



For Immediate Release

Woodbury University Professors Lead Unique Workshops Designed To Help Armenian Communities Turn Problems into Opportunities

Cooperative Effort Between Impact Hubs in Los Angeles and Yerevan Provides Future Armenian Social Entrepreneurs with Tools to Identify Issues, Develop Solutions



LOS ANGELES (May 16, 2016) – Sometimes the everyday challenges faced by the citizens of post-Soviet Armenia are so numerous and complex that it is difficult to know which to tackle first.

Now, however, a handful of future leaders from the capital city of Yerevan and smaller communities in three other regions of Armenia have a basic methodology they can use to identify issues, forecast potential barriers to success, develop relationships with key constituents and create a roadmap to guide implementation of new social projects or businesses thanks to a series of workshops developed and led by a two professors from the [College of Liberal Arts](#) at [Woodbury University](#).

Interdisciplinary Studies (INDS) visiting Professor Jason Keller and adjunct Professor Ani Okkasian, a Woodbury alumna and director of programs at Impact Hub Los Angeles,

partnered with Impact Hub Yerevan to develop and present what was billed as the “30-Day Challenge.” The program was designed to provide a framework young Armenians can use to research and resolve important questions and develop businesses or other solutions to real-world problems. At the end of 30 days, participants who made the most progress had the opportunity to present their ideas and research to investors (watch “Impact Hub Yerevan - 30 Day Challenge” on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/154573839>).

Among the problems discussed by participants were the challenge of opening a pharmacy, ways to discourage young women from marrying as a way to escape life in Armenian orphanages, and boredom among Armenian youth.

“Roughly 80 percent of Armenians between the ages of 16 and 30 are unemployed,” Keller explained. “They are unemployed because government and business are largely controlled by a few individuals or organizations that tend to discourage entrepreneurial activity.”

How might the dual problem of teen boredom and unemployment be resolved? “What about volunteerism?” someone suggested.

“What it came down to was that parents simply could not comprehend the notion of volunteering,” Okkasian said. “They thought it was a waste of time for their children to, essentially, work for free. This was clearly a reaction to Soviet-era norms. But it presented a problem for the country’s youth, who are trying to use volunteerism as the first step toward entrepreneurial ventures. So, we helped the young participants think about how we can re-frame volunteering. By the time we left, they were clear about what they were going to focus on, what shape their idea would take, where the ‘holes’ were, and who they needed to talk to next.”

The program and approach are founded on curriculum developed and taught at Woodbury, where the university’s core values – Community, Integrity, Professionalism, Aspiration and Agility – intersect with its four educational pillars – Transdisciplinarity, Design Thinking, Entrepreneurship and Civic Engagement.

[Impact Hubs](#) are founded on the principle that “... a better world is created through the combined accomplishments of compassionate, creative and committed individuals focused on a common purpose.” From Amsterdam to Johannesburg, Singapore to Los Angeles, Impact Hub has evolved into a rapidly expanding, diverse global network of over 11,000 members in 82+ locations. Part innovation lab, part business incubator, part community center, Impact Hubs offer members a unique ecosystem of resources, inspiration and collaboration to grow impact.

About Woodbury University

Founded in 1884, Woodbury University is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Southern California. With campuses in Burbank/Los Angeles and San Diego, the university offers bachelor's degrees from the School of Architecture, School of Business, School of Media, Culture & Design, and College of Liberal Arts, along with a Master of Business Administration, Master of Arts in Media for Social Justice, Master of Architecture (MArch), Master of Interior Architecture (MIA),

Master of Science in Architecture (MSArch), Master of Leadership, and Master of Arts in Media for Social Justice. The San Diego campus offers Bachelor of Architecture and Master of Architecture, Master of Interior Architecture and Master of Landscape Architecture degrees, as well as an MSArch degree with a concentration in Real Estate Development and Landscape + Urbanism. Woodbury ranks 15th among the nation's "25 Colleges That Add the Most Value," according to *Money Magazine* and is a 2014-2015 College of Distinction. Visit woodbury.edu for more information.

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