Lepage Center launches Innovators-in-Residence program

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Deborah Elam, former chief diversity officer at General Electric Co., is one of 12 distinguished business executives who mentor student entrepreneurs as part of the Lepage Center's new Innovators-in-Residence program.

The Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Tulane University has launched a new Innovators-in-Residence program to connect student startup founders with a team of successful executives, investors and entrepreneurs for one-on-one coaching and mentoring.

The program complements existing Lepage Center efforts to support entrepreneurship on campus, including its startup incubator, where students access workspace and services from partners such as HubSpot, Amazon, IBM Watson, Lucid, Stripe and law firm Stone Pigman and the student venture accelerator course at Tulane's A.B. Freeman School of Business. The course guides students from the idea phase through customer research, developing products and creating revenue models.

The 12 Innovators-in-Residence will mentor student ventures, serve as guest lecturers in the venture accelerator course and offer career advice during office hours. Student ventures are paired with Innovators-in-Residence according to background and needs.

"Our Innovators-in-Residence are generously donating their time and expertise to Tulane students," said Freeman School Dean Ira Solomon. "It's so valuable for our students to receive coaching and build relationships as they develop their careers and their big ideas."

Innovators-in-Residence can select their own individual titles for the program, which may include designations such as Executive-, Investor- or Entrepreneur-in-Residence.

Several of the Innovators-in-Residence offer valuable expertise in banking, healthcare, human resources, sales and communications. **Stacey Berger** uses his years of experience in commercial banking and real estate to help students understand capital needs for expansion. Cardiologist Dr. **Christopher Damm** assists students considering healthcare ventures. Former GE Chief Diversity Officer **Deborah Elam** advises on how to build great teams. **Kevin Ryan** helps guide students as they market and sell their products and services. **Sally Forman**, who served as director of communications for the city of New Orleans, shares her expertise in storytelling.



Innovators-in-Residence will mentor student entrepreneurs like David Woodside (BSM '19) and Emily Kahn (BSM '19), above, as they develop startups in the Lepage Center's Student Venture Accelerator course.

The Innovators-in-Residence program also brings investors from Boston, New York and San Francisco, the nation’s hottest cities for venture capital to the Gulf South where startups often struggle to obtain investment. Lepage Center students will benefit from the vast experience of **Timothy Bovard** of Search Fund Accelerator, **Jeffery Silverman** of Laconia Capital Group L.P. and **Mike Katz** of Tahoga LLC, who have invested in companies such as TripleLift, ALICE, StubHub, Dollar Shave Club and 23andMe.

Many of the Innovators-in-Residence have founded their own ventures, including **Allen Square** of Square Button and **Marianne Van Meter** of Legacy Capital. **John Elstrott**, former chairman of the board at Whole Foods Market Inc. and former emeritus executive director of the Levy-Rosenblum Institute for Entrepreneurship, and **Jim Christian**, formerly of Anschutz Investment Company and Paribas, bring expertise that comes with being on the ground floor of what later became large ventures.

“While these leaders come from a wide array of fields, what unites all of the Innovators-in-Residence is that they've demonstrated a lifelong commitment to innovation,” said Rob Lalka, executive director of the Lepage Center. “We’re delighted to have such a well-rounded group of professionals to aid our students in all aspects of starting, growing and investing in businesses.”

About the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

The Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the A. B. Freeman School of Business brings together scholars, inventors, investors and students to solve problems and build businesses. The center’s programs provide direct support for Tulanians, New Orleanians and communities across the Gulf South.

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