“Do I dare disturb the universe?”

T.S. Eliot’s words have been echoing in my head since I took over as the Director of the Jay Hurt Hub for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in late October 2020. Our universe had indeed been disturbed through a pandemic and monumental social movements that catalyzed a recapitulation of my personal and professional values. And then I saw a tweet from my predecessor Julie Goff ‘05 -- *in this minute there was time for decisions and revisions that a minute could reverse*. This tweet opened a window to potentially return to Davidson to combine so many things that I’ve loved for the past 21 years - building businesses, “doing the impossible,” and helping others “develop humane instincts and disciplined, creative minds for lives of leadership and service in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.” My family and I decided it was best to pack up, move across the country with our cliche COVID puppies to a college campus in the middle of a pandemic and begin our new chapter.

When we arrived, we were greeted by an incredible team at the Hurt Hub@Davidson serving the community in a completely different way, shifting the idea of a gathering space into a virtual environment and getting creative in the midst of new protocols. This period of re-evaluating everything gave us the opportunity to get to know our audiences at a much deeper level. We interviewed and surveyed over 200 Davidson students, faculty, alumni, Hurt Hub coworkers and community leaders from November 2020 to January 2021 to determine their perceptions of entrepreneurship and innovation and how we could better support their curiosity and growth. Moreover, we have embraced an ethos that empathy is currency and every engagement with our community is an opportunity to listen and to learn how we can continuously improve. Out of these conversations, we redefined our vision, values and mission.
From there, we focused on resetting the business foundations for this startup that we are running. We established our Objectives:

- Make innovation and entrepreneurship accessible to all.
- Develop and consistently deliver exceptional experiences every day for our Hurt Hub Community.
- Make the Hurt Hub an integrated and integral part of the Davidson College Experience.

To assess our success against these objectives, we are measuring outcomes like the annual growth rate of students working gigs through our Gig-Hub program, internships and full-time roles at startups and small businesses; students, alumni and community members starting new ventures; and, the monthly expansion of our coworking operations and revenue. Some of these outcomes are much longer-term and do not appear in this year’s report, but will in the future.

We strive to achieve our vision every day through experiential learning, a robust mentorship program, educational programming, inclusive co-working, and access to capital. In the following report, we’ll cover highlights from each of those areas, measures of success and plans for the future. Amongst many learnings from the past year, we recognize that “work” will never be the same. We thank you for your continued support as we help prepare students, alumni and our community to be leaders in innovation and entrepreneurship to solve the world’s most pressing challenges.

Best,

Liz
VISION
We facilitate access and exposure to innovation and entrepreneurship for all.
VALUES

Freedom, Integrity, Inclusion
MISSION
The Hurt Hub@Davidson convenes innovators and entrepreneurs in the Davidson college community and the Lake Norman region to catalyze innovative solutions to critical problems through educational programming, experiential learning in a safe environment, an inclusive co-working space, uncompromising ethics, a robust mentor network, and access to startup capital.
Liz Brigham '04
Director

Kevin Cook '09
Student Engagement Coordinator, Major Gifts

Amy Gascon
Educational Programming Manager

Dr. Laurie Heyer
Faculty Director

Zee Holmes
Community Manager

Wendy Johnson
Facilities Custodian

Erin Moreau
Operations Manager

Chris Langford
VC in Residence

Kelly Weaver
Gig-Hub Program Coordinator
Student Team Members

Community Ambassadors:
- Juan Diaz Mercado '22
- Drew Eastland '21
- Lucy Fasano '21
- Ben Laumankis '24
- Anna Montgomery '22
- Einstein Nhara '24
- Isabel Walter '24
- Abby Woodward '24

Marketing:
- Jessie Epstein '21
- Veronica De La Mora '21
- Garrett Ryan '24
- Gabby Thomas '21
- Jared Herr '22

Business Intelligence:
- Hope Carpenter '22
- Joey Ghirardelli '23
- Owen Bezick '21
BY THE NUMBERS

730
Students that visited Aug 2020 - May 2021

135
Coworkers

235
Student Gig-Hub Consultants

240+
Community Visitors

2,700+
Student Gig-Hub Consultant hours billed with startups, small businesses, non-profits and Davidson College

