

# UTM driving new education model

BY JANA SCHILDER

The planets are aligning in Mississauga—Canada's sixth largest city—to help turn it into an innovation hub.

Innovation hubs, business accelerators, incubators—call them what you like—are much coveted by many cities in North America. Why? Because the links among innovation, investment capital, well-paying jobs, thriving businesses, and ultimately the improved standard of living for the vast majority of citizens are very clear.

It's like the old saying: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

"If you look at the interests of the City of Mississauga, the various Mississauga Summits held since 2007, and the RIC Centre, there are some key players waiting in the wings, ready to drive innovation in Mississauga forward," says professor Ulli Krull, vice-principal, research and AstraZeneca chair in Biotechnology at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM).

"We actually do have the ingredients to drive innovation in Mississauga," adds Krull.

Educators Ulli Krull and colleague Mihkel Tombak, who is chair of Department of Management at UTM, have been spearheading a new model for business education in Canada. It's the Institute for Management and Innovation.

What's special about the Institute is that it combines content from several specific disciplines and management skills in the same program, taught concurrently.

For Krull, it started with rejecting conventional thinking about business education. "How can we nurture the next generation of leaders and get around the usual mindset of academia that everything has to be done in certain ways?" asks Krull.

Traditionally, a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) program is taught to give someone the tools and skills of management. The fly in the ointment is that this management knowledge is not linked to a specific profession. The current model for business education in most business schools across Canada is less than optimal, according to Krull.

Is UTM the first university in Canada to offer these types of hybrid programs? Krull is a little shy about waving the UTM flag, hedging that "UTM is among the first."

"In mindset and scope, these new programs are unique in Canada," admits Krull.

"We hope that in 10 to 15 years, the Institute for Management and Innovation will be of national significance to Canada," adds Krull.

"The individual first has to learn a profession. That is front and centre," explains Krull.

The programs that are offered by the

Institute for Management and Innovation include: Master of Biotechnology; Master of Management of Innovation; Master of Science in Sustainability Management; Master of Management and Professional Accounting; Bachelor of Business Administration; and Bachelor of Commerce. Each of these programs has between 50 and 80 students currently enrolled.

"Having expertise in a profession, you can then add on what you'd call management elements through experiential learning, by classroom study, and by interacting with people in the industry," says Krull.

"What we focus on with students is how they can understand the process of innovation from the perspective of their expertise, or field of study," says Krull.

So-called management elements taught concurrently to students include: prices and markets; applied economics; finance; accounting and negotiations; marketing; business strategy; and technology strategy and policy. Much of the course work is done in teams, to get ready for the real world. And students can take courses at any of the University of Toronto's three campuses.

"That's what the Institute is all about: how do you bring in management skills to learn to be an innovator," says Krull, adding that many graduates join management consulting firms to help other businesses.

Where is the proof that the new approach at the Institute of Management and Innovation is working? It's in case competitions.

Each year, the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management hosts a case competition where MBA students compete on business problems. They are given a problem and asked to build a business plan, a marketing plan, and make a sales pitch to investors.

"The students of the Master of Biotech program at UTM have won the gold prize in three of the past four years," says Krull.

There are a number of businesses, academia, individuals, and municipal government all talking innovation. This high level discussion about innovation has been going on in Mississauga for about five years now.

"We have now matured and all of the pieces are aligned," says Krull.

He points to Sheridan College's new Mississauga campus which was deliberately designed as a business college and as outreach to newcomers to Canada, to address the issue of integrating foreign-trained professionals more quickly with Canadian businesses.

He also points to the Mississauga Summit and the entire strategic plan at the City of Mississauga: both are wrapped around the innovation agenda.

He also points to the RIC Centre that has the mandate of helping to commercialize



Professors Mihkel Tombak and Uli Krul have been spearheading a new model for business education at UTM, and it is a model for all right across Canada.

Photos courtesy UTM

new ideas for products and services. While the RIC Centre has been focusing on small businesses and start-ups, at the same time they are trying to connect small businesses to large businesses.

"The reality is that Mississauga is so closely networked that we can actually start changing how we deliver education and experience to show government how innovation can be delivered," Krull.

"We're trying to change the nature of how Mississauga positions itself on innovation," says Krull.

He's convinced that if you show people how well the innovation education system works, you will attract investors.

