

Monday, Jan 11, 2016

## Graduate students craft ideas that could spawn tech businesses

Oakland University graduate student Scott Janson didn't come into his Special Topics in Management Information Systems course knowing that an idea he helped form could potentially be a viable part of a money-making business.

He soon learned that the emerging field of the Internet of Things (IoT) is still in its infancy, and that ideas cooked up for a class project can have real potential in the business world.

The course – called MIS 680 - Competing in a Connected World and taught by **tech industry professional Gregg Garrett** – is an inter-departmental graduate class for engineering and business students that focuses on the prediction that consumer experiences and expectations will be formed through a new market of connected devices because of the evolving nature of the internet.

For a final project, students were asked to think up a solution to a problem using connectivity, form a business plan around a product and pitch the idea to a panel of experts in technology and business. Among the panelists were officials with Fortune 50 companies, local health companies, tech startups and even OUINC, Oakland's business accelerator.

Janson – along with classmates David Hill and Patrick Pollet – thought up a connected product called Bike Vitals that would use electronic sensors on bicycles to pick up various data to be viewed and controlled remotely through mobile or computer devices. The idea was to equip a bicycle rider with diagnostic information about his or her performance, as well as the performance of the bicycle.

The course is a requirement for masters' degrees in business, but Janson said he quickly became passionate about what he was working on because the class focuses on what is happening in the industry in real time.

"As the project moved forward, we certainly became more passionate about the project and our discussions were focused around making this a viable product," Janson said. "I'm sure at some point there will start to be textbooks published on the subject and this type of curriculum will be implemented in other schools, but the advantage for this class is that we were provided the information as it is happening from the guest speakers."

Amy Butler, executive director of OUINC, the university's business accelerator, was one of the panelists during the project presentations. Butler said the incubator has many resources available to assist entrepreneurs and students who may want to further develop their business ideas, such as various finance tools, news about periodic start-up competitions, connections to other companies and help assessing actual business plans.

Butler said she was receptive to all the presentations she heard in instructor Gregg Garrett's class, which included ideas for connected traffic control, a connected auto dealership via a smartphone application, a connected medical marketplace and Janson's connected bicycle.

"The bicycle team might want to check with me," added Butler. "We have a scooter manufacturer in the incubator that has created a new hybrid vehicle. They might be interested in looking at the technology and talking about adding that kind of opportunity to it."

Garrett said the course has evolved since it was introduced in 2013. "When first introduced, the course was offered exclusively to senior level engineering students; the co-listed MBA and Graduate ISE course now brings together a group of students with a much more diverse professional background allowing for rich conversation and interactions."

Garrett is also a TEDx Oakland University speaker and CEO and managing director of Corporate Growth Strategy Advisors (CGS Advisors, LLC), a strategy and innovation firm that readies clients for the connect world. With many contacts in the start-up industry, he said he tries to maximize real world professional discussions with approximately 70 percent of the lectures coming



*A group of students in Gregg Garrett's Competing in a Connected World graduate course present their connected idea to a panel of judges.*

“I hope that courses like this help students see the world that they’re truly competing in, because the world is kind of connecting around us every day,” said Garrett.

“If you don’t pay attention to it, these connections just show up and you don’t really quite understand why, or what’s really changing. But when you get the chance to step back like in a course like this, you may understand and appreciate really what’s going on.”