21
Student & Young Alumni new ventures launched / scaled with Hurt Hub support

50
Students took entrepreneurship and innovation-focused classes, workshops, and case competitions

60+
Davidson Alumni mentors, advisory board members, Hub & Spoke Storytellers

1,000+
Hours of Mentorship through Launch LKN, Davidson Alumni engagement & Hurt Hub Office Hours

$35,200
Startup Capital distributed to support new student & alumni venture creation
Our Gig-Hub program has proven to be a cornerstone in connecting talented Davidson students and commercial ventures, especially startups and small businesses, for short-term internships. This year, we had about 200 students in the Gig-Hub consultant pool that have completed training with us. Of these, 64 Gig-Hub consultants worked a total of 138 gigs (2,700+ hours of work) supporting businesses across many industries and geographies. While gigs are typically projects lasting 30-40 hours spread over many weeks, we have seen many student consultants continue with their clients after delivering consistently great work. For example, Marion Comi-Morog ’21, English major, worked over 450 hours from the spring of 2020 through May 2021 for TechChange, a Washington D.C.-based digital training and events firm, and landed a full-time position with them that she will begin in the fall.
Several other students point to their experiences with Gig-Hub as a way to prepare them for summer internships and full-time employment. In partnership with the Center for Career Development, we are now requiring Gig-Hub consultants to meet with a career advisor at the conclusion of their gigs to ensure they can articulate the skills they developed for their resumes and interview stories. This also helps them build a portfolio for subsequent gigs.

"Becoming a Gig-Hub consultant has been an invaluable experience. The program has allowed me to hone my skills and grow confidence. Gig Hub is truly a mutually beneficial program. Students get real world experience, meanwhile small companies and startups get quality work for a reduced price. I continue to take on gigs because I love the balance of autonomy and collaboration that Gig-Hub provides."
- Brie Burrell, Davidson ’23

“The beauty of it [Gig-Hub] for the students is that they get to own every step of building something, with our guidance. From a business owner perspective, I have the ability to fulfill interesting, unique needs without expectations around how many hours it might take,” Hotze said. “We just start working, and we keep going until it’s finished.”

-Katie Hotze, CEO & Founder Grocery Shopii, Gig-Hub client and Hurt Hub@Davidson Coworker
This March, through generous support from Whitney A. White ‘08, Belk Scholar and founder of Afara Global & creator of Take Back Your Time, we offered women and minority-owned businesses over 300 hours of pro bono Gig-Hub consultant time. Three weeks after launching, we had over 10 new gigs, 9 new clients and 6 students working these gigs. For 4 students, this was their first gig. Students began working these gigs in April and are expected to continue throughout the summer.

“Innovation has the power to be a game changer for individuals and for businesses. When students have hands-on experiences, they can really move the needle for businesses that need it right now, in this moment in our economy .... I’m overjoyed that I can help maximize the potential of Davidson students while also maximizing more and more businesses that are in need of our support during a very challenging time.”

- Whitney A. White ’08, Belk Scholar, Founder Afara Global and Creator of Take Back Your Time
In an effort to connect academic study to entrepreneurial learning, this year we also piloted a new for-credit class called “Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship: Innovation in the For-Profit Sector.” In this class, 25 students did internships with for-profit firms for 8-10 hours a week, read materials focused on topics like design thinking and Lean Startup Methodology, business ethics and organizational culture, and engaged in reflective roundtable discussions. Max Vierling ’21 interned with a local Davidson startup, Boomerang Water, working to develop a “closed-loop” bottled water system to eliminate single-use plastics from our facility. Max partnered with the Hurt Hub leadership team to assess our shared goals and develop a marketing and operations plan to support the semester-long pilot. As a result of Max’s great work, he’s secured an offer to return to Boomerang Water full-time at the end of the summer.

