Fearless Ideas: Gift to Uplift

Adrienne Baer is a sophomore at the University of Maryland enrolled in the Honors Humanities program. Driven by a desire to help people in need, she entered UMD as a physiology & neurobiology major, excited to pursue a career in medicine as a physician. During her freshman year, Adrienne learned of the Do Good Now course, a Fearless Ideas course where interdisciplinary teams innovate for good. She decided to enroll because she wanted to help people in need. The course guides students through a process to help them generate a project idea, as well as gives them innovative and entrepreneurship tools to actually implement the project.

Prior to taking this course, Adrienne did not view herself as innovative or entrepreneurial, although she did have an idea that she wanted to explore. This idea was inspired by her cousin Charlie who has a heart defect causing him to spend lots of time in the hospital and also limiting the types of activities he can do. With a very early-stage idea and her cousin as inspiration, Adrienne pitched her idea for Gift to Uplift on the first day of the Do Good Now course, despite being one of the youngest in the course. Her pitch rallied seven new teammates representing various academic disciplines, including bioengineering, government and health policy. She was surprised that so many of her classmates wanted to work with her on this very nascent project idea, but excited by their palpable passion for the problem.

During the course, Adrienne and her team relied heavily on Design Thinking -- the innovation process taught by the course instructors to help students further develop their projects. Design thinking played an integral role in how her team developed their idea -- from the initial brainstorm of crazy ideas that helped quickly build a great team dynamic to gaining amazing insights that could only come from empathy interviews. Adrienne and her team took the innovation and entrepreneurship concepts learned in class and implemented them directly into their project, causing them to pivot, reframe, and reimagine. Originally Gift to Uplift wanted to do something to uplift parents of sick children. However after speaking with many of these parents, they quickly learned that what the parents really want is to make their child happy. This insightful piece of information lead Gift to Uplift to pivot their idea to creating care packages for hospitalized children. Beyond that, the team learned that because of sanitary concerns certain objects cannot be taken to all areas of a hospital so the care package idea pivoted again into a personalized book featuring the child.

Adrienne started with a humble idea and throughout the course she inspired and led her team to deliver their first product within only four short months: a personalized book for Charlie. As of September 2014, Adrienne and her team delivered their second book, which Adrienne describes as being the highlight of the journey so far. She explained that since the second book was for a child she had no previous connection with, she felt that there was a lot more on the line.

While Adrienne’s work on Gift to Uplift has the potential to change many kid’s lives, her project-turned-organization also changed her own. Adrienne switched from being a physiology & neurobiology major to a business major. She realizes that there are other ways to help people besides being a doctor, and is excited about the scale of impact that can be made when you work with a team to innovate and create a new product or service that has the potential to affect many people. Although she previously did not consider herself an entrepreneur or an innovator, she feels differently now. Because of the work she did during the Do Good Now course, she now feels confident that she can set a vision and lead a team to accomplish that vision. The Do Good Now course gave her the ability to be bold, start something and run with it.

“The Fearless Ideas courses are so unique. Everyone should take one. I fell so in love with my Fearless Ideas course that it completely changed the way I thought of myself.”

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