The Enterprising Dissertation:
Why? What? How?

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Why me?

- **University of Bristol:**
  - Associate Professor in the CfIE
  - Ex-Student Enterprise Manager (DREI)
  - Ex-Skills Development Officer (Careers)
  - Ex-Student Development Coordinator (Students' Union)

- **ARC Accelerator** (supporting Arts & Social Science academics into impact):
  - Lead Educator (ARC *Develop* and ARC *Launch*)
- **Bath Spa University**
  - Head of Enterprise and Employability

Defining Enterprise

"The *generation* and *application of ideas*, which are set within practical situations during a project or undertaking. This is a generic concept that can be applied across all areas of education and professional life.

It combines *creativity, originality, initiative, idea generation, design thinking, adaptability* and *reflexivity* with *problem identification, problem solving, innovation, expression, communication* and *practical action*."

Why Enterprise?

I want to see more graduates develop the creative confidence to generate more and better ideas and to act on them to create value for themselves and others.

- Enterprise education is a means to develop that.
- How do we get more students to engage in it?

*almost every.

- But there's no more room in the curriculum!
- But we can embed it in the process of teaching other things…
- Q: what does every* student do?
- A: a dissertation!

Why you and your students?

- An enterprising dissertation might create value for your students by:
  - Engaging them with their discipline in a new way
  - Helping them articulate the value of their discipline to outsiders
  - Developing new skills and confidence
  - Uncovering new opportunities
- An enterprising dissertation might create value for you and the University by:
  - Enhancing graduate outcomes (and how they 'use' their degree learning)
  - Enabling more research impacts
  - Enhancing civic and business engagement

Why are we expecting them to create impacts?

- Not creating. Just <u>planning for</u> impact.
  - Thinking through how to create impact
  - Trying to understand audiences and contexts
  - Anticipating resistance and challenge
  - Practicing their articulation to new audiences

- They are learning how to get their ideas adopted by others to create value.

How has the Enterprising Dissertation model worked so far?

- In Computer Science since 20/21:
  - 12.5% of their M-level Dissertation (5CP of a 40CP unit)
  - 238 students (over 4 cohorts)
- In Modern Languages/International Business Management since 23/24:
  - 12.5% of their finalist dissertation (5CP of a 40CP unit)
  - 16 students
- Grade averages and distribution for the Innovation Case are similar to the dissertation assessments (same in SML, ~5% lower in CS)

How does teaching work?

- Typically, we offer ~6 in-person class sessions in TB2:
    - CS does this weekly from WK13 to WK18
    - SML does this fortnightly through TB2
- Supported by asynch materials (videos, tools, reading)
- Formative video-pitch about a third of the way through for feedback

How does assessment work?

- 4-page 'Innovation Case' document submission
- 4 sections required:
  - **Executive summary** (2/3 of a page, invitation to read on)
  - **Motivation** (what's the problem or opportunity, is it worth it?)
  - **Value Proposition** (what are you proposing, why will it work?)
  - **Plan** (how do propose to get from idea to reality, timeline?)
- 3 marking criteria:
  - Evidence & Analysis
  - Planning & Methodology
  - Presentation & Communication

How do you 'evidence' if an idea is any good?

