

UF Entrepreneurship Students Take the Startup LEAP of Faith

GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Students participating in the Thomas S. Johnson Master of Science in Entrepreneurship (MSE) program will not only learn about starting new ventures in the classroom, but will apply those concepts directly to the creation of their own businesses as part of the new Lean Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program (LEAP).

LEAP is the MSE program's newest component—implemented into the MSE curriculum this fall— and is designed to combine the principle and practice of entrepreneurship. As part of LEAP, students will not only receive business advisement, but gain access to early stage proof-of-concept funding and incubation space in the new Jeff Gold Experiential Learning Laboratory in the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation (CEI). This innovative new offering serves as the program's capstone project, and is designed as the centerpiece of the MSE experience.

"LEAP is an excellent opportunity for entrepreneurially-minded students to leverage the vast resources available to them in the Warrington College of Business Administration to create new, value generating opportunities in the marketplace," said Chris Tassin, Director of the MSE program. "LEAP distinguishes the MSE program in that 100 percent of our students will have launched a business by the time they graduate." LEAP is taught by Whittington "Chip" Vara, a two-time Outstanding Faculty Award recipient at Warrington, who has served as an instructor in the MSE program since 2005. Professor Vara has 30 years of managerial expertise in marketing, product management, research and development and manufacturing. He has served as the Senior Business Analyst for the Enterprise North Florida Corporation, and launched Springboard Capital, LLC, a private equity fund focused on seed and early stage investments. Professor Vara has a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Florida and an MBA from Texas Christian University. Professor Vara has structured LEAP with an emphasis on "lean" startup principles so that students are able to create a viable business with minimal resources. According to Professor Vara, "Students will continually challenge the assumptions of their business models, enabling them to make a succession of small corrective measures, the aggregate of which, will result in a market-tested, reduced-risk venture."

"The goal of LEAP, like the mission of CEI," said Tassin, "is to instill an entrepreneurial mindset in our MSE students, and assist them in creating a career for themselves by the time they complete the program. I really look forward to seeing what our students will accomplish in the coming year."

CEI was created to teach, coach and inspire students to be entrepreneurial in their lives. The Center provides students the tools and experiences necessary to creatively pursue new opportunities and innovations in the start-up, social and corporate venture arenas. Through courses, degree programs and complementary activities such as speakers and workshops, CEI currently serves more than 2,000 students per year.

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The Warrington College of Business Administration is one of the world's top-rated public business programs, recognized for excellence by *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, and *Fortune*. As part of a Research 1 institution, Warrington is dedicated to a substantial research agenda, in addition to its teaching mission, from the undergraduate to the doctoral level. Warrington educates future business leaders using teamwork that provides opportunities for development of leadership, interpersonal and total management skills; promoting mastery of business functional areas; and fostering the habits and attitudes that constitute a solid research and work ethic.