other cultures is by simply having a conversation and sharing stories. CultureX is working to create a web-based application that connects individuals interested in expanding their cultural knowledge and wanting to prove their ability to interact with other cultures.

Umi is a mobile application created for college students that want to excel academically through peer group learning. Our mission is to provide the best match of students, empowering them to create an ideal learning environment tailored to their style.

Waiverhawk will take 27 years of insight and expertise in fantasy football and provide this knowledge with the efficiency of a fortune 500 company’s reporting system for the fantasy community to utilize. We will merge the world of advanced predictive statistics into the world of fantasy football and provide a powerful tool that will help struggling fantasy players at the beginner level and also make the research process of the advanced players more efficient. We identify potential through data while the rest of the industry research process of the advanced players more efficient. We will merge the world of advanced predictive statistics into the world of fantasy football and provide a powerful tool that will help struggling fantasy players at the beginner level and also make the research process of the advanced players more efficient. We identify potential through data while the rest of the industry

Economic Impact:

12 Still Operating
Haile/US Bank College of Business $56,000 Investment
1.7 Outside Funds Raised $2,118,000
53 Jobs Created

The infographic (above) represents the economic impact of the companies that graduated from the INKUBATOR program. Not only do the students who go through the program gain a great deal of invaluable knowledge, but many are able to start their business, raise funding (when needed), and create jobs. The INKUBATOR only provides seed funding to qualifying teams, with a substantial return on the investment for the region.

JUMP START IDEAS...MAKE IDEAS REAL...MOVE IDEAS FORWARD
Northern Kentucky University alumna Lauren Crawford opened her dream dance studio, Rapture Dance Company, just one mile from campus.

If you asked 10-year-old LAUREN CRAWFORD (’15) how she would paint the walls of her dream dance studio, she would have said pink and purple—and don’t forget the sparkles. Fast forward 12 years later, and Crawford’s dream is a reality, only the walls are gray and red.

Crawford, a dancer since the age of five, chose to stay close to her family after she graduated from Notre Dame Academy in Park Hills. She chose Northern Kentucky University since it was just minutes from her childhood home.

“I loved how convenient NKU was,” Crawford says. “It’s amazing to me how much it’s grown just in the past 4-and-a-half years. The professors, programs, and the Greek Life within itself is such a unique aspect of the college that a lot of people don’t realize. I didn’t even realize it when I started there. But once I began college, the reasons I chose NKU were not the reasons why I stayed.”

Crawford first chose a major in elementary education. Still intent on opening a dance studio, she decided that having a degree in fine arts would help her become a better dance teacher. Later during her freshman year, Crawford also added an entrepreneurship minor.

During her senior year, Crawford began fine-tuning her business plan and headed to NKU’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) for help.

“Without their guidance and support, my vision wouldn’t have come to life,” Crawford says. “I’m so thankful for all of their help throughout this process. The ability to create my business plan within my classes and get critiques—not only from other students but also from professors and people in the real world—was wonderful. I definitely don’t think I could have done this on my own. I had so many people at arm’s reach in the dance department, as well as the entrepreneurship department, who offered me guidance and suggestions.”

When she had her business plan set, all she needed was the building to make it happen. Crawford scouted for months to find the perfect place for her dream studio. In October 2015, she found luck nearly one mile from Nunn Drive—a brick, bungalow-style which was formerly a funeral home.

“The building was exactly what I needed and what I wanted. The running joke is that Crawford is putting life back into the building.”

Two months after purchasing the building, Crawford graduated from NKU with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts with a focus on dance and a minor in entrepreneurship.

“The building was exactly what I needed and what I wanted our students to grow up in,” Crawford says. “It was very important to me to create a second home atmosphere. I want everyone to feel welcome, warm, and at home the second they walk through the door. When I walked in here, it felt right.”

Two months after purchasing the building, Crawford opened the studio’s doors to the public. Rapture is now a second home to 70 students who practice recreational and competitive jazz, hip hop, yoga, and more.

The studio is still in its first year, but Crawford is already considering how to expand the studio in a different way by offering acting courses or vocals.

“Dance is a part of the arts, and everything meshes together in so many places,” Crawford says. “If they ever want to pursue something in a professional atmosphere, I want to be able to give them those tools. I want them to be ready if they want to go on right after they graduate from high school to do what they want to do. In a lot of auditions, there are other things besides dance that they’re looking for. I don’t want them to feel unprepared when they get to that point.”

Between answering emails and phone calls, scrubbing the scuff marks out of the studio floors, and teaching classes, Crawford has realized that running and starting a business is no easy task.

