

Mercy's Entrepreneurship Program Lifts Future Innovators

Thanks to Support from the Beba Foundation



(l to r) William James, Robert Bohn, Umran Beba, Korhan Beba, Dean Lloyd Gibson, Paulina Lopez, Maria Trusa, Astriz Contreras '22, Victor Rosado '22, Leilani Tyson '23, Tereva Bundy, M.S. '22, Travis Cox '22 and Kristin Ludl

Since 2019, the Mercy College Student-Preneur Conference and Business Plan Competition, hosted and organized by the School of Business (SBUS), has excited the campus community. Today, both the conference and Mercy's entrepreneurship program are flourishing, thanks to support from the Beba Foundation, a non-profit whose mission is to prepare a diverse new generation of innovators.

"The Beba Foundation has made great strides in helping students with a desire to succeed who are minority, female, first generation, or members of underrepresented populations," said Lloyd G. Gibson, dean of the SBUS. "The synergy between Mercy College and the Beba Foundation makes this a very dynamic partnership."

Founded by a husband-and-wife team of social entrepreneurs and international business leaders, Umran Beba, M.B.A., H.D. '22, and Ali Beba, Ph.D., the Beba Foundation encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to turn their innovative ideas into real-world solutions for global markets. The family's personal involvement has not only

provided enthusiastic support and wise counsel for Mercy's students, but also a model of social entrepreneurship.

Mercy's commitment to entrepreneurship, as well as participation in the annual conference, has seen significant growth — from four student presenters to 26, and from an audience of a few dozen to 500 in-person and virtual attendees. The Beba Foundation's generous funding of the past two conferences has undoubtedly contributed to its expansion. "The Beba family's support has been a tremendous asset for Mercy. The confidence they have shown in our programs and our students can be felt by everyone," said Robert Bohn, director of Mercy's Entrepreneurship program and the conference organizer. The event now includes a keynote speaker and a panel discussion with leading entrepreneurs from Mercy's Business Incubation Center, and the business plan competition is now open to every student, not just business majors. "With their support, they are putting their globally recognized brand behind Mercy College," he said. "They are part of us, and they want to see us grow."

Umran Beba, who served as a judge for the 2022

Business Plan Competition, is currently on the SBUS Advisory Council. “The greater the diversity, the stronger the ideas,” she said. “Mercy students come from every ethnic group, every social background, and from more countries than ever. We’re looking forward to seeing what this year’s Business Plan Competition brings to light.”

Korhan Beba, the Foundation’s executive director, recalled the experience of listening to students competing for the top prize in last year’s Business Plan Competition. “It struck me how much I enjoy working with young entrepreneurs, seeing the light in their eyes and the way they process ideas in their minds,” he said. “They’ve observed a problem that they are trying to find solutions for, so our job was to ask hard questions and test their ideas for bringing their business proposal to market. When we see we can help them in some way, it’s very rewarding.”

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The Beba family’s contributions to Mercy’s entrepreneurship program also enabled four student officers of the campus chapter of the Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization, known as the CEO club, to travel to the national meeting held in Chicago last fall. On their return, the students prepared a presentation to share what they had learned with their benefactors.

“They walked us through their experience in Chicago, which, for some of them, was their first time visiting another city,” said Korhan. “It really opened their minds to see



Kaycee Moreno, M.B.A. '24 and Denisa Ademaj, M.B.A. '24



Umran Beba, M.B.A., H.D. '22

what other student entrepreneurs are doing. And it gave us the idea to invite winners of the Business Plan Competition to form a team that could compete on a national level. It’s a way for them to learn how to collaborate and generate new ideas.”

“This was the first time we were able to send our students to the national CEO conference and it was a very big deal,” said Bohn. “They made some wonderful connections with other student groups and mentors, and they brought back ideas for promoting entrepreneurship on campus. Now they are organizing a bus trip to visit other CEO clubs at neighboring universities to learn best practices we can implement at Mercy.”

Umran Beba’s spark of enthusiasm for Mercy’s entrepreneurship program, fanned by her participation in the pitch competition, blazed even higher when she was invited to speak at the SBUS 2022 Commencement Ceremony after being awarded an honorary degree from Mercy. Recalling it as “a special moment,” she said, “Seeing the graduates and their families, knowing all they have been through to complete their education, was so moving. It allowed me to see that the work we do helps bring new talent forward. My family and I are proud to be part of Mercy’s ecosystem.”

“So much of what we’ve accomplished in recent years has been made possible because of the Beba Foundation,” said Gibson. “We appreciate their personal attention, and we are grateful for their confidence in our programs and our students, which they have shared with other organizations and individuals in their sphere. They are leaving us a legacy.”

Umran Beba summed it up with these words: “My husband likes to say that over the course of our lives we learn, we earn and we return. Once we’ve achieved a certain level of success, then it becomes our responsibility to give back, because now we have more experience and the financial means. For me and for my family, it’s our time to do that.”

To read about the 2023 Student-Preneur Conference, visit www.mercy.edu/studentpreneur.