COMMUNITY, CULTURE, CASH

Three little words with big impact

by Liam Grigg, BCom ’18

COMMUNITY, culture and cash are three words that are helping Indigenous youth across British Columbia create the future they want, and I am honoured to be a part of it. Since graduating from Gustavson with my BCom, I have been working with the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres on a Service Canada-funded project that teaches Indigenous youth about the ‘3Cs.’

The 3C Challenge aims to tap into the entrepreneurial spirit that exists within Indigenous culture, and consists of a three-day workshop followed by a 30-day challenge for participants to test their business ideas in their communities.

Participants not only learn about starting a business, but they have access to highly trained facilitators, mentors and start-up cash. These youth are making real money and representing their communities and cultures at the same time.

I feel incredibly fortunate to be doing something as meaningful as this right out of school. This opportunity was made possible by the lessons I learned during my degree, my experience in my co-ops and the Friendship Centres’ partnership with Gustavson’s own Dr. Brent Mainprize, Renée Letellier and the National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development.

When I first started at UVic, I was terrified I would end up in a career for which I had no passion. I never pictured myself finding enjoyment in working a nine-to-five desk job, where I merely “worked for the weekend.” I needed a career with purpose, something that made a difference in my community. And this is exactly why I chose to go to Gustavson. I knew that the school thought of business differently. It didn’t teach students to maximize profits, but focused on a holistic approach.

I kept the quest for purpose in mind when applying to co-ops, and worked a double co-op term with Canadian NGO The SAM Project, helping rural farmers in the Southern Province of Zambia through sustainable agriculture and micro-enterprise (SAM). After teaching a workshop we had developed on the fundamentals of micro-enterprise for a few months, my co-worker and I realized there was a serious need for start-up capital enabling farmers to create businesses beyond subsistence farming.

With only $5,000 USD, we created a community-based loan model that relied on social pressure as collateral. Although this program was designed in 2017, The SAM Project can still boast a 100 per cent repayment rate on its loans.

I returned to school with a brand-new perspective of the power of business, and some concrete ideas of what “purpose at work” might look like day to day. Although my co-op was internationally focused, it was based in a small-community mindset. Realizing the importance of this in business, I took the international business specialization in fourth year. The combined experience of co-op and the lessons I learned at Gustavson created the foundation for me to manage the 3C Challenge.

As a city kid, growing up in Vancouver and Victoria, I never pictured myself travelling to places like Prince Rupert, Smithers and Fort Nelson to work. Interacting with the youth that participate in the program is what gives me purpose in my work as hard as I do. The obstacles that these youth face in our province can seem insurmountable, but I believe programs like 3C empower a generation to create its own future. I’m extremely optimistic about what the Challenge can achieve in the next two years and I am beyond excited to be a part of it.

The opportunities I had during my time at Gustavson have allowed me to shape a career that gives me purpose. Business is much more than just a bottom line: it’s a powerful tool that can be used to develop both our local and global communities.