



LaunchBox

Vanier LaunchBox: Bringing Innovation to Students

Innovation is not an unfamiliar term, and it's become rampant in many industries. We've heard of Uber rethinking the way we move through cities, Airbnb opening doors to travellers, and Tesla building a greener future. These are but a handful of popular examples. Companies around the world are looking for ways to change the paradigm, to lead their respective industries into the future.

But what is innovation? Is it just buzz word that's part of the latest trend or is there more to it? According to the *Réseau québécois en innovation sociale* (n.d.), innovation is about creating change in the form of a service, product, or a way of doing things (e.g., a process or law) by bringing new ideas to

to move from idea to impact with confidence". The J. Armand Bombardier Incubator is a joint venture between Polytechnique and Université de Montréal which aims "to contribute to the emergence and growth of innovating technology-based businesses" (Polytechnique Montréal, n.d.). These are but two local examples with a surge of new centres launching throughout the province. It should not come as a surprise, however, since Quebec's Research and Innovation Strategy envisions that the province will become "one of the most innovative, creative societies in the world" by 2030 (Économie, Science et Innovation Québec, 2017). As such, innovation is being fuelled by the government at both the industry and academic levels, and

Vanier has seized the opportunity to take advantage of this as of this year.

Vanier LaunchBox is a three-year, institutionally-supported and government-funded

initiative undertaken by the Learning Commons with the goal of triggering social, technological, or business innovation and creativity and encouraging outside-the-box thinking through student-led projects supported by staff, faculty, and industry. It flips our usual approach of animating activities that we feel students may want to participate in. Instead, students who become involved in LaunchBox will be have the opportunity to propose projects that they are passionate about. Projects can aim to: 1) make Vanier better; 2) improve the community; or 3) partner with companies to solve industry

problems. Proposed projects are then evaluated by a committee, and accepted projects are funded and supported in some form by Vanier. At the end of every semester, teams will be asked to demo their projects and will have the possibility to receive additional support and win prizes in recognition of their innovative works.

Starting in the Winter 2018 semester, LaunchBox will host a number of workshops open to all members of the community, including faculty and staff. These sessions will focus on design thinking, usability testing, programming, entrepreneurship, innovation, and more. Moreover, Vanier's HackerSpace (located in D-301) will be further equipped to provide an area where students can get hands-on with their learning and tinker away creatively. Effectively, with LaunchBox, we are seeking to work with students to help them develop some of the important competencies and skills needed in the 21st century, as outlined in a recent report from the World Economic Forum (2015). In particular, students actively participating will develop foundational literacies such as ICT, financial, and cultural literacy; sharpen character qualities like curiosity, intuitiveness, leadership; and most importantly, develop competencies such as problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

Finally, having students take part in innovation while in higher education is not only about helping them develop critical competencies that are transferable to their careers later on, it is also an investment for the future. Investing in students, ideas, and innovation today will lead to a more prosperous tomorrow for Canada (Universities Canada, 2017).

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life or transforming existing ideas. It can be social and/or technological in nature and often seeks to introduce a collective benefit for a given group.

Corporations are not the only ones pushing innovation. For a while now, universities have also been on board, looking for ways to foster innovative thinking among their students while developing and providing a framework that supports students in bringing their ideas to fruition. Concordia University's D3 Center (n.d.) "is an innovation hub uniting the Montreal ecosystem for innovators



Photo credit Gerald Nino

For more information on innovation at Vanier, visit the LaunchBox site at: <http://vaniercollege.qc.ca/msc/launchbox>

Staff and faculty who are interested in becoming involved as mentors or would like to contribute to LaunchBox in some way are welcomed to contact me at kavalloh@vanier.college.



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