

Harvard Launches Innovation Incubator

BOSTON—Harvard University announced today the opening of its first lab for innovation and entrepreneurship with the goal of spurring innovative ventures across the University, at Harvard Business School (HBS), and in the Allston-Brighton neighborhood. The Harvard Innovation Lab will open in fall 2011 in a building on Western Avenue in Allston that formerly housed public broadcasting's WGBH.

"For the University as well as for the economy and our nation, the importance of innovation cannot be overstated," said Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust. "It is also of utmost importance and great interest to our students and faculty, many of whom are inventors and entrepreneurs. This lab will foster team-based activities and deepen interactions among both aspiring and experienced innovators across the schools of Harvard."

Harvard Business School, long a center for teaching and scholarship in the area of entrepreneurship, will fund and develop the lab, while opening its doors to the University. "We see it as a potentially quite distinctive resource —" not one that would attempt to replicate other successful innovation spaces in Massachusetts, but one that would leverage Harvard's people and resources in new and exciting ways," said HBS Dean Nitin Nohria. "Our goal is to drive innovation by connecting entrepreneurial teams, not only across the Charles River, but nationally and internationally, in an interdisciplinary approach to creating viable business ventures and social initiatives."

Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, a champion for spurring innovation in the city to grow the economy and create jobs, joined Dean Nohria at the announcement. He noted that Boston is a city with deep roots in innovation and entrepreneurship. "Harvard is an important part of that history and their investment in this facility in Allston will ensure that they play an important role in the future of innovation in Boston."

Like the very enterprises it will house, the concept for the Harvard Innovation Lab had entrepreneurial origins. HBS Professor Peter Tufano, who drafted the initial proposal, saw the potential for the lab. "Student entrepreneurs don't respect academic silos, but nevertheless often found it hard to connect across school boundaries," he said. "If we could find ways to facilitate those interactions, bringing them together in an environment that stimulates the sharing of ingenuity, knowledge, and skills, innovation and creativity could flourish. The potential of a unified Harvard could partially be realized."

Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) Dean Cherry Murray sees the lab as an ideal way to bridge the gaps across academic disciplines. "Innovation isn't bounded by organizational structures and areas of study," said Murray. "I'm thrilled to broaden the experience of SEAS students by bringing them together with their counterparts from other fields such as design, business, government, law, medicine, and science."

The Harvard Innovation Lab is planned to come on line beginning in the fall semester of 2011. During stage one of the launch, it will be open to student entrepreneurs across the University, including undergraduates, students in Harvard's professional schools, and graduate students. Student teams will have shared space to work on their ventures, access to experienced Entrepreneurs-in-Residence, support by faculty and administrators, and a program of related activities to deepen their understanding of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Some student teams will work independently, while others will work as part of established courses. For example, teams of students in the jointly taught HBS and SEAS course *Inventing Breakthroughs & Commercializing Science* will use the Lab to create plans for commercializing University/private lab research. The course builds interdisciplinary student teams from several Harvard schools as well as MIT and Tufts with backgrounds in business, medicine, law, government, engineering, and science. Also in stage one, the 150 or so teams entering the annual HBS Business Plan Contest would also be given work space in the Lab along with HBS Entrepreneurs-in-Residence, a group that has included the likes of Jeffrey Busgang of Flybridge Capital Partners and Susan Decker, former president of Yahoo. The intent is to create a supportive and interactive environment where ideas and activities can be shared across disciplines and ranges of experience.

Stage two of the launch will include a mix of innovation-oriented programs and services that benefit small businesses and entrepreneurs in the surrounding community. For example, the Lab will engage groups affiliated with HBS to work with local entrepreneurs and business and may provide rent-free space to such organizations and to others who can work with Allston community business owners and entrepreneurs.

The Innovation Lab will be led by a team whose job is to connect the various Harvard entrepreneurship programs—such as HBS's Rock Center for Entrepreneurship and The Technology and Entrepreneurship Center at Harvard (TECH), based at SEAS--and to link student teams with the right people and resources to overcome hurdles and foster their success.

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