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# Student Wins IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship

Sept. 17, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Deep into his design for a smartphone app, Tim Leiser '16 tapped into an unfulfilled niche in the marketplace.

So, he did what any good entrepreneur would do. He started a new company to fill that void.

Leiser, an Illinois Wesleyan University senior, received the first [IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship](#). Funded initially by Illinois Wesleyan alumnus Marc Talluto '94, the new fellowship provides a \$5,000 stipend for a student to develop his or her entrepreneurial idea and prepare to take the idea to market.

A [computer science](#) and [sociology](#) double major, Leiser's initial idea was to develop a smartphone app that would track the community engagement activities of university students, faculty and staff. Through his involvement with Illinois Wesleyan's [Action Research Center \(ARC\)](#),

Leiser had learned that many colleges and universities do not have the software or other electronic tools to accurately manage and report important information such as the number of volunteer hours, volunteer locations, or which student groups are volunteering the most. In recent years, ARC staff had created a makeshift program with a Google document and an Excel spreadsheet that tracked community-engagement activities.

Through considerable trial and error, ARC staff made the database more functional and easier to use, but Leiser said ARC staffers were still concerned that some students' volunteer hours were going unreported. "For three years they've been dreaming of an app to make the process user-friendly, customizable, and fun for the students to use," Leiser said. "Plus, it just seemed to make sense to our demographic that if you had access to the database on your phone while you were still volunteering, you just check in as you finish your volunteer shift and the information is recorded." So Leiser decided to design an app to do that. He called it the "Do Good" app, taking the name from the commencement admonishment of former Illinois Wesleyan President Minor Myers, jr. that graduates should "go forth and do good."

Once the app was ready for market, Leiser envisioned selling it to other universities who were facing the same challenge – the need for a mechanism to accurately report community engagement activities. After he investigated the logistics, however, Leiser determined the costs of user-profile hosting were too prohibitive.

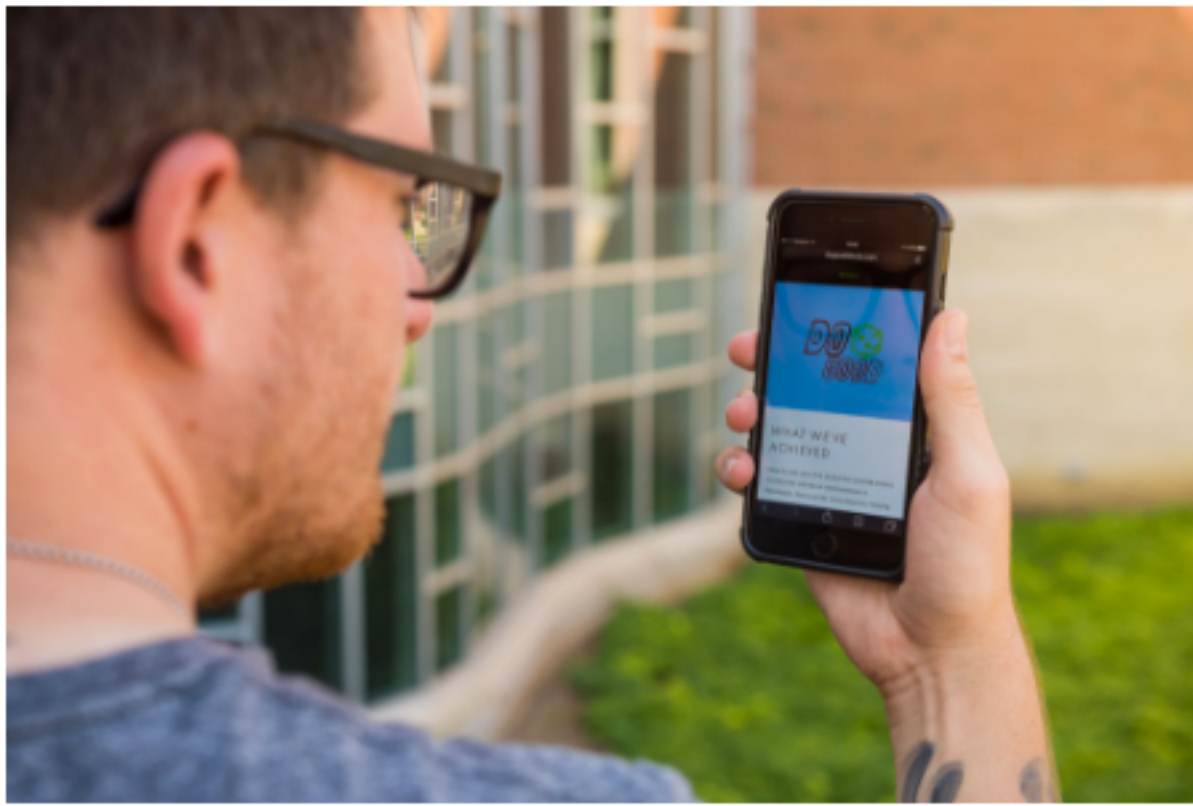
He decided it would be much cheaper to host and webhook the data through Illinois Wesleyan's Qualtrics research software. "Using Qualtrics to host the aggregate data was a great solution, but it prevented any possibility of selling the app to other institutions," said Leiser. "Not every university uses Qualtrics."

