**Dornsife Toolkit: Launching a Start-Up**

**MDA 300x Section 42220R** **| 2 Units | Spring 2020 | Fridays 10AM – 11:50AM**

Classroom: [CPA](https://maps.usc.edu/?id=1928&reference=CPA)259

Contact Information:

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Office Hours by Appointment Using [Calendly](https://calendly.com/jamesbottom)

**Course Description & Objectives**

This course provides an introduction to startup culture and an overview of the skills necessary in building a startup. The objective is for students to take a problem, create a solution for a proposed customer segment and build an initial prototype. Our class timeline also mirrors how quickly you can develop solutions and implement products in the real world.

This is a co-curricular experience and you will learn by doing. This class isn’t designed for heavy academic debate, encourages experimentation, user feedback, consumer discovery, customer validation and general feasibility. The only critically important part of startup lifecycle not covered by this course is how to build financials but we have extra assistance if this is something that you have a burning need to resolve.

**Grading**

You will be graded on a **Pass/Fail** basis and it will combine attendance, class participation, homework, reading assignments, insights about your product or service and of course results! This Credit/No Credit course weights your in class participation very heavily because you will learn a lot from listening to your fellow classmates thoughts/questions/pitches. That being said, if you build something profitable, the ends will justify the means.

**Schedule**

This will be a semester centered heavily on discussions online, thought provoking guest speakers, interviewing potential customers, partners and investors outside of class.

**COVID-19**

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC’s COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (SJACS).

**Required Text and Materials**

There is no required textbook for this course but I will require you to read or listen to the [Lean Startup By Eric Reis](https://www.audible.com/pd/Business/The-Lean-Startup-Audiobook/B005LXV0HI) (Free with 30 Day Trial). This will lay a solid foundation for most of our discussions and we will also be using [LeanStack.](https://leanstack.com/lewis-center/start-122a24e9-dce1-4139-80a0-457f6d6c8d56)

**Laptop Policy**

You will need your laptop for our weekly and for taking notes, looking up information, finding relevant websites & contributing the USC startup ecosystem media channels.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 – 8/27/21: Identifying Problems You Want to Solve**

***Assignment Due: 12 Problems Due (All Assignments Are For The Next Class)***

An introduction your first startup mentor (Me) and the rest of your class cohort. You will have an opportunity to introduce yourself to your peers that will support you throughout your career at USC and get an overview of the USC Startup Ecosystem. We will also have a quick overview of the startup landscape at USC.

Learning How To Not Boil The Ocean

Three: What is the problem I’m trying to solve?

What is the solution to that problem?

What customer is willing to use or purchase my product or service?

One: Combine the three sentences above into one

Three: Say your idea in 3 words. Example: “Uber For Cats” or “Netflix For Games”

**Week 2 – 9/3/21: Problem/Solutions, Experiments & Customer Discovery**

***Assignment Due:*** [***Watch 5 Minute Business Model Canvas Video On Startup 101***](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoAOzMTLP5s)

Your Business Hypotheses AKA - The Business Model Canvas

Can you create an experiment to test your business model? What data do you think you need and how can you get it? Are you listening to your customer or customers?

Go out and interview at least 16 prospective consumers or customers regarding your top ranked prospective problem or problems. If you are still undecided on a problem, use the feedback to see if this problem is as big a problem as you think. It’s just as important to invalidate ideas as it is to validate them. Pick one problem to work on for the duration of the seminar and remember 5 minutes of real feedback from a potential customer is worth hours of research insights.

Special Guest: George Sehremelis from Overlooked – Destroyer of Fake News

Troy Labs Coming By To Recruit

**Week 3 Class – 9/10/21:** I**ntro To Startup Finances & How To Retire Early**

***Assignment Due:*** [***Login & Win A Digital Cashflow Game***](http://www.richdad.com/classic)

Understand how the big 3 financial statements impact business and you need to master these tools to retire. There are a lot of ways to win and you will go bankrupt before you figure out how to play. A word of advice, you can lose three fortunes in a lifetime and you can still retire in style.

Special Guest: John Bogdnanov - Entrepreneur & AEN Board Member

**Week 4 – 9/17/21:** **Lean Business Model Canvas & How To Pivot To Success**

***Assignment Due: Write up describing how you will get data from a series of experiments***

What are some easy ways we can get users to adopt your product? How can we iterate to build a better product? What can I hack out quickly to demonstrate my idea, concept, product or prototype? How can I design a $20-50 experiment to see if it’s feasible?

Special Guest: Eddie Lin from Nexus Edge & the TechStars Accelerator program

**Week 5 – 9/24/21: Product Management, Design Ideas & Experiment Success Stories**

***Assignment Due: Create a draft of your business model canvas***

Understand the basics of product management and this will help you get organized. You will get a feel for UI/UX and hear about several successful product launches.

Special Guest: Jay Chang from Google - Formerly Block1, CropSticks & Sidebench

**Week 6 – 10/1/21:** **Basics of Raising Crowd Funding Equity Capital & Product Launches**

We will go over the basics of how to raise money and give a broad overview of what the venture capital industry looks like in the US. What does a good go to market strategy look like?

Special Guest: David Maliglowka from StartEngine, Drops & Hear With

**Week 7 – 10/8/21: Basics Mechanics of How Venture Funds Work & Brandable Names**

An overview of how VC funds work and what they are looking for when investing.

Note: If you pay attention in this lecture, you can get an analyst job in a VC firm or possible a gig in social media with the skills you learn!