## How to be Silicon Valley

Many have tried to crack the secret formula to an incubator's success. "How to be Silicon Valley" is an interesting article written by computer programmer-turned-venture-capitalist Paul Graham written in 2006 and available for free on the Internet.

To cut to the chase, Graham says there are two necessary conditions to re-create Silicon Valley. First, you need about 10,000 computer nerds. Second, you need venture capitalists who have successfully launched companies and made money.

It is this pool of venture capitalists, rather than government, that has the knack of picking the winning ideas to commercialize. They almost have a sixth sense about business ideas. This pool of venture capitalists are the key; Graham says that everyone else will move to an area that is starting to "rock and roll."

In fact, Graham advises that government should be kept well away from incubators because it makes venture capital—those who put serious money at risk, for the Big Payday—feel that some are being given preferential treatment through grants, subsidies, inside connections, special favours, and the like. When serious money doesn't feel like the playing field is level, says Graham, they take their ball and go home.

## Humber a top choice for business students

BY SAYWARD SPOONER

The Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning is the largest college in Ontario. That's because Humber College is whatever the student needs it to be, which makes it a top choice for Mississauga residents.

And since Humber's Business School is the largest school within the college, it's safe to assume that advanced learning in business is what most students need right now. It's also what business needs right now. One of the reasons why Humber, one of the biggest degree granting colleges in Canada, is doing so well is because many students now choose college over university, even if gaining a four year degree is their primary goal.

The Business School currently offers eight four-year degree programs. They offer the basics and much more. One of the most popular degrees right now is also one of the newest, the Bachelor of Commerce-Accounting. This year Humber will say goodbye to its first full group of graduates in its Bachelor of Applied Business-Human Resources Management, Bachelor of Applied Business-International, Bachelor of Applied Business-Tourism Management, Bachelor of Applied Business in Fashion Management, as well as e-Business Marketing. They also offer the Bachelor of Applied Arts-Paralegal, and have recently added the newest degree,



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The Business School

Bachelor of International Development, to the selection. The latter was approved for degree status because of its popularity first as a diploma program. Paul Griffin, associate dean, Business Degrees, says they already have four other degree programs on the table, but they won't be announced until they've officially received approval.

While the range of offered degree programs, as well as certificate and diploma programs, meets the needs and interests of students—both fresh from high-school and those interested in continuing education—it also meets the needs of industry. When deciding what programs to run and how to run them, Humber faculty meets with advisory committees made up of industry insiders from all levels and sectors of business, depending on the program in question.

"The purpose is to create a curriculum with [industry in mind]," says Griffin. The committees are made up of, not only members of the local business community, but representatives from national brands as well. When deciding on educational

opportunities for students, secondary institutions have to consider, not only what students might be interested in, but the economical benefits to industry and the province in general. Humber is a top choice for many Mississauga students because it does this so well. Humber considers the future and, by all accounts, the future is about adaptability.

Griffin says there is "a shift in training and education." While the basics in business education are still found, not only necessary but increasingly popular—such as a Bachelor of Commerce Accounting degree—there is a definite push to "rise above the textbook," as Griffin says. "There is a greater emphasis on getting the student to think, to be creative," he explains. "To adapt," and "to learn how to learn."

With so much change taking place in technology across all disciplines, it's hard to gauge exactly where we'll be and what we'll need 20, even 10 years down the road. Hence the importance of being able to adapt. Perhaps what's most refreshing then, is that adapting is very much a human thing.

"People thought that with the improvement of software, accounting [programs] would disappear," remembers

Griffin. Yet, here we are 20 years later and accounting is one of the hottest courses being offered at any school. Similarly, project management is still big because, as Griffin explains, "it overlaps into different areas." The future is all about transferable skills.

Sometimes in order to "adapt" or transfer one's skills to another discipline, it's necessary to accumulate a new set of skills, often geared to a specific career. In fact, a huge trend across colleges right now is the enrolment of students who already have university degrees into certificate and diploma programs. A Humanities major may decide to specialize in accounting, while someone with a degree in Accounting or Economics may decide he/she needs some project management skills or wants a career in fashion.

"We are sometimes referred to as a finishing school," says Griffin. It's certainly a place to achieve intellectual polish, but if Humber's embracing of the future tells us anything, it's that most people won't finish their secondary education on their first go-round. Humber can either be about higher education in a particular subject, gaining the skills and education necessary for a particular career, or adding to the skills and education one already has in order to move on and take the next step. At any time in one's life or career, Humber College is whatever the student and future of business needs it to be.