

Some alumni entrepreneurs aided by College resources

BY SUSAN MATTHEWS, THE DARTMOUTH STAFF

PUBLISHED ON FRIDAY, MAY 08, 2009

Editor's Note: This is part two of a two-part series on Dartmouth graduates and entrepreneurship.

The launch of the company Gyrobike, which sells bike-stabilizing devices, would not have been possible without the help of the entrepreneurial staff at the Tuck School of Business and the Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network, according to the company's CEO, Daniella Reichsletter Tu '07.

The company is among many that have been founded by Dartmouth graduates with the help of College resources, several alumni said in interviews with The Dartmouth.

Reichletter, who attended Georgetown University, said she had limited exposure to entrepreneurship as an undergraduate.

"I didn't even know what the entrepreneurship options were, so I took an investment banking job after school," she said, adding that Tuck eventually fostered her desire to start her own business.

"Dartmouth is a school that attracts people who would make great entrepreneurs," Rodrigo Ramirez, outreach and program coordinator at Career Services, said. "There's something about how Dartmouth works that prepares you to deal with ambiguity and all the problems that you will need for entrepreneurship."

Career Services offers many resources for students interested in starting their own businesses, Ramirez said, although students have to be proactive.

"We try to set you up in ways that you're able to take the next step," he said. "It depends greatly on how much effort the students want to put in it."

Career Services encourages students to reach out through the Dartmouth alumni network and the Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network, Ramirez said.

The DEN, which was started by Tuck professor Gregg Fairbrothers in 2001, includes alumni who have started their own businesses and are willing to help students with an interest in the field.

"For people who are interested, there are plenty of places to go for support," Fairbrothers said, although he also recognized that it is still "unlike corporate recruiting where you just have to show up in [the] Collis [Center]."

Tuck, the Thayer School of Engineering and Dartmouth Medical School are also great resources for undergraduates, Yang Wei Neo '12, public relations and marketing intern at Career Services, said.

"The network transcends, really, the College — [DMS] and [the Thayer School] really do collaborate with Tuck," he said.

Speaking with Dartmouth alumni who are in the field or have started their own businesses is particularly helpful for interested students, Ramirez said.

“One of the biggest assets you have in a start-up is the people that you know and where they are based,” Fairbrothers said. “We’re drowning in that compared to the average institution.”

Chris Weiss '82 said that the creation of his company, Dynamic Clinical Systems, which sells data collection software to health care services, was the direct result of Fairbrothers' encouragement.

“I never even thought to start a company until we moved [to the Upper Valley],” he said. “I will directly attribute the idea to Gregg Fairbrothers.”

Weiss said the entrepreneurship culture at Dartmouth has expanded in the years he has been away from the College.

“Dartmouth is among the elite five to 10 schools who are figuring [how to teach entrepreneurship],” he said, equating Dartmouth with institutions like Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with respect to this field.

When Russ D'souza '07 and Jack Groetzinger '07 approached venture-capitalists to solicit funding for their start-up, D'souza said they met with many Stanford and MIT graduates, but few Dartmouth alumni. The team's online company Scribnia, a web site that allows users to find columnists online, is currently in its pre-launch phase.

David Gardner '05, whose company Color Jar was launched at the end of 2008, said that the entrepreneurship culture is not as strong at Dartmouth as at other institutions of higher education.

Color Jar is a “design and branding company” that helps other businesses design more effective web sites.

“It's not totally foreign, but I wouldn't say it's a common career path,” he said.

Despite the efforts of the DEN and Career Services, Dartmouth's location is an additional hurdle, Weiss said.

“Geographically, the Upper Valley has its challenges,” Weiss said. “It's not a place that tends to retain a lot of young people. It's not heavily saturated with job opportunities.”

While Fairbrothers and the DEN should receive a “100 out of 100” in terms of support and inspiration, the Upper Valley is a difficult place to base a start-up, both because it is rural and because it is on the East Coast, said Ricky Joshi '01, who launched his web site Fandome six months ago to connect sports fans with sports-related videos.

“At least in the Internet space, I found the Northeast to be more conservative than the West Coast,” he said. “For those reasons, I would say that the West Coast is occasionally more innovative.”

<http://thedartmouth.com/2009/05/08/news/entrepreneurs/>