

## SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## Commerce beyond the profit motive

Students are increasingly looking to add community involvement to their studies

VIRGINIA GALT

During a study tour of Japan last spring, McGill University MBA student Ba Sein and his classmates made the usual rounds of corporate boardrooms, factories and lecture halls. Then they went off the traditional business school grid – to perform volunteer work at the Second Harvest food bank in Tokyo.

“It was such a stark contrast from the image of glitz and glamour of Tokyo and a wealthy industrialized Japan we had been exposed to until that point,” Mr. Sein says.

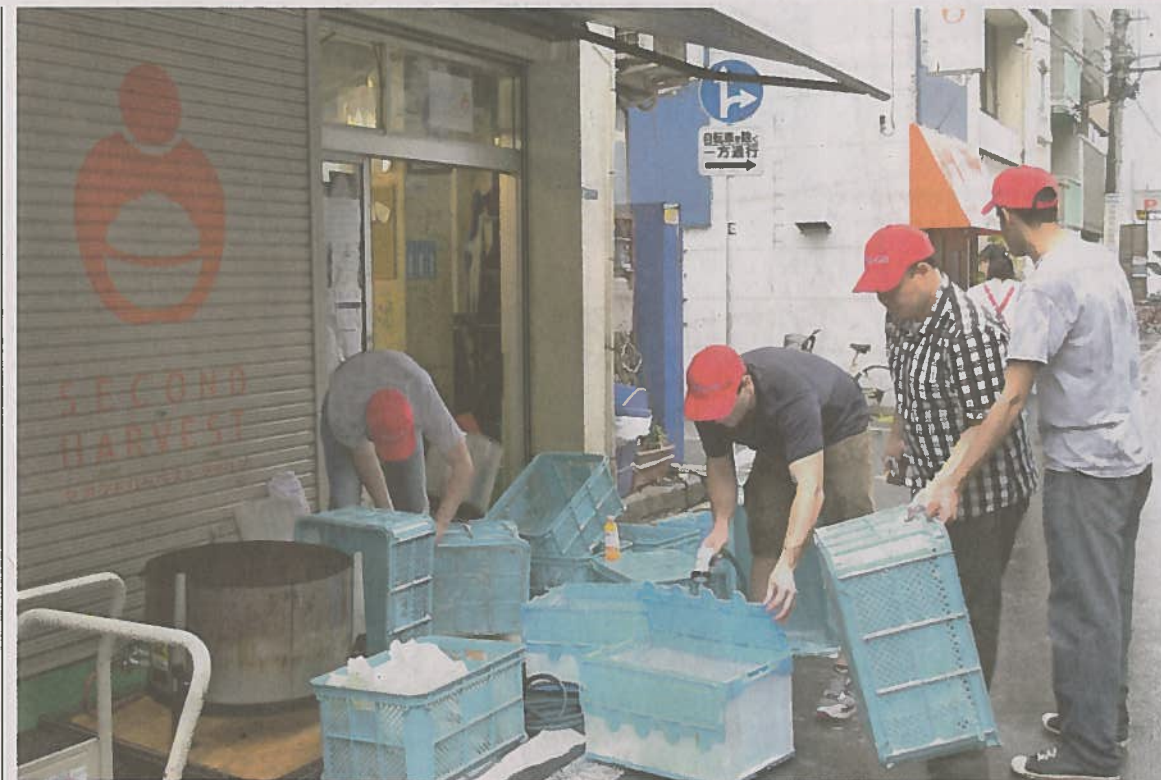
The experience made a profound impression on Mr. Sein. He was “somewhat shocked” to learn that one in six people in Japan lives in poverty, he says, but was inspired by the business model developed by the national food bank to reduce food waste, collect surplus supplies and deliver them to those in need.

“For business students, tackling a societal challenge through sound business practices, community involvement and volunteerism is very interesting and an excellent learning opportunity,” says Mr. Sein, who hopes to contribute to the social and economic development of his native Myanmar after he graduates next May.

