How can we determine what regions are best suited to support social enterprise initiatives and can social enterprise be used as a driver of regional economic development?

Faculty Advisor: Tim Zak

Project Description
Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise are relatively new concepts that are being employed around the world. These concepts work across the nonprofit/NGO, public, and private sectors to bring new ideas and concepts to solving public interest problems. No longer is solving social problems under the realm of just the government or nonprofits —cooperation and new partnerships involving all three sectors is increasingly the norm to address ever more vexing social problems. As a result, we are seeing a rise in the creation of hybrid organizations -- nonprofits running profitable ventures like bakeries, consulting arms and music production studios. For profit companies are being established with social missions at the core of their organizations like Google, Patagonia and Tom’s of Maine. Strategic partnerships are being established between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, like the one between Timberland and City Year. And many of these new organizations are either being funded by government or acting as incubators for new public sector programs.

With the rise of these new kinds of organizations, can social enterprise be used as a driver of not just social change but also economic development?

During the course of the project, students will study the work being done in the Pittsburgh region around social enterprise and social entrepreneurship and compare it to activity in other regions such as Silicon Valley, Seattle, the UK. The students will then work to define measures of social innovation activities and develop a tool that will help regions to determine what kinds of investments and indigenous assets are needed to promote this activity in their regions. The students will also employ the leading practices and core principles of urban planning and regional economic and community development to determine what kinds of impact this emerging activity can have on economic development.

Project Committee Ideas
- Regional Economic Development: Jerry Paytas, Don Smith or Ashish Arora
- Allegheny Conference - Katie Claber
- Someone from Silicon Valley or the UK: Heinz alum Colin Lacon, President, Grantmakers of Northern California or contact from UK Small Business Administration.