"After nearly three years of research and classes centered around conservation and the environment at Davidson College, I was seeking a different perspective on work with the environment. The experiential learning course at Davidson College offered me the opportunity to get course credit for an internship with a sustainability startup. With help from the Hurt Hub and career center I received an interview with Boomerang Water. Boomerang allowed me independence with the project, and I was able to learn and apply new skills such as marketing, logistics, and service. My role with the feasibility project, work on other projects, and fit with company culture led to a job offer.” - Max Vierling ’21
COVID may have interrupted major in-person events like the Davidson Venture Fund, but we pivoted and took the opportunity to innovate. The Davidson Venture Fund was established in 2014 through generous support from Marian Nisbet and Chip Nisbet ’86 and has run each year since with the exception of spring 2020. Fortunately, COVID did not affect the number of strong applications to the competition this year. We had 12 teams apply, which was consistent with previous years, and selected 5 finalists. Finalists’ ventures ranged from sustainable jewelry and eco-friendly hair care products to financial wellness apps, developer operations software, and planning software and consulting for strategic building projects. With the elimination of geographic boundaries, we recruited 18 mentors, 15 Davidson alumni and 3 Hurt Hub@Davidson coworkers, from across the globe.

“As a Davidson Venture Fund Mentor, I’m inspired by the community of aspiring business leaders and alumni the Hurt Hub has brought together. Mentoring a Davidson student means learning as much as giving. The Hurt Hub at Davidson is propelling aspiring business leaders from the Davidson community with the tools it took me years at top companies to accumulate.” - Grant Bleecher ’02, Product & Marketing Executive
Learning from the best entrepreneurial incubators like TechStars, we introduced a new weekly business plan-focused curriculum led entirely by Davidson alumni mentors and an online viewing and voting platform for the finalists’ pitches. Creating a virtual way to engage with our finalist teams yielded over 3,000 people coming to our website expanding our reach like never before. We also held a virtual awards ceremony, including a provocative panel discussion and live Q&A with our finalists and judges. The judges awarded a $25,000 equity investment to **Orion Solutions Engineering**, led by Owen Bezick ’21 and Hurt Hub coworker Nicolas Bracco, which provides software and consulting services to hospital systems for capital improvement projects.

"The primary reason we joined the [Davidson] Venture Fund was to learn. It’s the perfect way to put together the materials needed to secure larger investments. From starting with Gig-Hub to now sharing a co-working space with Nico, it’s really a full-circle experience. I hope more students will choose to get involved with everything the Hurt Hub@Davidson has to offer" - Owen Bezick ’21.

This year, we also rebranded and relaunched the Try It fund, formerly known as the Failure Fund. The Try It fund awards up to $1,000 to Davidson students looking to build a prototype or test their ideas. We had 7 students win grants this year with over $5,200 distributed, with ideas that ranged from jewelry and apparel manufacturing to a social networking club and new app development.

“[With the Try It Fund], I piloted a collegiate social club outside athletics and eating houses and fraternities with mentoring, resource tips, and student to student connections. My idea was important because having fun, meeting new people and being around people who fuel you makes everything else possible. . . . I connected with a social club in New York City who has taken the idea of a social club and turned it into a thriving network, community, and business and used it for reference and inspiration. . . . My idea has potential to turn into a business because my expertise comes in the form of having navigated Davidson for four years so I am attuned to the wealth of resources, places, and people. Therefore, I can be a human version of Netflix’s algorithm that recommends what you might like to watch based on what you’ve watched in the past” - Julia Balick ’21
In partnership with Launch LKN, a community of mentors, entrepreneurs and community leaders dedicated to sharing knowledge and motivating growth of the startup scene in Lake Norman, this year we have offered mentorship, albeit virtually, to 7 Davidson student and alumni ventures to develop, launch and scale their ventures.

One such venture is FinSiteful, a financial wellness app for students, led by Jack Clary, Axel Fries and Tea Rankin-Williams, all '20. Working in partnership with their mentors, the FinSiteful team refined their go-to-market strategy, product development and initial customer focus.

At FinSiteful, we want to reimagine student finances. We envision a generation of young adults making confident, informed financial decisions.

