Each year, about 8,000 alumni join the workforce. While the majority find themselves a job, some create jobs for themselves.

These HKU alumni start their own businesses and even charities with an enterprising spirit. Some work part time, others work 24/7 on their ventures. Their work style and hours may vary but they are all innovators and risk takers, solving problems and making an impact. Their ultimate goal is to transform Hong Kong and the world for the better.
The magic of Sheva is that you have to use female hygiene products every month. Women can regularly help other women by buying women stuff!

“I was born in Guatemala but I lived in the city,” said Marisabel Ruiz, a 26-year-old who founded Sheva.com.

Her online store sells female hygiene products and donates sanitary towels to those who cannot afford them.

“I didn’t know that rural areas in my home country also have girls who use newspapers, dried leaves and cloth as sanitary pads. They leak easily and are very unhygienic.”

Ruiz was first made aware of the subject two years ago whilst, as an exchange student at HKU, she took part in a summer service trip (Impact For Peace) organised by CEDARS.

“We went to Kolkata, India to teach children English and I found out that some girls were skipping classes because of their menstruation,” said Ruiz. “After some Internet research, I realised that Guatemala is as bad.”

According to Ruiz, only 12% of India’s women use sanitary products and more than 50% of girls in Guatemala drop out of school after their first period. The discovery marked the beginning of her mission for girl-empowerment.

Ruiz initially attempted to talk companies into donating female hygiene products to people in need. But after receiving several rejections, she decided to make her idea a self-sustainable project.

“I was lucky because my family and friends supported me financially.”

In 2013, the business and economics alumna founded Sheva with a vision for social impact. For every box of sanitary towels or tampons purchased online, the company would donate a month’s supply of napkins to girls in Guatemala.

“The magic of Sheva is that you have to use female hygiene products every month. There is always a need. Women can regularly help other women by buying women stuff!” commented Ruiz.

Sheva, which was launched in October, receives at least 1,000 hits per day.

“We also took quite a lot of orders in the first two weeks. I can’t tell you exactly how many as this is our secret,” said Ruiz. “But most orders were from the United States.”

The company is based in New York and Guatemala. Ruiz aims to expand her business so as to serve
one million underprivileged girls worldwide by 2020.

“Our future plan is to add products for women who are going through menopause and women experiencing incontinence,” said Ruiz.

The startup is also looking into making biodegradable napkins out of banana and coconut fibres.

“I want to bring Sheva everywhere and Hong Kong is definitely on my list,” said Ruiz, who is currently seeking local partnership and collaboration.

Marisabel Ruiz (Exchange Student, Faculty of Social Sciences 2010-2011)

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**Mining Big Data**

“We want to save people from mundane work. We cover about 80% of all mining projects around the world.”

One American, one Briton, one Australian, and three beers.

“That was pretty much how it started,” said Jim Guzy, CEO of the data analysis startup The Cloudminer.

“We are three founders.”

Guzy is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who had the experience of listing companies on the NASDAQ. He and British geologist Daniel Bloor crossed paths in Hong Kong in 2011 whilst studying the same Master’s programme in Applied Geosciences at HKU.

The synergy brought the pair and Australian mining engineer Will Coverdale together to found The Cloudminer, which provides real-time information on mineral asset valuation, analysis and financing.

“I rely a lot on Dan’s mining knowledge,” said Guzy. “But coming
projects globally, downloading them, extracting all the publicly available data,” said Bloor. “We cover about 80% of all mining projects around the world.”

Investors, analysts and executors of mining projects are The Cloudminer’s major customers. “When considering the start of a new mining project, it’s very important to benchmark and compare the costs and methodologies among all the projects with similar geology and geography, or similar mining and processing methods,” said Bloor. “In this case, users can get a handle of what different operation and capital costs might be.”

After six weeks, the enterprise has already sealed subscription deals with 160 clients, including big banks.

“Hong Kong is Asia’s financial hub,” said Guzy. “Our potential clients gather here. It’s the perfect location.”

But there are also customers who are skeptical about storing data on cloud-based services.

“Some clients are more wary and worry about data security, but we counter that by describing how our data and security systems are like online banking,” said Bloor. “It can feel like we sometimes have to re-educate customers with our market approach to adopt new ideas.”

The trio expects to expand its service to other commodities like oil and gas.

Jim Guzy (MSc 2011) 
Daniel Bloor (MSc 2011)

from Silicon Valley, I saw that there is very little IT in mining and resource’s sector.”