“My dad, who was a small business owner, always said that so much of what a business owner does goes unseen,” Crawford says. “I heard it, and I thought I understood it. But I did not understand it at all until now. I’ve learned you always have to expect the unexpected and be able to take care of things in the most positive way possible by using every spade bump as a learning tool.”

But she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Dance is such a unique sport and art form that gives people the opportunity to express themselves in ways that not every sport or art form does,” Crawford says. “For me, it’s the ability to forget about the outside world and dive into movement at the studio. You can never have a bad day there, and that is one of the most important things I have learned and try to instill within our students. There are no ‘wrong ways’ when it comes to creating movement but only endless possibilities and opportunities to create something new. Having my own studio where I can create that unique atmosphere for our students, as well as help them grow within the art form to discover themselves as dancers and artists is such a wonderful and special feeling that words can’t truly describe and nothing can replace. ◆
NKU student combines love for animals, business

TAYLOR LANDRUM found a passion for business in NKU’s entrepreneurship program, which helped him launch Fur Sure Dog Care last May.

For most college students, starting a business doesn’t easily fit into a busy schedule that revolves around studying, doing homework, working, and trying to squeeze in a social life.

That didn’t stop Taylor Landrum, a U.S. Air Force veteran and NKU entrepreneurship student, from launching Fur Sure Dog Care last May.

Fur Sure offers a mobile approach to dog care. Instead of clients taking their pets to a physical location, Taylor travels to each home to walk, brush, de-shed, bathe or trim nails.

But Taylor, who is expected to graduate Spring 2017, didn’t originally have plans to start his own dog care business…. or a business at all.

After graduating from Ryle High School in 2010, Taylor joined the U.S. Air Force. When his enlistment ended in 2014, he matriculated as a student at NKU. The animal lover didn’t become seriously interested in starting his own business until taking ENT 310, a new venture creation course, under the guidance of Dr. John Clarkin.

“If it wasn’t for the entrepreneurship program at NKU, I would have never done this,” Taylor says. “NKU has helped make my business what it is, and it has given me the confidence and know-how to do what I’m doing.”

Coming up with a great business idea was the easy part, Taylor says. It was turning that idea into a reality that felt like hitting a wall. Taylor knew he’d found a market with needs that weren’t being met. He’d done the feasibility studies and knew that his idea was practical. But where was he supposed to go from there? What was his next move?

After seeking advice from Dr. Clarkin, Taylor visited the Small Business Development Center and Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship on campus. He filled out the necessary legal paperwork, and soon enough, Fur Sure Dog Care became a limited liability company (LLC).

“Students like Taylor come to NKU for an education, not just a diploma,” Clarkin says. “Through his studies, he found a way to link his passion and love for dogs to a business concept where he could earn a living. He was looking for more than a job… He was looking for a career path that followed his dreams. I expect that Fur Sure is the first of many entrepreneurial ventures in Taylor’s future.”

As a student who owns his own business, Taylor’s goal—other than making northern Kentucky a better place for dog owners—was to have a flexible schedule. His clients started out as family members and close friends, but he’s gained traction by word of mouth. Currently, Fur Sure offers its services to Campbell, Kenton, and Boone county residents.

When it comes to the future, Taylor has an interest in consulting but still has plans to keep the business going after he graduates. Whether it’s in a part-time or full-time capacity will depend on how his clientele grows between now and then.

Taylor’s advice for students who are thinking about starting their own business?

“Own your idea like the business you want it to become.”
The founders of CompleteSet, members of the inaugural INKUBATOR class, have received exciting news in the entrepreneurial community. **Gary Darna (NKU ‘10) and Jamie Rump (NKU ‘14),** graduates of the 2012 INKUBATOR class, have been accepted into Techstars Chicago for 2016.

Gary Darna, CEO of CompleteSet, began collecting Star Wars memorabilia as a kid, scouring toy shows, comic book shops, and retail stores in order to find those missing pieces to all of his unique collections. During a trip to Pennsylvania to pick up a R2D2 Star Wars Cooler, Gary thought - 'if I am willing to drive over ten hours to find the missing piece of my collection, how many other people have the same passion for collectibles and need a better way to find them?' Fast forward to today, and CompleteSet is now a fully functional website - and through the help of the INKUBATOR program, turned into a successful business with a mission to archive the world's collectibles. The site matches items from sellers to collectors who want to acquire them - be it antique toys, vintage clothing or memorabilia.

CompleteSet entered the INKUBATOR in 2012 with a simple idea – transform printed books about collectibles into a beautiful website and app. The NKU INKUBATOR is a 12-week summer business accelerator housed in the Haile/US Bank College of Business through the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship that is open to current and recent graduates of NKU. Through the program, Gary was able to identify another talented NKU student to bring on board, Jamie Rump, who currently serves as the Co-founder and Vice-President of Engineering at CompleteSet.