Jack Clary  
CEO

Téa Rankin-Williams  
Sales & Marketing

Axel Fries  
Operations
In the spring of 2021, the FinSiteful team applied, became finalists and won the inaugural crowd-favorite award ($5,000 grant) at this year’s Davidson Venture Fund competition with generous support from Marian Nisbet and Chip Nisbet ’86. Throughout the competition, they worked closely with Davidson alumni mentors Dax Cross ’98, CEO & Co-Founder of Revenue Analytics, Mbye Njie ‘04, CEO & Founder of Legal Equalizer, and Jim Patterson ‘88, CEO of Patterson Advisory Group, to develop and perfect their pitch. Because they had a much more public platform through the Davidson Venture Fund, the team secured both investor and advisor interest from the Philippines to seasoned venture capitalists in Atlanta.

“I had a sales call and I texted Mbye Njie ’04, one of our advisers, to see if he had time to talk through it with me. We ended up talking for 45 minutes in advance of the call, and he said I could text him during my call if I needed quick guidance on anything. It’s amazing that he would do that, and it worked; we got the client.” - Axel Fries ’20, Co-Founder, FinSiteful
Despite COVID forcing many to work from home, we had strong supporters of the Hurt Hub who continued to come in daily, wearing masks and adhering to new protocols. As we turned the new year in 2021, we saw attendance and membership steadily increase as the cravings for community and the desire to get out of the house compounded. We now have over 135 members and a growing wait list for our office space. Our first-ever coworker and student joint venture, Orion Solutions Engineering (also the winners of this year’s Davidson Venture Fund as aforementioned), emerged from the pandemic and established its headquarters here. Similarly, here’s a sample of companies and organizations, many of whom are also Gig-Hub clients and mentors, that call the Hurt Hub home:

- Everblue
- Quoin
- Launch LKN
- Orion Solutions Engineering (Co-Founded by Owen Bezick ’21)
- Purple Dot (Co-Founded by Madeline Parra ‘09)
- Grocery Shopii
- Investorcom
- Elite Roofing & Construction
- Satellogic
- Enformia
- Moves
- Sweet Relish
- ProctorFree
- Opticrib

"I love being a thread of the tapestry that makes up a beautifully diverse workspace. The co-working concept has given me the opportunity to make new acquaintances and discover some of the most interesting and innovative businesses."
- Cassandra Walsingham, Marketing Director, Moves
This Spring, we launched Hub & Spoke, a new storytelling platform which aims to build a strong community of entrepreneurs and innovators by sharing the stories of Davidson alumni who have used their liberal arts education as a foundation for their success in creating their own businesses, leading teams and driving innovation to solve the world’s most pressing challenges. Through one-hour Zoom webinars with 10 storytellers across 9 episodes, we reached just over 110 unique attendees (many attended multiple episodes). Four Davidson students, Gabby Thomas ‘21, Jared Herr ‘22, Jessie Epstein ‘21, Veronica De La Mora ‘21, were involved in all aspects of production, marketing and video editing. We interviewed (top right to bottom left):

- Mbye Njie ’04, CEO & Founder, Legal Equalizer
- Dean Williams ’11 and George Ramsay ‘13, Co-Founders Bold Music
- Mike Guggenheimer ’96, President & CEO Blumenthal Holdings LLC
- Jill Sypult Marcus ’86, Founder Something Classic & Mother Earth Group
- Caroline Lewis ’06, Partner Rogue Venture Partners
- Amee Parbhoo ’06, Managing Director Accion Venture Lab
- Cameron Hardesty ’07, Founder & CEO Poppy Flowers
- Megan Falvey ’14, Product Marketing Manager LinkedIn
- Will Naso ’18, Co-Founder & CEO Biteline
The pilot attracted a much wider audience than we had initially anticipated including Davidson alumni, faculty, staff and our broader community. While we did not hit our goal of 50% of attendees as students (only about 15% were), we have launched a new YouTube channel and have been experimenting with reaching more students in an on-demand manner. The stories we captured are evergreen and can be edited for many different formats allowing us to reach more Davidson students, alumni and our community in the future. We’ve also partnered with the College Communications team to distribute episode clips on Academic major pages, such as the English Department. Overall, the feedback we received was extremely positive. Just like any great innovator, we are testing, learning and iterating!