Before The Cloudminer’s launch in September 2014, geologists, commodity traders, bankers and mining companies had no choice but to valuate digging projects using old enterprise systems. This could mean building models in Excel and spending long hours inputting numbers into multiple spreadsheets.

“The old way of doing things was that you had to download and store software on servers that were customised, which was expensive and cumbersome,” said Guzy.

“But now, this is all available on the Web. We want to save people from mundane work.”

The Cloudminer can process, analyse and present massive amounts of data in clean tables and charts on iCloud. It builds a database on the Internet and user-generated content.

“We take technical data held in PDFs of some 360,000 mining projects globally, downloading them, extracting all the publicly available data,” said Bloor. “We cover about 80% of all mining projects around the world.”

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The trio expects to expand its service to other commodities like oil and gas.
Easy on your Wallet

We want to build an e-wallet for everyone... (and) to eliminate all charges in the virtual world.

Imagine that you go to lunch and everyone splits the bill. You think you may have enough small change but after rounds of fumbling in your wallet, all you find is a few HK$100 bills. So, what do you do?

Instead of borrowing money from friends (and forgetting to repay them), Food & Nutritional Science graduate Daniel Chan came up with a solution – an e-wallet.

After winning the competition “Startup Weekend” in April, Chan quit his previous job and began building his app “CashYou” full time, with two part-time partners.

“We want to build an e-wallet for everyone so that they can transfer small payments instantaneously to friends in Hong Kong,” said Chan.

“Right now PayPal is available, or perhaps, people use other e-banking systems to transfer money between individuals. However, there is a high transaction fee.”

Chan’s goal is to eliminate all charges in the virtual world, including settlements across banks.

His team is currently negotiating with various banks in Hong Kong to set up a direct connection with people’s saving accounts. He expects to test this app on Apple smartphones and Androids at various universities and high schools later this year.

According to the 25 year-old, there is looming competition as Hong Kong’s Octopus card is also plotting a similar plan.

“It’s risky to quit a stable, well-paid job for the uncertain,” said Chan. “There is always pressure, especially peer pressure. Some of my friends thought I was crazy to have left my job.”

However, the entrepreneur said something braved him into all the risk taking. He credits this to family support and the satisfaction of creating and launching his own “baby”.

“I love building something out of nothing,” said Chan. “The satisfaction you receive is very different when you are building your own dreams.”

Daniel Chan 陳冠熊 (BSc 2012)

Top 20 selected for the Empowering Young Entrepreneurs Program
www.cashyou.hk
At the tender age of 21, Timothy Yu was earning more than HK$50,000 a month.

“In 2011, I was a student studying risk management and finance at HKU. After some time, a few friends and I decided to start a tutorial centre in Fortress Hill,” said Yu.

Like many university students in Hong Kong, Yu gave private tutorials to secondary school students in his spare time. But what stood out was that he kept pushing boundaries.

“Originally, it was more about business,” commented Yu. “But then I switched my mindset.”

Yu’s company Appedu initially charged students HK$500 per class, which equated to HK$2,000 per subject per month. “We realised this was a large sum to pay for parents whose salaries are less than HK$20,000 per month. In fact, one of my students told me he only had HK$500 left for the month and this was just before his public examinations.”

Promoting paid app services in Hong Kong is not at all easy, as app education is a relatively new concept for local Chinese students.

Named after the French word “Apprendre” which means “to learn”
www.appedu.co
“I didn’t want my student to miss out so I ended up not charging him. But I know I cannot help everyone in need this way,” said the founder.

As a solution-seeker, Yu turned to technology for a more cost-effective business model and an affordable education.

His idea was to create Snapask, an app that allows students to ask questions and receive replies from trained tutors within 15 minutes. The pitch quickly won its way into Cyberport’s incubation programme, which offered him a HK$320,000 grant and two years of free office space.

According to Yu, there are 130 million students who are not receiving an education worldwide.

“How long is your stay?” asked the reviewer. “We are eager to make knowledge an abundant resource for all people around the world through technology.”

Yu pulled together a team for Snapask in 2013. On board was also HKU graduate Philip Hong, who completed his Master’s degree in Statistics.

“We are testing Snapask and collecting data from a school now,” commented Hong, whose main responsibility is encapsulating the app’s market analysis. “So far, we have recruited 25 secondary schools and roughly 6,000 students have installed the app.”

