

Nursing Student Shares Innovation Fellowship Program Experience

As application time for UConn's Technology Incubation Program (TIP) Fellowship draws near, a former TIP Fellow takes a step back to ruminate on his experience.

School of Nursing student and 2017 TIP Summer Fellow Joey Fetta '18 said he chose the TIP Program because it allowed him to draw upon his undergraduate coursework while opening up new possibilities beyond the classroom.

"It was an opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and learn something new and apply my prior lab experience to a completely different field," he said.

He also said the innovation environment was "challenging at first," but that he was quickly able to adapt to how his ideas and thought processes would fit in with the company he was paired with.

"Nursing is a profession with virtually limitless opportunity and this program is an example of that," Fetta said. "Nurses bring with them valuable perspectives and critical thinking skills that can be applied to any situation; in my case, the practical application of topical moisturizing creams as a potential drug delivery system."

Fetta's fellowship was with the Farmington-based ReinEsse LLC, a company developing products and services to solve human skin problems.

Fetta also said the TIP program is an "incredible" opportunity for all students because of how it teaches students about developing and marketing the practical applications of their knowledge through hands-on mentoring from startup entrepreneurs.

"The program has a lot of built in opportunities to learn about innovation and how you market your ideas and transform them into a product," he said. "It also showcases many local success stories and hard-working entrepreneurs."

Dr. Caroline Dealy, associate professor at UConn Health and director of the TIP Fellowship Program, said her goal in founding the program in 2012 was to benefit UConn students by broadening their opportunities for hands-on research, and to benefit the startups in UConn's technology incubator by supplying fresh student talent.

Though the program began with a focus in bioscience, eight areas have been added since through the support of UConn's research infrastructure and its deans' efforts, including engineering, pharmacy, medicine, liberal arts and nursing, the program's newest partner.

Dealy said the TIP program can benefit students in numerous ways. Students are paired with startups that host and mentor them on their research projects, either for a summer, or during the entire academic year.

"As TIP Fellows, UConn students get to do research with one of 36 startup companies. The startups are located on campus, and they are developing innovative new technologies in a wide range of areas like medical devices, drugs, diagnostics, materials engineering, manufacturing, genomics, computing and so much more," Dealy said. "Students experience what it's like to work in the fast-paced world of a tech startup, while getting real-world training in cutting edge technology. They also participate in weekly seminars and workshops on innovation and entrepreneurship, and present their work at the program's Research Symposium."

Speaking to the program's specific niche for nurses, Dealy said nursing students' participation is critical in learning how to translate new biomedical discoveries into marketable healthcare products to meet unmet needs in patient care.

"The hands-on research and formal innovation training that the Nursing students receive as TIP Fellows helps prepare them to be tomorrow's clinical problem-solvers," she said. "Nurses are after all the front line of clinical healthcare providers."

TIP Fellows are also well-prepared for the working world or academic world, armed with their summer or year-long experiences, Dealy said.

"Former TIP fellows have gone on to jobs in Connecticut's pharmaceutical and engineering industries, while others have matriculated into UConn's graduate programs, or its schools of medicine and dental medicine," she said. "I like to think that their experience as a TIP Fellow helped these UConn students on their career paths as they contribute to Connecticut's future technology and health care sectors."

As a testament to that, Fetta said he credits the TIP Program with influencing his decision to pursue a PhD in neuroscience after graduating this spring.

"While my TIP experience did not focus on neuroscience, it did have a big influence in my decision to continue to work in the realm of research and development. I love critical thinking and problem solving. This

experience truly showcased the transition of scientific discovery from theoretical to applicable to medical practice.”

Essentially, Fetta said the TIP program is crucial not just to students’ own professional futures, but to the future of healthcare innovation.

“Nursing, now more than ever, needs innovators in the profession and many hospitals are in search of candidates with innovation experience,” he said. “This program opened my eyes to the opportunities for entrepreneurship in nursing and at UConn.”

Established in 2004 to accelerate the growth of technology-based startups with a strong connection to the University of Connecticut, TIP has supported approximately 100 startup companies. These companies have raised more than \$164.6 million in debt and equity, \$62.3 million in grant funding, and more than \$50.7 million in revenue while in the program. At the end of 2017, TIP companies employed 91 full-time and 70 part-time employees.

For more information on how to apply to be a UConn Technology Incubation Program Fellow, visit <https://innovation.uconn.edu/resource/45/tip-interns%2F-fellowship-program>.



Joey Fetta '18 presents at the summer 2017 TIP Research Symposium.