



[Q&A] Summer 2023

Q&A: Rosanna Garcia on Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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Rosanna Garcia, Paul R. Beswick Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, answers questions about the entrepreneurial culture of WPI.

How does WPI encourage student innovation and entrepreneurship?

Innovation is built into the curriculum with the [Interactive Qualifying Projects](#) and the [Major Qualifying Projects](#). Entrepreneurship is encouraged through several programs that are broken into five stages: inspiration, exploration, foundation, application, and acceleration. The Innovation & Entrepreneurship Studio is for students in the inspiration and exploration stage when testing an idea. For the later stages, The Business School's [Business Development Lab](#) (BDL) at 50 Prescott St. is where a student can build a company around an idea. Students then develop their minimally viable product and over time scale their companies to a point where they're ready for an accelerator or incubator. Students preferring to 'test the waters' without starting a company can come to the BDL and be matched with another student's company.

How do you get the word out about the many resources available to students who think they might have an innovative business idea?

[The Business School newsletter](#) regularly announces various programs; there is more information on the [BDL website](#). Resources provided include office space, mentorship, along with introduction to banks, lawyers, accountants, and other professions and networking opportunities.

The BDL has a student ambassador program that will pay students to talk with their peers about the resources available for student startups. Interested students may reach out directly to me.

Are you finding that students value social impact as much as potential profit?

The BDL serves start-ups of all types—it's amazing how many have a social impact as part of their mission. Currently, all the student companies at the BDL have a social goal. Civil engineering major Nick Gronda runs CROI, which helps under-financed populations in paying for college. Cesar Guillen, a management engineering major, leads Universal Education, a company looking to provide education to low-income populations in developing countries that don't normally have the opportunity to attend college. Therapeutic Innovations, run by Assistant Professor [Solomon Mensah](#), is dedicated to developing medical interventions for emerging economies focusing on neonatal health. He hopes that someday all children across the globe will have access to lifesaving and affordable medical technology.

What is the most common misconception about business development that might keep students from pursuing a potential idea?

I find the biggest misconception that students have is that WPI will automatically take partial ownership of their company if they operate from the BDL. The university takes no equity in undergraduate start-ups. If it feels there is intellectual property that needs to be protected, WPI often offers to pay for the provisional patent and then a licensing agreement may be made. If students want to pay for their own IP, the university does not take any future earnings. The services we provide at the BDL are available to any student at no cost. In fact, we have a small start-up stipend of \$500 that we give to each company joining the lab.

What exciting ideas were honored at the Celebration of Entrepreneurship held this past spring?

We honored more than 20 companies that had been involved with the BDL in the last academic year. Two companies "graduated" from the lab, which means they had outgrown our space, which is very exciting. Anthony Galgano '22 launched [TRUE Robotics](#) to develop a classroom robotics kit, curriculum, and training service to provide an affordable, hands-on, all-in-one STEM experience for students in grades six through eight. The purpose of the classroom package is to provide students and teachers access to the latest technology, to increase student interest in STEM, and to have students design, build, and program robots in a hands-on environment. Priscila Espinosa runs SproutChange, which provides consumer education around alternative medicine, organic agriculture, sustainability, and social/food justice. [SproutChange](#) seeks to empower everyday people to become autonomous with their overall health. Watching these companies grow using the resources of the BDL is such a pleasure!

How can alumni get involved to encourage student entrepreneurs?

We are actively recruiting mentors for our faculty start-ups. Translational research is when lab innovations are moved from the lab to the marketplace. Faculty are experts in their fields but they seek guidance on how to navigate market environments. We have several alumni who fulfill the roles of mentors and advisors. Our AMP! (Advisors, Mentors, and Partners!) program holds monthly events that match technology-based start-ups with mentors. Interested alumni may also reach out to me: rgarciaphd@wpi.edu.

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 **Chinwendu Otei**

5 months ago

I feel really inspired by the wealth of experience and commitment to mentorship of Professor Garcia

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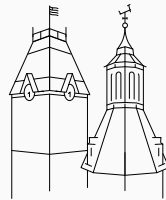
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