While the current state of the world may make it seem like a strange time to start a business, many of Gustavson’s recent grads and soon-to-be grads are doing just that. The increase in available time (for example, how many hours are suddenly free because we aren’t travelling or commuting?) has helped give these new entrepreneurs a different kind of runway than what they had pre-COVID-19.

There is precedent for the idea that economic downturns often drive innovation, as we saw in the 2008-2009 recession with the emergence of Airbnb and Uber. “A lot of people think that creativity and starting a venture happens best when the sky’s the limit, you have tons of money and so many choices,” says Mia Maki, Gustavson faculty and entrepreneurship expert. “But we know that creativity comes from constraints. In many ways, these new entrepreneurs are forced to be creative.”

Whether it’s despite or because of the current state of the world, Gustavson’s latest cohort of entrepreneurs is finding new opportunities and pivoting existing ventures. From managed software as a service to zero-waste craft dip and everything in between, here are just a few of Gustavson’s emerging entrepreneurs.

**Pacifica Digital Inc.**

**FOUNDERS:** ANDRES AGRESOT, BCOM ‘20, AND CORY MCIVER, BCOM ‘21

**Elevator Pitch:** Pacifica Digital implements and manages robotic process automation solutions using existing software providers. Our managed software as a service (MSaaS) provides automation solutions that help with resource allocation, such as time and human power, and helps reduce wasting time in non-value-adding tasks and processes.

**Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business?**

Yes and no. Before the pandemic I [Agresot] was already clear that at some point in my career I wanted to start a business of my own (which is why I went into entrepreneurship), but the COVID-19 crisis accelerated my decision. After diving deep into the world of entrepreneurship this summer in the midst of a pandemic, I realized that a crisis always brings new opportunities to shift paradigms.

**What are you most nervous about?**

Funding and capital. At this point we are still working on landing our first client and making sure we have the resources (financial and human) to be able to deliver our project. We are optimistic and are looking at some avenues sponsored by the government for young entrepreneurs in the STEM fields, but we are also cognizant of the impact COVID-19 may have on the way the federal government provides subsidies and grants.

**Does your business address the COVID-19 crisis, or the shortages, new consumer habits, etc. that have come out of the crisis?**

Just as we were getting ready to launch our products in some local retail locations, and start up the 2020 farmers’ market season, the pandemic forced us to pivot our business and adapt. In the initial wake of the COVID-19 crisis, we developed an e-commerce website platform to help facilitate local contactless delivery. This delivery service allowed us to grow our customer base and provide people with an easy way to get their favourite dips without leaving the home.

**How did you come up with the idea? What was your inspiration?**

In the summer of 2019, our co-founder, Justin, started creating a variety of delectable dips and brought them everywhere for our friends to try. The feedback was great, and we decided to start selling the dips at local farmers’ markets to further test the product idea.

**The Chalk Club**

**FOUNDERS:** HARRISON ARMSTRONG, BCOM ’20, KAT CRAATS, BCOM ’20, AND MAYA BELLAY, BCOM ’20

**Elevator Pitch:** The Chalk Club is Whistler’s newest rock-climbing gym, delivering an incredible climbing experience at a fair price through a superior facility and a strong, inclusive atmosphere.

**Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business? If so, how?**

COVID-19 has not had any direct effects yet as we are still in the early stages. However, real estate, staffing and capacity regulations is a foreseeable challenge down the road. Collectively, we are nervous to fail. Start-up costs are quite high and to have the pressure of using both equity funds and borrowed funds is quite nerve-racking.

**What are you most excited about with this new venture?**

The most exciting part about this venture is seeing it come to life. The whole process from ideation to the completion of our business plan has been a great experience, and it would be incredible to see it come to fruition.
Elevator Pitch: Rose Creative Co. provides effective and tailored, photography, video and visual strategy services for small business owners who need an accessible and stylish solution for their content marketing. Unlike DIY marketing or hiring a standard photographer, we bring experience in marketing strategy with a results-focused approach to take your business to the next level of growth.

Does your business address the COVID-19 crisis, or the shortages, new consumer habits, etc. that have come out of the crisis?

Digital marketing services are needed now more than ever in the midst of the pandemic. As businesses are forced to focus on building and growing their online commerce capabilities, I have been involved with helping set up two Shopify stores for my clients in the past six months, as brick-and-mortar sales were on pause at the beginning of quarantine. My services for these clients included website photography and customizing product listings on the online storefront. As we shift to working remotely and focus on doing business online, digital marketing and content creation services are only going to increase in demand.

Does your business address the COVID-19 crisis, or the shortages, new consumer habits, etc. that have come out of the crisis?

Elevator Pitch: Coco Willow Candle Co. is a West Coast-inspired candle company that produces handcrafted, locally made candles using soy wax, natural fragrances and wooden wicks for a fireside feel. 

Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business? If so, how?

Although we initially felt uncertain launching in such an unstable economic environment, we decided to continue to pursue our goals based on our passion for the people who are our customers and our desire to help them feel happy.

Does your business address the COVID-19 crisis, or the shortages, new consumer habits, etc. that have come out of the crisis?

Our business addresses new consumer habits and desires to improve their home environment. Since consumers also shop more frequently online, we offer an easy way to shop from the comfort of their homes.

Elevator Pitch: Hayley Zumkeller Photography

Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business? If so, how?

Our business addresses new consumer habits and the desire to continue to pursue our goals based on our passion for the people who are our customers and our desire to help them feel happy.

Does your business address the COVID-19 crisis, or the shortages, new consumer habits, etc. that have come out of the crisis?

The wedding industry got flipped upside down this year. I had to change the way I ran my business quite a bit, and pivoted when it came to offering photos versus videos. The demand for wedding videos skyrocketed because people wanted to share their day with family and friends that couldn’t make it. Also, I started to book two- to three-hour elopements instead of eight- to ten-hour wedding days. It changed my perspective on the perfect wedding day, and how I can advise future clients with their day.

At the beginning of COVID-19, it was really difficult. My weddings were getting postponed, clients were very stressed, and money wasn’t flowing. Fortunately, my summer booked up more than before because I changed my client packages. I attracted new brides and grooms who were making last-minute changes to their wedding days. I had the opportunity to shoot at some incredible locations, such as mountain-top elopements only accessible by helicopter.

All in all, the learning experiences and eye-opening moments have developed my passion for photography and the future direction of my business.

Elevator Pitch: Every Leader Sustainability Education (ELSE)

Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business?

We came up with the idea for ELSE pre-COVID-19, but we believe that engaging, alternative education is going to be very important in the new forms of schooling that are emerging. We’ve had to pivot a lot because of COVID-19 and shift the nonprofit direction, but I think the service is even more valuable now in these times of drastic change.

Has COVID-19 affected your decision to start a business?

Going forward, I [Tansey] will dedicate my weekends to building the organization, and Clio will step back to an advisory role. It will take some hard work to stay on deadline, but I’m passionate about reaching as many young people as possible!