

Members of the BevCool team show off their invention in the Entrepreneurial Ideation Lab.

MOTIVATED to INNOVATE

NEW CENTER FOR INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP HELPS STUDENTS MAKE THEIR IDEAS REAL

BY CATHY ENNS

NEED QUICK, INEXPENSIVE REPAIRS for a cracked iPhone screen? Want a bicycle brake that prevents head-over-handlebar crashes? Looking for a device that will cool your drinks in a matter of minutes?

The new Cal Poly Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship has you covered. These are just a few of the novel business and product ideas Cal Poly students are developing through the center.

Launched last fall, the center is Cal Poly's first comprehensive assembly of resources to encourage students from across the university to innovate, arm them with the tools they need to turn their ideas into companies, and connect them with alumni, community and on-campus resources.

The center is the brainchild of Lou Tornatzky and Jonathan York of the Orfalea College of Business. York, Cal Poly's first professor of entrepreneurship, believes the center will play a critical role in student success in the years to come.

"Today, college grads enter a world that's much different from the one their parents faced," he said. "Their success may depend on whether they can create their own opportunities."

On a campus where Learn by Doing is a way of life, Cal Poly students hone their problem-solving abilities, develop critical thinking skills and then unleash their creativity. The university has always nurtured entrepreneurial potential; indeed many grads have gone on to develop breakthrough products and establish their own companies.

Now, though, the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship offers a comprehensive program for entrepreneurial activities.

BRINGING VISIONARIES TOGETHER

The center's year-round activities include mentoring, internships with start-up companies, lectures by visiting entrepreneurs and alumni, and assistance in preparing for funding opportunities such as the "no strings attached" contest for Cal Poly students sponsored by Innovation Quest each spring.

Tornatzky and York also established a home for some of these activities – called the "Entrepreneurial Ideation Lab," a room filled with white boards, flexible seating and other equipment students need to brainstorm.

Events sponsored by the center are as spirited as they are educational. Several months during the academic year, the organization hosts Entrepreneurship Forums. Students, faculty, alumni and community members come to network, share ideas and learn about tools for success.

A key goal of the center is to bring visionaries together. Classes and activities introduce students, faculty and alumni from across the university to each other and to members of the business community. Young entrepreneurs learn to develop the contacts they need to take their ideas to market.

Diversity of skill sets and experiences is a key strength of the BevCool team, a group of six engineering and business students who joined forces to design a device that chills beverages in two minutes.

In just a few months, the team has created a product plan, built a prototype and earned seed money by winning the Elevator Pitch Competition. "We're taking advantage of all the center has to offer in bringing BevCool to market," said team leader Matt Slette, a Mechanical Engineering student.

To read more about the center, visit www.calpolyentrepreneurship.com.

