

Students Offering Support expands nationally

Charitable SBE club started at Laurier, designed to help students study, opens chapters at nine university campuses across Canada

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Greg Overholt, a recent graduate of the Laurier business program, has truly accomplished something spectacular. He has seen his passion project – Students Offering Support (SOS) – grow into a national success.

“I’m excited for Laurier SOS,” said Overholt of the School of Business and Economics (SBE) club he started in his second year at WLU.

After spending his last co-op term working to set up the non-profit organization, branches of SOS have now opened at nine universities across Canada.

“It’s like running nine different small businesses,” said Overholt.

“As long as they use the overall vision of what Students Offering Support is about and why we’re here, how you do it is up to you ... That’s the beauty of this small, social entrepreneurship business; it’s all up to you.”

For a \$20 donation, students can attend large-scale tutoring sessions, traditionally for courses in the business and economics programs.

“I don’t think any of us [know how successful it would be] when we started it four years ago and thought of this ‘exam cram’ initiative,” said Overholt.

The money collected at the tutoring sessions is put towards a yearly humanitarian project where volunteers travel to a selected country.

The volunteers completely finance the trips themselves, and all funds raised throughout the year go towards the materials needed for the actual project.

“It was just one of the four pillars of ways we wanted to raise money and it just ended up taking off,” said Overholt.

To date, SOS has raised over \$130,000 for sustainable education projects, and this past August

18 students travelled to Honduras to renovate a farm school for orphaned boys.

Laura Allan, a professor at Laurier who teaches first-year business and sits on the SOS Board of Directors, feels that SOS offers a “tremendous resource” to students, as long as they use the services appropriately.

“Students have a lot of other avenues ... and it’s just one extra avenue for them,” said Allan.

“What Greg has done here is a really commendable thing. I think it’s a real assistance to students if they take it the right way, if they don’t see it as a way to rely on someone else to help them.”

Aside from benefiting students who use SOS services as a learning resource, Allan also sees how the project helps students looking to gain some teaching experience.

One such individual is Ian Hutchinson, a third-year business student, and next year’s head tutor, who got involved with SOS not only because he wanted volunteer experience, but also to participate in the teaching aspect of the program.

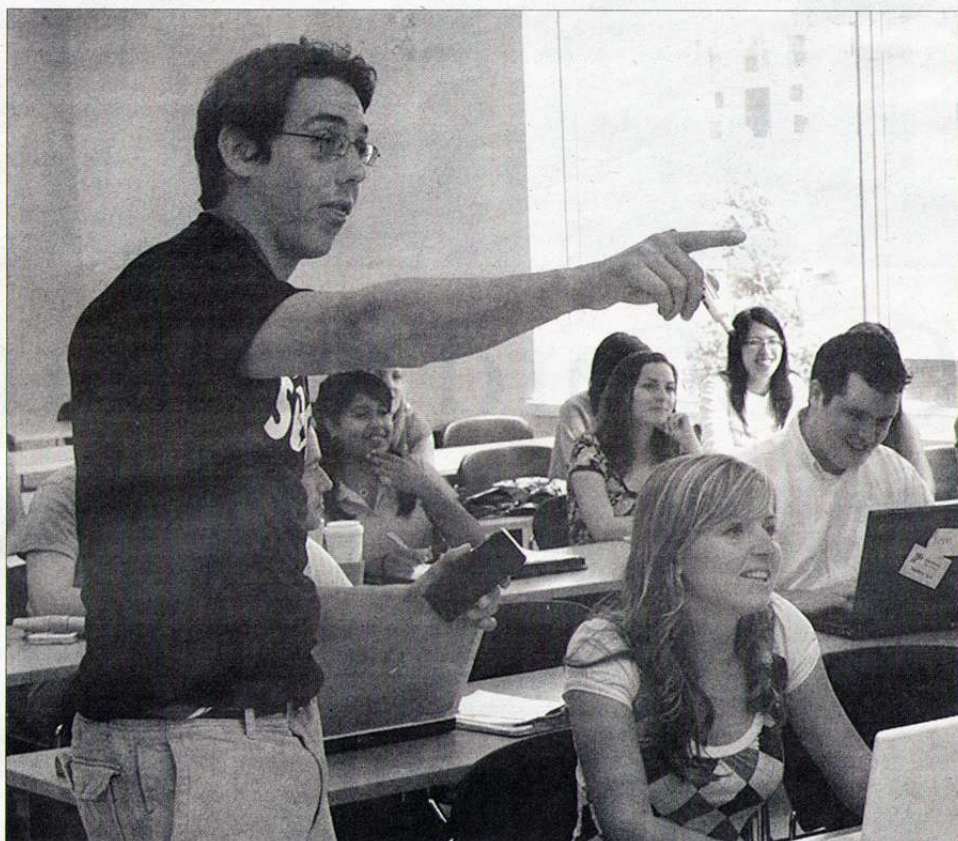
“I’ve always loved teaching; the passion you feel, the rush you get when you teach. I wanted to contribute on a bigger scale,” said Hutchinson of his involvement.

“You’re amazed by the amount of kids that come out and the amount of help you can provide,” he added.

This year, the SOS program at Laurier is seeking to increase the number of students to whom they can offer academic assistance, as they will be teaching exam aid sessions in programs outside business and economics.

“We’re hoping to expand into different faculties,” explained Olesya Komashko, president of Laurier SOS.

Classes are already planned to take place in languages this upcoming year – specifically Spanish and



EXAM AID - ‘Exam aid’ sessions, such as this one, help to raise money for humanitarian projects.

LAURIER SOS

German – and Komashko is also looking for volunteers interested in organizing sessions for classes in other departments at Laurier.

“You definitely need somebody from [that program] making sure your approach to them is the right one,” said Komashko.

“You have to have a different approach to every faculty because it’s so different.”

This concept is based on Trent’s SOS model, in which courses are taught in various programs and aren’t focused on one particular academic niche.

“My goal is to have everyone know about SOS,” said Komashko.

“It’s a great service for everyone to use, it shouldn’t matter what your faculty is.”

While Komashko will be working to ensure SOS’s growth within the Laurier community, Overholt too will be looking for ways to ensure SOS’s future success.

In September, he will become the full-time director of SOS, and will be staying in Waterloo to run the organization.

He hopes that by September 2009, the business will be fully sustainable.

“The whole point of this is that it does become sustainable, it just needs to grow some more,” said

Overholt.

He is optimistic that, if this next year goes well, they will be able to open more chapters across Canada and potentially tap into the post-secondary market in the United States as well.

“What I’m looking for is support to get to the point of sustainability,” said Overholt.

“This model was devised so that it won’t be run like a charity, it will be run like a social business ... I want to be able to provide more of a business mindset, more of a sustainable mindset into [the charitable sector], and that’s what I feel SOS can do in a matter of a year.”