

Honoured by the Invitation

Gustavson delivers business training in aboriginal communities

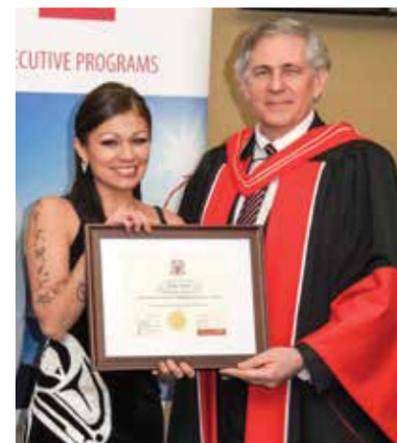
By Moira Dann

The engagement Dr. Brent Mainprize has had with First Nations communities over the past 16 years is “a gift that’s been given to me,” he says. It “set the direction of my career and continues to influence me in many ways personally.”

That gift led Mainprize (and Gustavson Executive Programs) to create a number of cutting-edge programs as the business school continues to be invited into B.C.’s northwest and Okanagan aboriginal communities to deliver entrepreneurial and management education.

“This is a tremendous honour,” says Mainprize. “By going into communities, we’ve taken a new approach to ensuring access. We are customizing the courses and building what the communities want, an approach that is unique among Canadian business schools, offering aboriginal education programs on their terms in their territory.”

There are many programs underway, with the longest-running—the Northwest Aboriginal Canadian Entrepreneur program undertaken in partnership with the Tribal Resources Investment Corp.—seeing its fifth cohort graduate in November. There have already been several achievements



Liana Spence and Dean Saul Klein.

arising from the programs (see the list at the end of this story and sidebar about Noah Guno) and many more in the works, such as Liana Spence (Art From Ashes art studio) and Wayne Fast (with his Peace of Mind painting company).

Patrick Shannon, owner of EVIL Patrick by Design,

is enjoying tremendous success, including winning the 2015 BC Young Aboriginal Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Shannon was part of the “Haida Owned and Operated” program, which is a six-month program (similar to NW-ACE) for people living on Haida Gwaii.

Mainprize and NW-ACE have netted several awards for their work: Mainprize for his teaching innovations, while the program itself won a Partnership and Collaboration Visionary Award from the Industry Council for Aboriginal Business.



“Haida Owned and Operated” alumnus Patrick Shannon.

Mainprize says the success comes from going into the community, getting to know the people and taking a collaborative approach. He welcomes more involvement, particularly from alumni who have the interest and skills to share.

“I am proud to be part of a forward-thinking business school with faculty willing to step outside their comfort zone and travel to remote aboriginal communities. It enables greater educational access for these students and cultural learning opportunities for our faculty members,” says Mainprize. “It’s all exciting.”

Business Programs Underway in Northwest B.C.

• **NW-ACE:** participants learn entrepreneurial theory and skills such as marketing, business-plan writing, presentation skills and human resource management. A 10-week initial class program followed by a 12-week mentorship. nwace.ca

• **NW-CAMP:** training for village and band administrators, economic development and education officers delivered



Dr. Brent Mainprize.

mainly in Prince Rupert in four-day modules over 10 months. nwcamp.ca

• **NW-EAGLE:** short, workshop-style course, designed to help students explore opportunities in employment or entrepreneurship. ieagle.ca

• **Haida Owned and Operated (HO2):** offered for Haida citizens with business ideas that serve and help grow the economy of Haida Gwaii. Weekend classes rotate among three centres: Skidegate, Tllall and Old Massett. haidaownedandoperated.ca ■

Teaching Out



KEEPING WITH GUSTAVSON’S commitment to bring education beyond the school grounds, Dr. Brock Smith, champion of the campus-based Entrepreneurship Program, says he loves teaching in the NW-ACE program. “The students are very appreciative of the opportunity to learn and for us being in Prince Rupert,” says Smith. “Content-wise, what we deliver is very similar to what we teach our BCom and MBA students. Process-wise, because the program is shorter, our delivery tends to be a bit more practical.” An interesting difference, he says, is use of vocabulary. “Most of the students have not been inside a classroom for a long time and we are throwing a lot of business terminology at them that they have not heard before. The students are pretty good at asking us what some of the words we are using mean, but I have also given more thought to how to present concepts with less jargon.”

Dr. Brent Mainprize says program manager Cory Stephens (BCom ’96) must be recognized for the operational success of the NW-ACE and NW-EAGLE programs. Stephens, with roots in the Nisga’a and Tsimshian Nations, lives in Prince Rupert and looks after things on the ground.

“Consistently, our graduating students have offered deep appreciation for the learning opportunity provided by Gustavson and TRICORP and further express gratitude for a new way of envisioning and taking advantage of opportunities in Northern B.C.,” says Stephens. “The program has truly changed lives.”



NW-ACE in reserve classroom: Dr. Brock Smith demonstrates product/market positions to student Barb Duncan.



Noah Guno (right) with TRICORP’s David Parnell (left).

Photos: Courtesy of participants

Coming Up ACEs

by Carol Crenna

NOAH GUNO, 37, lives in the community of Gitlaxt’aamiks (New Aiyansh), 1,400 kilometres northwest of Vancouver. He was among the very first students in the NW-ACE program. Formerly a logger, at age 29 Guno sensed industry changes and began focusing on creative multimedia instead.

“I started *Nass Valley News* from the ground up: reporting, layout, recruiting writers, managing distribution and printing,” Guno says. “Although I had never done anything like that before, I was given a three-week deadline to put together the Nisga’a Nation’s first newspaper.”

After a dozen issues, it folded due to funding cuts, and he enrolled in NW-ACE.

“NW-ACE was a one-of-a-kind program in that it cuts the fat, enabling you to learn only what you need to for your interests. I learned how to market myself and my business, and how to prosper in publishing. The program gave me so much confidence. It made me brave enough to become self-sufficient, showing me that there is a way out of poverty, and I have to create it for myself.”

He subsequently relaunched the newspaper. With additional school district funding, *Nisga’a Talking Stick* began publishing in 2013 as an educational tool targeting young adults. He enlisted students from the “alternate program” to assist him. “It has been a great success—sent to all Nisga’a communities in B.C. And it is a blessing to work with these great kids. I started out in the alternate program as one of the ‘bad’ kids, and I’m now able to show them that it does not define who you are.”

Since then his focus has evolved. “Now, at the same time that I’m driven to launch an online multimedia magazine to target a much larger aboriginal audience, and break the invisible walls that block communication between First Nations, I realize that furthering my education is paramount. I want to get my degree from UVic’s Peter Gustavson School of Business to gain the knowledge and credentials, and to show my three kids that education is crucial.”

NW-ACE-styled business programs are essential, says Guno, because aboriginals are innately entrepreneurial; as the country’s first entrepreneurs, thousands of years ago they made and traded their own goods. “But we must now learn how to do business in the new world.”