Student Reflection: Leadership & Entrepreneurship in the Changemaker Lab

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Initial Goals and Transformation

My initial goal when I first arrived at Evergreen and joined the Changemaker Lab was to enhance my media skills and start my own media business. The course's unique interdisciplinary approach to education helped me to discover my true potential. After this realization I decided to change paths and commit my career to something more inspirational and financially viable. My goal became to help those with disabilities find new ways to become more independent in every aspect of their lives. The courses I have taken, Changemaker Lab and Non Profit Boot Camp have allowed me to develop the perfect toolkit to turn this vision into reality through design thinking, team learning, and visionary leadership.

Entrepreneurial Learning in the Changemaker Lab

Through the Changemaker Lab's learn-by-doing approach, I gained comprehensive experience in leadership and developing real business ventures from the ground up. I learned to conduct market research to identify customers' most pressing needs, prototype cost-effective business models to address their needs, and implement digital strategies to reach my target audience on a larger scale. Through this iterative process, I discovered how to create effective value propositions that align with customers' needs. My goal is to use these skills to show the world that overcoming accessibility barriers can benefit far more than just people with disabilities. While most view accessibility barriers as problems to solve, merely raising a low bar to a middle standard, I instead see them as opportunities to build innovative solutions that elevate all of us to a higher bar. I found that when multiple stakeholder groups understand the value they will receive from these solutions, buy-in almost comes naturally, making the funding and implementation of accessible solutions simple and straightforward.

Leadership Development

Serving as both Team Lead and CEO of student-run companies, I guided multiple diverse teams through every stage of the entrepreneurial process. The leadership toolkit I developed in the Changemaker Lab is based on two frameworks: Barry Posner's The Leadership Challenge and MIT's Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future. These approaches have taught me to lead with empathy, set standards by serving as a role model, cultivate a shared vision, and continuously innovate and refine processes. In our quarterly evaluations, my teammates consistently recognized

my ability to maintain focus on our goals while ensuring all voices were heard. I'm particularly proud of how I grew in empowering team members to take initiative by delegating tasks based on the unique learning goals they created for the program.

Accessibility Coalition Project

My most meaningful achievement was leading a coalition aimed at addressing campus accessibility barriers by facilitating inclusive, generative dialogue among students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Our collaborative efforts turned accessibility challenges into opportunities to enhance campus safety and education for all students, while increasing self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. One of the most prominent changes currently underway is lowering a section of the produce wash station at the farm to enable wheelchair users to easily reach and have a similar hands-on learning experience as their non-disabled peers. This modification also benefits students who are injured or of varying heights, allowing them to use the wash station more effectively. Even after the completion of my studies the coalition's vision continues to inspire other students to sustain and advance these initiatives, ensuring that Evergreen sticks to their commitments.

Non Profit Boot Camp Skills

While in Non Profit Boot Camp I developed the skills to bootstrap and quickly begin making changes through a nonprofit, with minimal startup capital and resources. By applying systems thinking and design thinking, I learned how to identify key societal problems, analyze their root causes, and pinpoint key leverage points. Addressing these issues required me to learn how to prototype sustainable solutions through iterative processes such as value proposition design, managerial accounting, and impact business modeling. To obtain the funds required to effectively implement these solutions, I leveraged AI to find grant opportunities that align with my nonprofit's mission and programs. Using my managerial accounting skills, I streamlined the grant applications process by developing a budget, projected financial statement of activities, and statement of functional expenses for each of my nonprofit's programs. As the class unfolded, these elements came together and enabled me to develop my own nonprofit that empowers people with disabilities to explore and experience the world, while working to make places around the globe more accessible.

Comprehensive Entrepreneurial Toolkit

I have developed a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship that has prepared me to step into the role of a well-rounded CEO, equipped with both vision and practical experience. I learned effective leadership begins with articulating a clear and inspiring vision, then mobilizing a team around that vision through collaboration, trust, and shared accountability. I gained hands-on experience in financial planning, from building budgets and forecasts to evaluating investment strategies, ensuring that new products and programs are financially sound and self-sustaining. In addition, I learned the importance of corporate and legal formalities, such as forming the right type of entity, maintaining governance records, and ensuring regulatory compliance to protect the organization and its stakeholders. By integrating leadership, teamwork, vision, strategy, finance, and legal and tax knowledge, I am equipped to develop and lead innovative, financially resilient, legally sound, and purpose-driven organizations.