The primary purpose of the mandatory international study tour is to acquaint MBA students at McGill’s Desautels Faculty of Management with business practices in other parts of the world. The faculty recently added “a social mission component” to the annual expedition, at the request of students – a reflection of the growing interest in social enterprise at Canadian business schools.

At McGill and elsewhere, students interested in more than the profit motive are taking courses on social entrepreneurship, internships at non-profits and volunteer activities such as the Second Harvest event.

In British Columbia, for instance, University of Victoria commerce grads Rebecca Koch



MBA students from Montreal’s McGill University including Ba Sein, second from right, volunteer at the Second Harvest food bank in Tokyo as part of a study tour of the country last spring. PHILIP D’ANGELO

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**Matt Murphy**  
University of Victoria

and Kim Cope received help from the Innovation Centre for Entrepreneurs, a startup incubator at the Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, to form a “community contribution company.”

Through an initiative called early entrepreneurs, they teach young children how to raise money for social causes. Building on a concept piloted by real estate entrepreneur Taylor Conroy, Ms. Koch and Ms. Cope go into elementary schools, offering

\$100 in seed money and guiding kids through the development of business ventures aimed at bringing in at least \$500. Proceeds go to the Free the Children charity. The first 18 classrooms to participate raised \$18,000 – enough for Free the Children to build two schools in Kenya, Ms. Koch says.

Ms. Koch and Ms. Cope hope to expand their operation. “Both Kim and I have worked in different office jobs ... and we both wanted to try something new, something that has the intrinsic rewards that a social venture has,” Ms. Koch says.

York University’s Schulich School of Business in Toronto has long been a magnet for students interested in human rights, health care, environmental protection, education, culture and other not-for-profit fields. Schulich bills its social sector management program as one of the few MBA degrees in the world “with a specialization in the social sector and the management of social-

sector organizations.”

Business professor Cameron Graham, acting director of the program, says there is a growing need for graduates with such expertise as non-profits look for more sustainable methods of financing, beyond charitable donations and hard-to-obtain government funding.

“There has to be a lot of creativity brought to bear on the problem of how do you do something that’s worthwhile, yet attract sustainable funding for it,” Prof. Graham says.

At the University of Victoria, all commerce students are introduced to the concept of social entrepreneurship by their third year of undergraduate studies, says Matt Murphy, a professor who has developed a new fourth-year course on social entrepreneurship. The course includes readings on the emergence of “social intrapreneurs,” people who act as socially responsible change agents within corpora-

tions. “I try to emphasize in this course that social entrepreneurship doesn’t belong to any one sector, and it’s not just something that is done in startups. It can happen anywhere,” Prof. Murphy says.

In Montreal, a collaboration between McGill’s business faculty and two management consulting firms – McKinsey and Co. and Oliver Wyman – has been critical to the success of McGill’s not-for-profit consulting program, which received 90 student applications for 12 spots this fall, says business professor Omar Toulan, a co-founder of the program.

Three teams of four students – a combination of undergrads and MBA students – have access to the consultants’ expertise as they work with local non-profit organizations on proposals to improve some aspect of their operations, while the professors provide academic oversight.

“We encourage them to focus on issues where they can bring some knowledge that the NGO [non-governmental organization] doesn’t have – so a management issue, an expansion issue, a costing issue. We want them to go through the process of finding the client, developing a project, performing the project, presenting it – really the full cycle of consulting – while, at the same time learning what it’s like to help an NGO,” Prof. Toulan says.

“It is very different to consult for an NGO which, let’s say, is ideologically driven.”

Recently a team of McGill students worked with a meal program in Montreal to develop a sideline business – selling frozen meals to students – and using the profits to support the core objective of providing fresh food to clients who could not provide for themselves.

“The students did the whole scenario and, yes, did trials of freezing food and everything,” Prof. Toulan says. Their recommendations were implemented this fall.

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