“We have about 200 part-time tutors and four full-timers answering questions that students may have.”

However promoting paid app services in Hong Kong is not at all easy. As app education is a relatively new concept for local Chinese students, getting subscriptions from them is a challenge.

“International students are more receptive to our product mainly because they are more familiar with e-learning,” said Yu.

The actual app will be available for downloads in January 2015 and monthly subscriptions will cost about HK$300.

“We have an open recruitment for tutors,” said Yu. “But in order to make sure tutors can really handle queries, we will run training programmes. In fact, there will be one held in February 2015.”

Cover Story

HKU Alumni Entrepreneurs Club
香港大學創業校友會

We are a group of budding entrepreneurs, with different professional backgrounds and nationalities, who have come together to build a supportive platform for resource sharing, team building, mutual learning and networking. You will be able to pitch your ideas to get funding, partnerships and support, and join various workshops.

◆ January 17, 2015 : An inauguration at Rayson Huang Theatre, HKU
◆ Bimonthly Entrepreneurs Get-together
◆ Four Pitching Competitions
◆ HKUAEC Bootcamp
More at www.HKUaeC.org
Sketching Elbow Room

That is what is fun about design. You work within the constraints and boundaries.

Did you ever sketch on textbooks when you were young? If so, what did you draw?

While most people have blurred images of their childhood pastimes, Paperclip Design founder James Lee remembers.

“Even back in primary school I always drew airplanes and cabin seats,” said Lee with a laugh. “I was considered the artist in the class.”

But who could have guessed this somewhat insignificant hobby actually laid the foundation for the future air cabin seat designer? Now, the 30-year-old is armed with a list of international design awards.

Between 2009 and 2012 his signature invention “Paperclip armrest” scooped four accolades including the A’ Design Award, Good Design Award, Red Dot Award and the Crystal Cabin Award. The two-level design saves passengers the trouble of fighting for elbow space. Though originally designed for planes, the dual-user feature also suits theatres.

“I came up with this idea while sitting at a crowded lecture room at MIT,” said Lee, who furthered his studies in the United States after graduating from HKU with a Bachelor in Mechanical Engineering in 2005.

“Design and aviation are the two things that I have always been passionate about,” said Lee. “I like solving problems using creativity.”

The entrepreneur also impressed the world with a “Butterfly” convertible seating design. This allows airlines to reuse and transform seats in Economy class into seats for Business class. Just flip the seat’s back and you will get a bed without taking up extra cabin space.

Lee currently has a major client - a seat manufacturer - who hired him to design its products, but it will probably take a while before people can fly with his armrest and convertible seats. Getting the aviation industry to turn new designs into real products takes time. One major deterrent is the extra cost incurred from safety and requirement tests.

“My main income source is now from offering design services as a hired consultant,” said Lee. “It’s not from patented design concepts I come up with and sell to people.”

The young talent is optimistic, determined and confident that the future will embrace the design values he has created.

“That is what is fun about design. You work within the constraints and boundaries.”

James Lee 李誠軒 (BEng 2005)
Start it up: HOW

Face-to-face with seasoned entrepreneurs: The Entrepreneurship Academy@HKU

Since 2010, over 600 students, staff and alumni have joined the Entrepreneurship Academy (EA), a partnership between the Technology Transfer Office and the School of Business.

This year Dr Saimond Ip, CEO of OnePort Limited, talked on the “5 Dynamics of Entrepreneurs”; K O Chia, President of HK Venture Capital & Private Equity Association spoke on “Transforming Technologies into Entrepreneurs”; and Dr Dominic Chan, Co-founder & Partner of Dark House Investment, talked about “Entrepreneurs in Action – How to Put Everything Together and Get it Started, with Limited Resources”.

Since October 2014, EA participants have been able to join STEP@ CoCoon+HKU, a two-month ‘learning by doing’ programme with a CoCoon startup company.

Fund It:
Up to $1,200,000 x 3 years

TSSSU@HKU is a new award scheme that leverages the Technology Startup Support Scheme for Universities (TSSSU) launched by the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC). It provides funding support to technology startup companies formed by HKU students, staff and alumni. Successful companies will be funded up to a maximum amount of $1.2 million per year for no more than three years.

www.tto.hku.hk/public/tsssu/

“Nowadays, everybody needs to have an enterprising spirit. In our work, we need to do something new and evaluate whether it can be a viable and successful idea. Then we have to get resources and support, market it and make it a success. This is not only for financial gain but something beyond economic benefits, something social.”