After hiring seven employees and receiving several rounds of fundraising following their graduation from the INKUBATOR, CompleteSet was notified this June that they had edged out hundreds of other promising and innovative startup companies to be one of only ten businesses selected for acceptance into the preeminent accelerator program in the world, Techstars.

Techstars is a global business accelerator, which has led to over 90 percent of its graduates to have either been acquired or are still operating today. The program has grown into a part of the largest interconnected network of entrepreneurs, mentors and investors in the world.

The intensive three-month program aims to arm fledgling entrepreneurs with the tools, resources and perks of being in Techstars - including exposure to hundreds of in-demand mentors, free premium office space and access to funding resources. The common goal of participating teams – craft a pitch and presentation that successfully explains their business and market in an entertaining storyline.

The Techstars Chicago program culminates in what is known as ‘Demo Day’ – an all-day private event taking place on September 29 at Chicago’s House of Blues. Each of the participating startups will take turns pitching their idea to a roomful of investors with millions of dollars available for the teams.

"Being accepted into Techstars Chicago is a testament to the continued success and hard work that Gary and Jamie have exhibited since being a part of the INKUBATOR program," said Rodney D’Souza, Director of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, founder of the INKUBATOR and Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship. “We are so proud of all they have accomplished - and the network, tools, and resources they will have access to with Techstars will be immeasurable."
High school students from the Kenton County Academies of Innovation and Technology Informatics came together for a two-day workshop on NKU’s campus for several days in September to learn about entrepreneurship and how the idea generation process allows them to see opportunities where others see problems.

“NKU Jumpstart” is a workshop series designed to introduce local high school students to critical aspects of the entrepreneurial process - topics include creativity, communication, design thinking, idea generation, understanding the customer and pitching a business idea. The workshops provide students with a hands-on approach to understanding these concepts through the facilitation of members of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, part of the Haile/US Bank College of Business.

“We had the pleasure of bringing our freshman, sophomore and junior Computer Science/Informatics Scholars to participate in Jumpstart last week,” says Amanda Lewis, an instructor from Kenton County Academies of Innovation & Technology. “As a teacher, this program is perfectly designed to teach our students the basics of being an entrepreneur and developing an entrepreneurial mindset.”

Some of the activities during the September workshop included designing chairs using modeling clay, followed by pivoting their designs to meet the needs of a specific customer. The students were challenged to think creatively on what customers need and how to deliver a product that satisfies that need.

The final event at the workshop was a presentation by the students to leaders from US Bank, Dan Gronbeck and Craig Carlson, as well as students in the entrepreneurship program at NKU. The students worked in teams to prepare a two-minute pitch on a business idea they generated earlier that morning.

The students were also afforded the opportunity to take a tour of Griffin Hall, the NKU campus, and learn about college life by dining at Norse Commons.

As part of their academy, these students will be presenting concepts for websites, apps, or games in December at NKU and will work throughout the spring semester to prepare a working prototype and presentation to pitch to judges in May. The students will combine the skills and experience they are obtaining during their Academy education at Kenton County with the tools they learned during the NKU Jumpstart program.

“The students really enjoyed the two day workshops and overall experience,” says Amanda. “We are so happy and grateful to have a relationship with NKU in order to work together to prepare our students for an outstanding future!”
In October of 2016, several students from the Collegiate Entrepreneurs’ Organization (CEO) attended the National CEO Conference. The conference was held in Tampa, FL and was attended by students from across the nation. Over the course of the weekend, our students listened to a slew of inspirational speakers, heard from big name entrepreneurs, and had the opportunity to expand their network on the national scale. This is the third year in a row CEO has attended the national conference and it has proven to be one of the most valuable experiences the organization provides.

*Pictured left to right: Samantha Pearson, Sara Palomino, Quinten Fuller, William Rohr.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF COLLEGIATE ENTREPRENEURS ORGANIZATION

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**About the CIE**

The Haile/US Bank College of Business Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at NKU is a driver of educational and professional development opportunities to all NKU students.

The center seeks to advance the university’s strategy by fostering cross-campus applied learning and embedding innovative thinking more deeply in the university culture. Built on the belief that students from colleges across campus can all learn from one another, the CIE fosters trans-disciplinary opportunities for applied learning to occur so students can become well-rounded, innovative, and creative thinkers.

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**OUR PEOPLE**

- **RODNEY D’SOUZA**
  Fifth Third Bank Endowed Professor of Entrepreneurship and Director

- **SALLY ALLEN**

- **ZAC STROBL**

- **JEFF VARRONE**

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**NKU**

**College of Business**

**CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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This publication was prepared by Northern Kentucky University and printed with state funds (KRS 57.375). NKU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution. MC166532

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