In his market research Leiser had also come to the realization that many small business owners and nonprofits needed the same kind of support he was providing to ARC. He began to envision an affordable technology-consulting firm that could provide those services and support. "There are so many small businesses that don't have an ecommerce store or even a fully functioning website," he said. "I decided to take most of the stipend I received from the fellowship and found a [company](#) that builds mobile apps and websites, improves social media impact, and offers a wide variety of marketing services for small businesses and nonprofits." He named the company Do Good as well, and said the company takes a nonprofit approach to technology consulting.



Tim Leiser (right) is the first recipient of the IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship, funded initially by Marc Talluto '94 (left).





Tim Leiser demonstrates the smartphone app he developed, supported by the first IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship.

Once he decided to start a company in addition to designing the smartphone app, Leiser depended even more on his team of advisors. The IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship provides students with the guidance of successful entrepreneurs and the mentorship of faculty members. Leiser's team included Chair and Associate Professor of [Business Administration](#) Dave Marvin, who also holds a law degree, and Adjunct Instructor in Business and Coordinator of Entrepreneurial Activities Tara Gerstner, along with Leiser's ARC clients, Deborah Halperin and Bevin Cowie. "Both Deborah and Tara gave me a lot of room to breathe and move through the process in the way in which I was most comfortable," said Leiser. "Dave Marvin was there every step, especially with the legalities. Any time that I emailed or dropped in to talk about problems or had questions, they all dropped everything they were doing to help.

"To have people who are on the top of their game, who know what they are talking about, or if there is one thing they don't know, to put me in touch with the person I needed, that sort of advice is invaluable," Leiser added.

Despite the considerable help of his advisory team, Leiser still experienced his share of frustrations. For example, he did not expect the Do Good app to be so difficult to program. Ironically, establishing the Do Good business proved to be considerably easier – and provided Leiser with the most important lesson he took from his entrepreneurship project. "I realized that I'm going to stumble and fall, but the biggest thing I've learned is to just relax and if something doesn't work, you take a different direction," he said. "There's always a new path."

During Leiser's presentation to his team of advisors, Talluto questioned the young entrepreneur about the company's pricing structure and offered advice on possible additional sources of revenue. Talluto wondered if there was a way to get other students involved.

"However I can continue to be service, I'm glad to be involved," said Talluto, the chief executive officer of Fruition Partners, a technology provider for the service-management sector. "I think this has legs."

Do Good the company has already served clients ranging from the Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal to Recycling Furniture for Families. While Leiser ponders Do Good's next steps, he'll finish his coursework at Illinois Wesleyan in December. He plans to start an MBA program next fall.

"We feel the entrepreneurial fellowship was wildly successful for our first one," said Gerstner. "It was interesting to watch Tim's project morph along the way, which is what most businesses do anyway."

The IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship is just one of the distinctive experiential learning opportunities for [undergraduate research and creative activity](#) at Illinois Wesleyan. [Applications for the next round of funding](#) for the IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship are due Oct. 24. The most recent surveys show two-thirds of Illinois Wesleyan students engage in research or a deep and sustained creative activity such as the IWU Entrepreneurial Fellowship.