Young people can afford to start up their businesses. They are daring, innovative, willing to take risks, and their ability to adapt to new things is higher.”
Believe in your Selfie

It's more than a business. I hope my customers leave my studio with big smiles on their faces.

It all began with a “Chinese tourist” taking a selfie with French President François Hollande in Southern France.

While Vien Wong was enjoying her one-year French course and life in Bordeaux, after graduating from HKU with a Major in Translation in 2012, she bumped into President Hollande who was attending a ceremony in Nice. With an Asian’s unique “instinct”, Wong and her friend immediately grabbed the chance to take a selfie with the President. This selfie was then surprisingly seen on the international news and more importantly, an inspiration for Wong to set up Snaparty in Mongkok – a 900 sq. ft space for selfie-taking and party-goers.

“We are the first in Hong Kong to start such a business,” said Wong with pride. “But it doesn’t mean it’s an easy ride.”

Effective marketing, business diversification and cost-cutting measures are all that she has to learn and implement from scratch to make her business a success.

“A business startup is challenging when one is not abreast of the market pulse. Our shop is located upstairs and it’s hard to pull people in.”
Nevertheless, as a devoted St. Johnian back at HKU, Wong found herself ready to cope with “enterprising” challenges.

“The tradition of St. John’s College of ‘Strive for the Best’ has prepared me with the right attitude to keep fighting in this ever-changing market.”

From the start, 90% of Snaparty customers were coming in for selfie snaps while the rest were attending the party venue. Now, the respective proportions have reversed to 30% and 70%.

Wong is fully aware that she has to be the trend-setter to stay afloat.

“We also diversify and offer space for e-shops selling skincare products. This helps to occupy the shop space whilst we continue to encourage customers to our business.”

Overseas investors are also exploring the possibility of becoming franchisees.

The once the Chief Happiness Storyteller of Laughfull, a local youth group aiming to bring joy to people through various activities, Wong shared her ultimate mission of setting up Snaparty:

“It’s more than a business. I hope my customers leave my studio with big smiles on their faces.”

She once shared her experiences at a local TEDx conference in 2012 and said, “If you have the passion and you want to make an impact, or like us spread happiness, then just do it!”

Startup Resources

• Hong Kong Science and Technology Park – 3-year Incu-Tech Programme
• Cyberport – Entrepreneurship Centre
  www.cyberport.hk/en/about_cyberport/our_5_centres/entrepreneurship_centre
• Hong Kong Trade Development Council – SME Start-up Programme
  www.hktdc.com/info/mi/sbr
• 8080SPACE – Co-working space platform
  www.8080space.com
• Jumpstart - the first start-up magazine in Hong Kong
  jumpstartmag.com
• The Hongkong Federation of Youth Groups – Youth Business Hong Kong
  ybhk.hkfyg.org.hk
• British Council – Global Social Enterprise Programme
  www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise
• StartUps HK – Hong Kong’s tech startup community
  www.startupshk.com
• TiE Hong Kong – Entrepreneurship fostering platform
  hk.tie.org
• CoCoon – an entrepreneurship community
  www.hkcocoon.org
• Good Lab – A hub for social entrepreneurs
  goodlab.hk
• The Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited – Microfinance Scheme
• Technology Startup Support Scheme for Universities TSSSU@HKU
  www.tto.hku.hk/public/tsssu
A Sporting Chance

Gary Wong is a manager at a chemicals holding company. When not flying to and from the Mainland to monitor the company’s factories, he takes on a fight for equal opportunities.

His targets? Grass-roots kids who cannot afford proper sports training, especially activities such as fencing which require costly gear.

“I believe every individual should have the right to access to different learning opportunities,” said Wong. “Be it academic, cultural or sporting.”

That’s why Wong started “InspiringHK Sports Foundation”, a charity that provides children from low-income groups with free, long-term sports training.

As a sportsman himself, Wong believes in the power of sports in developing resilience and a fighting spirit in underprivileged children.

“We are a young and small charity without any full-time staff. Financial sustainability and capacity building are always at the top of our agenda.”

www.inspiringhk.org
The first thing he learned on the sports ground was to accept one constraint - his height.

“I was one of the shortest players on the basketball team. I hated myself when I was young.”

Disadvantaged by his physical built, Wong trained himself extra hard.