What constitutes a good name for my business? Why shouldn’t I fall in love with the name already have dreamed up? What online tools do I use to validate if I have a good brandable name? Examples Namechk.com & USPTO.gov

Gmail, Instagram, FB, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn, Wordpress, Blogger, Myspace, etc.

Special Guest: Michael Rivera – Adjunct Greif Center Profess or & Managing Director of the USC Marshall Venture Fund

**Week 8 – 10/15/21: No Class – Fall Break**

If you are traveling home or abroad over the Fall Break, are you evaluating potential problem/solution sets for the potential customers you see around you? I want you to take a look at your surroundings with a new perspective. What business could be built on a vacant lot or do you see something that is missing to make your experience better? Is there anything I see here that I can sell back home or anything from home I can sell here?

If you are just being lazy with family/friends, could you also be cataloging your assets, evaluating your goals and benchmarking outcomes for your intended efforts?

**Week 9 – 10/22/21: Crowdfunding Or Non-Equity Fundraising & Story Boarding**

There are many paths to success including bootstrapping, incubation, and angel investment. We will learn the basics of how to put together a concept video for a funding campaign and hear about how crowd funding might help you acquire the equity needed to launch your venture.

Learn the basics of a startup pitch and a basic presentation deck. Think about how to build out your advisor network because your network is your net worth…

You will also learn about the basics about fundraising and this will be a deep dive in equity backed crowdfunding campaigns. Buckle your seat belt because you won’t want to miss this.

Special Guest: Paul Kastor – Exited Carbon Cravat & Crooked Branch Studio

**Week 10 – 10/29/21: Startup Legal Basics**

***Assignment Due: Build A Profile On Our Startup Tree Platform & Add Your Venture***

The basic legal concepts you need to have an understanding of to run a business. Entity formation, board dynamics, trademark and IP discussion. It’s a complicated business and you need to know what you don’t know.

Special Guest: Daniel Goldberg Startup Lawyer & Entrepreneur

**Week 11 – 11/5/21: The Sales Shift & Goals**

In this class we will talk about the “Sales Shift” and getting ready to pursue sales for your startup. We will have Bitium’s sales team in class and their venture gives growing companies the ability to manage access to all of their web-based applications -- including Google Apps and Office 365, as well as social networks and CRM, collaboration and marketing tools.

Special Guest: Garrett & Collin were formerly at [Bitium](http://bitium.com/) & it was acquired by Google

Future Note: If you like the lecture, they have a whole class dedicated to the Sales Shift ☺

**Week 12 – 11/12/21: Fireside Chat with Rob Angel (Founder Of Pictionary)**

We have a very fortunate for our next distinguished speaker… Rob Angel is the founder and creator of the bestselling game Pictionary®, which sold over 38 million games in 60 countries before selling to Mattel. Rob is also the author of Game Changer. As well as a Forbes top 10 Keynote Speaker. Aside from being a successful entrepreneur, and incredibly entertaining storyteller Rob is a great human whose story and life philosophy can inspire all of us.

Special Guest: Rob Angel – Founder & Creator of Pictionary

**Week 13 – 11/19/21: Growth Hacking Strategies & Examples**

You will get to meet an interesting growth hacker that will likely share some confidential hacks that he has performed. You will likely not be able to talk about everything that you are going to learn in this class or it will be off the record.

Special Guest: Chad Riddersen - Deviate Labs & wrote the book [Growth Hacking](https://www.google.com/shopping/product/8624714653270131142?q=Chad+Ridderson+Growth+Hacking&rlz=1C1GCEV_enUS841US842&biw=1536&bih=722&prds=epd:215932972443450636,prmr:3&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7-frK16TkAhUC7J4KHZ-9DrEQ8wIIogE)

**Week 13 – 11/26/21:** **Mastering the Pitch**

***Assignment: After This Class Take 30-60 Minutes To Build A High Level Pitch***

Learning the basics of a startup pitch and a basic presentation deck and hear a firsthand account of how a student mastered his first pitch and launched a business. Jill has an incredible entrepreneurial journey and you can learn a lot from her.

Special Guests: Relevant founders current raising capital

**Week 13 – 12/3/21:** **Final Startup Pitch Presentations**

Pitching your venture idea to the class and we will vote to see how as the best startup concept. We will recap your seminar experiences and talk about how you can expand your knowledge in the Blackstone LaunchPad program.

Special Guests: Winners from past USC pitch competitions

**Class Is Over But Your Entrepreneurial Journey Continues**

Who is going to sustain their entrepreneurship idea/venture over the spring semester? Do you plan on applying to the Marshall/Greif Accelerator, the programs in Viterbi or apply to some of the other programs around Los Angeles? Is the idea worth perusing or will you take on a new idea? Will you apply to the New Venture Seed Completion and win equity free prize money?

**Opportunity to Win Equity Free Startup Capital**

There are several pitch competitions in the spring semester and you should enter one!

**USC Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own.

All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located at [http://scampus.usc.edu/university-governance](http://scampus.usc.edu/university-governance/). Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The review process can be found at https://sjacs.usc.edu/.

**Academic Accommodations/Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed.

Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructors as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union room 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

**Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

**Building a Startup With No Code**

Teaching you how to build and test your MVP without having to hire expensive developers of wait for a technical co-founder. Whether you are building an on-demand app like Uber, a marketplace like Airbnb or a productivity tool like Slack, you can build it with no-code.

Special Guest: Christian Peverelli Co-Founder & CEO - WeAreNoCode