I have been constantly amazed and inspired by the enthusiasm you have shown for all the different projects that come through the center. I guess the biggest lesson has been really appreciating other people’s work and what the next person is passionate about. I’ve seen this quality with you all, and it has left a great impression on me and on how I now choose to connect with people.”

—Mzwakithi Mhokazlizi “Prestige” Shongwe ’16 CSE Fellow

The Center for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) builds on Middlebury’s commitment to educating students in the tradition of the liberal arts. Our students learn to be effective agents of social change by reflecting on who they are, connecting with others, analyzing systemic challenges, and engaging the world around them. The center is Middlebury’s hub for a growing global network of schools, NGOs, government agencies, businesses, and foundations that share our commitment to social change.

Innovating for the Greater Good

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Our Programs

Students often begin their relationship with the CSE—and their awareness of their potential in social entrepreneurship—through our Friday Speaker Series. At this weekly lunchtime event, students meet and listen to alumni and other guest entrepreneurs and share insights on social change, lessons from the field, and potential career paths. Following each speaker session, students and young alumni gather for MLab at the center. In this forum participants continue the discussion from the speaker series, explore and develop ideas, and consult with peers and mentors about resources that can help expand their ideas into projects.

In the 2012–13 academic year, the CSE hosted 16 lunchtime lectures, with an average of 30 attendees per talk. The popularity of the program continues to increase.

Social Entrepreneurship in the Curriculum

Each January term, Professor Jon Isham teaches Social Entrepreneurship in the Liberal Arts. This interdisciplinary course orients students in the ancient roots and traditional goals of a liberal arts education and connects those traditions with the field of social entrepreneurship. As part of the course, students conduct their own research with help from the center. Completion of this course is a prerequisite for becoming a CSE Fellow. Professor Isham has also led a First-Year
I would like to think that we have empowered students at Vergennes Union High School to know that an idea that they have can actually come to reality, and perhaps this will motivate more environmental action in the future and perhaps this will motivate more environmental action in the future and perhaps this will motivate more environmental action in the future and perhaps this will motivate more environmental action in the future. – Eleni Polychniadiou ’14 and Sam Koplinka-Loehr ’13 about their composting project at Vergennes High School

Seminar entitled Social Entrepreneurship and Social Justice. This course introduces students to models of social change, theories of justice, and the promises and challenges of social entrepreneurship. For more advanced students, Professor Isham teaches an independent study, Social Entrepreneurship 2.0.

In 2014–15, Professor of Economics David Colander will offer a new course on the history of entrepreneurship, which will involve local professionals and emphasize the power of the social entrepreneurship model.

Research into What Works
Lauren Kelly ’13, a CSE alumna, is working with Professor Isham while researching social entrepreneurs in India. Her research on what is effective in that region will inform the center’s programs.

Professor Isham, with assistance from CSE interns, has researched the performance of the Davis Projects for Peace grants to identify elements that enhance success. (For example, a fellow’s first-hand knowledge of the project site’s language and community is an important factor; forming an NGO can boost a program’s sustainability over time.)

Summer Grants
Each spring, the CSE accepts grant applications from students who have identified social problems and wish to create projects to address them. The CSE selects up to five grantees and awards each up to $1,000. Among the completed projects so far: developing a composting system in a Vermont high school, training youth changemakers in Mexico, initiating GIS mapping in Rwanda to aid a grassroots health organization, creating job training for underprivileged deaf women in Pakistan, and producing lap desks for poor schools in Swaziland.

In the course of these summer projects, grantees often discover the challenges and rewards of negotiating on-the-ground bureaucratic, political, and cultural issues. They also experience many of the personal growth thresholds that can confront changemakers. They maintain access with their CSE advisers and, on their return to campus, they work with CSE staff and mentors to measure and evaluate results and build their next level of skills.

CSE Fellows
The CSE fellowship program selects a cohort of six sophomores for a three-year period of study and mentored training that integrates with their college studies. The goals of the program are to extend the cohort’s exposure to opportunity, to encourage humility and awareness of the complexities of trying to effect social change, and to help students avoid isolated experiences as they learn from failures and successes. Students receive $8,000 grants and are expected to blend social entrepreneurship into academic work, pursue relevant summer experiences, lead social entrepreneurship activities on campus and beyond, and design and implement their own projects before their senior years. Fellows are selected based on their record of commitment or orientation to community, empathy, humility, and social change.

Each cohort participates in Professor Jon Isham’s January term class, Social Entrepreneurship and the Liberal Arts (see above). During the following spring semester, individual and group advising and skill-building sessions prepare fellows for summer internships with a social enterprise or a similarly involved organization.

Throughout their junior years, fellows are mentored in skills such as budgeting, interviewing and listening, public speaking, and project design. Each fellow designs his or her own project for the fellowship’s second summer. Those wishing to study abroad at one of Middlebury’s 36 sites in 17 countries can arrange internships with social change businesses and organizations.

Some students also use their fellowship funding to attend conferences such as the Clinton Global Initiative University, of which Middlebury is a member. There they share their own “commitment to action,” receive additional training, and widen their networks by meeting with experienced social entrepreneurs and with other engaged students from colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad.

Annual Public Symposium
Our annual January Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship brings together members of the College-community, interested area residents, and leaders from around the world in social entrepreneurship. The symposium includes events with and keynote addresses by our Vision Award recipients, workshops with leading social entrepreneurs, and explorations of the field through such lenses as social justice and education.

MCSE Vision Award Recipients
At the center’s annual January Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship, Middlebury honors leaders who share the center’s goal of preparing individuals to lead a life of social change.

2012
Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, the world’s largest social entrepreneurial network, which proposes that everyone is a changemaker.

Jacqueline Novogratz, founder and CEO of the Acumen Fund, a nonprofit global venture fund that uses entrepreneurial approaches to solve the problems of poverty.

2013
Billy Parish, climate activist and founder of Mosaic, a company that uses crowdfunding to enable individuals to finance solar energy projects and receive a return on their investment.

Majora Carter, founder of Sustainable South Bronx green-collar job training, and head of the Majora Carter Group, which focuses on climate adaptation and urban revitalization.