“Every time I listen to the [Hub & Spoke] episodes, they truly remind me of why coming to Davidson was the best decision of my life. . . . The diversity of stories and ideas made it really engaging for me as someone who is really undecided and interested in a lot of different things. I think the series also really personified what being a leader really meant. Growing up, I thought of CEO’s and entrepreneurs as distant and the conversational tone of the series really connected me and gave me confidence to reach out to all of them.” - Sohan Gade ’23
The Lean Startup class with Rebecca Weeks Watson, Founder of The Reveal Co., had previously been offered in person at the Hurt Hub, but with all things COVID, we had to shift to an online format. Lean Startup Methodology, popularized with Eric Reis’ best selling book, has driven an entrepreneurial mindset movement over the past 10 years and we believe it’s foundational to our educational offerings. With nearly 20 students, including Hurt Hub coworkers, local entrepreneurs and Davidson students, Rebecca powered on leading 7, 90-minute classes as well as offered one-on-one consulting sessions. Her students shared that some of the most valuable lessons were: “being vulnerable, prioritizing the customer, and minimalism”, “the concept of treating a business like a hypothesis and testing small-scale MVPs (minimum viable products) to prove market fit” and “the balance of the theory with guest speakers who illustrated the practical aspects of the concepts.”

With the newest member of our team, Amy Gascon, Educational Programming Manager for the Hurt Hub, we look forward to the expansion of what we can offer both in person and online in the next fiscal year.
STUDENT-LED BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE, MARKETING & COMMUNITY TEAMS

At the Hurt Hub, we are employing Davidson students in nearly every aspect of our operations to provide them the opportunity to hone their business skills while co-creating this community with us.

In the spring, we launched our business intelligence team - Joey Ghirardelli ‘23, Hope Carpenter ‘22, Abby Santiago ‘22, and Owen Bezick ‘21 - under the direction of Dr. Laurie Heyer, our Faculty Director, and with the intention to better understand how our audiences were engaging with our offerings. We modeled this team after industry best practices and wrote job responsibilities to match those of a business analyst to ensure they could translate their work at the Hurt Hub into what many recruiters are looking for.

Students have written software development requirements, consolidated and analyzed data from disparate sources, and have built a prototype data dashboard using R Shiny eliminating manual work and highlighting areas of improvement for us. This work is critical to making strong data-driven decisions. We look forward to iterating on this prototype and employing more students as we grow.

I want to enter a career in technology after graduation, and the Gig-Hub program has helped me to develop the tech skills I need and wouldn’t have been exposed to as an English major. I am fortunate to be part of a long-term gig with the Hurt Hub as part of the Hurt Hub’s Business Intelligence Team, where I have helped implement a CRM for the Hurt Hub, developed sophisticated analyses for the data we have collected, and practiced my technical writing skills by writing documentation for the project. I am excited to use and expand upon my experience working with CRMs as I intern for a higher education consulting firm this summer.

- Hope Carpenter ‘22
We also restructured and expanded the “Hub Herd” Marketing team to support the relaunch of our website, social media channels, and Hub & Spoke storytelling platform. Amidst all of the other changes this year, we endeavored to completely redesign our website to provide a better guest experience and to adhere to global standards for accessibility. Hope Carpenter ’22 worked in partnership with Erin Moreau and our design partner, Sweb Development (led by Davidson alum Taylor Ansley ’07) to reimagine our digital home, building off of our new positioning and messaging foundations. We launched in late April and will continue to improve the site over this calendar year. We also developed an official editorial calendar for our social media channels, implemented a weekly analytics review and launched a LinkedIn page.
One of our strategic objectives is to provide exceptional experiences in the Hurt Hub every day. Our student community ambassadors are responsible for greeting all guests, preparing our space for any meetings and ensuring that everyone adheres to our COVID protocols. As we look to next fall, we intend to expand our student ambassador program to have more of a presence and partnerships with student leadership teams on campus. We have seen most of our growth from students come from those bringing their friends to events or suggesting they take a class. Word of mouth is powerful and we will focus on as much outreach as possible to realize our vision of providing access and exposure to entrepreneurship and innovation for all.
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