“I kept asking myself if I want to do well in basketball and if I want to compete, what should be my advantage? I realised my advantage could be my pace, my speed, maybe my shooting skills, maybe my sense of providing assistance to others. So I became the point guard.”

Wong worked his way into established local basketball teams in boyhood. This fighting spirit also got him admitted to world-class institutions like HKU and Oxford University in adulthood.

But his fight doesn’t just end there. Conceptualised just two years ago, “InspiringHK Sports Foundation” is now serving 120 students aged between 9 to 14. Participating teenagers must be beneficiaries in the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme or are referred by a registered social worker or NGO. “The students’ parents may be housewives or cleaners. They may not have certain exposure and networks,” said Wong. “Some don’t even have an idea of what a holistic education is.”

“We are here to tackle that, to share our professional connections and to level the playing field.”

Fighting shoulder to shoulder with Wong on the battlefield are 12 other professionals. Working full time in various industries, they take up different roles in the Foundation including fundraising, online marketing strategies, media and event management.

“We are a young and small charity without any full-time staff. Financial sustainability and capacity building are always at the top of our agenda. Besides financial support, commitment of our team and volunteers, our skills and network, and new ideas are equally important to our continuous growth and expansion.”

Gary and his team. “I believe in the power of collaboration. On our team, there are civil servants, high school teachers, businessmen, lawyers, bankers and many others.”

Front row: Ruby Chan 陳穎芝 (B Econ&Fin 2006; MIPA 2011) (1” right); Lisa So 蘇詩韻 (LLB 1998; PCLL 2000) (2” right); Gary Wong 黃梓謙 (BA 2006) (3” right); Judy Kong 江嘉惠 (MSW 2011) (2” left)

Back row: Jack Chen 陳嵩泳 (BEng 2009; MSc(CompSc) 2013) (1” right); Desmond Cheung 張志銓 (BSocSc(Govt&Laws) 2008; LLB 2011; PCLL 2012) (2” right)

And those who are not in the picture:
Eddie Chow 周倬行 (BEng 2007), Harvey Lo 羅子峯 (MEd 2014), Vivian Chik 戚瑜慧 (PCLL 2014), Erica Wang 王海茵 (BA Year 3) and Alex Luk 隆嘉健 (BSc(ActuarSc) Year 3)
Hungry for some quality jokes, funny pictures and videos? Here is your remedy!

9gag.com, one of the world’s most popular websites for audiences seeking laughter and entertaining tidbits, is the brainchild of Ray Chan.

“We are trying to solve a problem here,” said Chan, who left HKU with a Law degree in 2006. “In this Internet age, content is everywhere but not everything is good. We help our users find the best content through curation, algorithm and the participation of the 9gag community.”

The idea popped up as a side project in 2008. Chan was then working for an online book-sharing platform. He took off from his career in 2011 to focus on 9gag.

“We worked on a lot of internet start up ideas in the beginning but not all ideas worked out,” said Chan. “So we decided to focus on the more popular project, 9gag.”

Six years after its inception, the site is receiving 90 million views each month for an average 10 minutes’ surfing time. Yet, these numbers do not include app traffic.

With 21 million followers on Facebook, 6.8 million on Instagram and 3.3 million on Twitter, 9gag has emerged as a leading social media player. Though young, the company is in the lead in comparison to some big retail brands such as Forever 21 and Tommy Hilfiger, especially when it comes to the number of “likes” on its Facebook page.

So just how did Chan do it? “We have one guy managing all our social media accounts,” said Chan. “1.5 people to be exact because another person comes in when the social media guy goes on holiday.”

With a team of only 30 hires, Chan said creativity and diligence are the key. “We definitely don’t have as many people as big companies,” said Chan. “So we constantly have think of new and more flexible ways to get things done.”

But that’s not all. “If you think of a smart option, it’s possible that others can do it too,” said Chan. “That’s why you have to work extra hard in order to stay on top of the game.”

Though often seen as a light-hearted and sometimes goofy company, the founder said his staff are not necessarily people who crack jokes. They are serious when it comes to work.

“Hustle is the word,” said Chan. “It’s not about doing what you love, but loving what you do.”
SHARE THE PASSION
GET CONNECTED

Calling all young alumni startup owners, social entrepreneurs, freelancers, angel investors... and enterprising dreamcatchers.

HKU dreamcatchers
Sign up now
www.alumni.hku.hk/dreamcatchers2015