Diagram 9: A new model for design in regulated industries

Feasible · Viable · Valuable · Allowable · Sustainable · Future Value
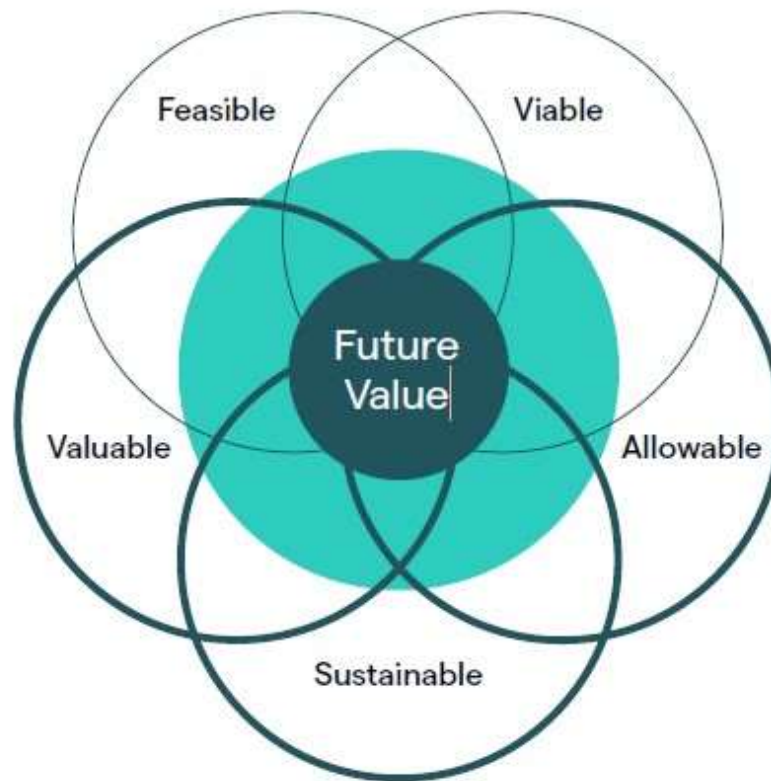
How: Formats make it all possible!

- **A Start-up Scoping Report** should be written for a commercial or social investor who might be interested in creating an economic or social impact from an idea central to or derived from your Dissertation Project.

- **An Academic Research Proposal** should be written for an academic gatekeeper such as a research funder who might wish to fund or champion the research extending or building on an idea central to or derived from your Dissertation Project.

- **A Policy Briefing White Paper** should be written for an appropriate policy-making unit, e.g., a governmental or professional body, who might act on it to create impact in an area central to or derived from your Dissertation Project.

How: Formats make it all possible!

- **A Curriculum Proposal** should be written for an educational authority or institution who might be interested in developing a new (part of an) educational programme informed by an idea central to or derived from your Dissertation Project.

- **A Symposium Proposal** should be written for a research institute committee or research conference organising committee which might be interested in funding a research symposium in an area central to or derived from your Dissertation Project.

- **An Internal Proposal** to resource a new project within an existing organisation should be written for an internal gatekeeper's consideration as if your Dissertation Project research had been conducted by that organisation.

- **(A Public Engagement Proposal)**

What do we teach?

Subject matter:

- **Proving the problem or opportunity is real and your idea is feasible**
  - (conducting secondary market and competitor research)
- **Developing a value proposition – who might care about your research outputs or research methods?**
  - (primary user research and testing)
- **Proposing a plan of realisation**
  - (modelling good innovation practice for the sector)

What else do we teach?

- Unless you can find an audience willing to reward you for an idea its unsustainable.

- To find that audience you need empathy for their objectives and context.

- An experimental mindset in which you test your hypotheses quickly and robustly is critical.

- Good ideas are cheap but well-executed good ideas are priceless.

What kinds of things do students propose?

- Policy proposals for enhancing cyber-security in the agricultural tech sector
- In-game chat moderation tools to reduce toxic behaviour online
- VR-based training app for Snooker
- Research proposal for the role of Chandelier Cells on cognitive function in schizophrenia
- Symposium for researchers in Interated Learning Models studying language evolution.

What kinds of things do students propose?

- A startup providing secure whistleblowing services for the German SME sector
- Sustainability Certification scheme for the Spanish real estate industry
- Adding a Sleep habits function to the Bristol Moves+ app
- Policy proposal for modernizing vocational education in Andalucia
- Policy proposal for extending paid leave for sufferers of severe endometriosis in France

What have we learned?

- Different students value different elements:
  - Employability – personal and professional skills gain
  - Research Career exploration
  - Discipline engagement and application
  - Doing something "purposeful"
- Students initially find it a little disorienting.
- They do need to see examples of work.
- But many have told us that they found it valuable in articulating the value of their degree, their skills, and their ideas.
- So far, CfIE staff have been required to support it – but we believe an impact-familiar academic from any discipline could teach this.

Thanks!
Any questions?

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