

# The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change

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Volume 5  
Issue 2 *Spring 2016*

Article 2

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May 2016

## Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 5 Issue 2 Spring 2016

Eric Glustrom  
*Watson University*

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### Recommended Citation

Glustrom, Eric (2016) "Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 5 Issue 2 Spring 2016," *The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2.  
Available at: <https://opus.govst.edu/iujsl/vol5/iss2/2>

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## **The Editor's Notes**

### **An Unexpected Revolution in Education**

Tune into a debate today on education and one will hear all about the problems of access to a quality higher education. In the United States Over the past thirty years the cost of higher education has increased 12 fold. Student debt in the U.S. is now greater than credit card debt. Students are demanding an educational experience that is not only affordable, but also transfers real-world skills and aligns with their passions. In Europe, governments are facing the rising costs of providing higher education while making it inclusive to new populations. India and China are facing increasing demand that they are struggling to meet, and seeing some very talented students emigrating across the world to attend colleges and universities. Educational leaders hope that a revolution in higher education can be inspired by massive open-source online courses (MOOC's). Yet, I argue that the real revolution in education is not about making Harvard courses available for free to the world. Rather, it's an unexpected revolution, one that has the potential to transform the very purpose of education itself.

### **Introducing WatsonU**

Education is just one of the critical arenas we face today. From sustainable economic development to health care; from issues of equity to developing vision of geo-political cooperation, universities must evolve into communities where students explore the world alongside peers, leading mentors, entrepreneurs, thinkers, and practitioners from around the world. Why? So they may learn to design and accelerate ideas to solve the toughest challenges facing the world — from entrepreneurial ventures to research projects and everything in between.

Social entrepreneurs are the change-makers who are creating entrepreneurial solutions to these challenges. From poverty to climate change, some of the most promising innovations that will shape the future of our world are driven by this rising group of social entrepreneurs. More and more often, we find that students themselves are becoming social entrepreneurs and creating innovative solutions while still in university.

Thus, in 2012, leading social entrepreneurs came together to craft a different vision for higher education. We developed WatsonU as a new university model specifically tailored and designed for next generation social entrepreneurs. We selected 20 promising 18-23 year old social entrepreneurs from across the world to join the inaugural class and during the first semester the students learned from a Time Magazine Hero of the Planet, a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace

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Prize, and a roster of mentors and social entrepreneurs in residence. Students can come to for either a semester program or a full Bachelor's degree through our collaboration with Lynn University. The outcome of the Watson experience is that students refine their idea for positive social change, receive a team of expert mentors to help them work through inevitable challenges, and are trained in key skills needed to carry forward their innovation from rapid prototyping to team building, empathy, creativity, grit, and fundraising.

Here are a few examples of the scholars and alumni of Watson:

**Tessa Zimmerman:** Tessa developed the ASSET model to help the 1 in 9 youth across the US (including herself) who suffer from severe anxiety. At Watson, Tessa has been hired by schools including the Denver School of Science and Technology (a top performing charter school) to implement the ASSET model, is being mentored by Terry McGraw, and recently signed a book contract.

**Melissa Diamond:** the granddaughter of a holocaust survivor, Melissa's organization, A Global Voice for Autism, helps the mothers of children with autism in Palestine and communities of Syrian refugees to learn how to best support their children. The model is affordable, yet has proven effective in supporting children with autism.

**Mahmud Johnson:** Mahmud started J-Palm and developed a new way to produce palm kernel oil in Liberia. He has created 76 jobs and a new market for a previously wasted resource (palm kernels). He recently received a \$150,000 grant from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and Tony Blair's Africa Governance Initiative to scale his model.

**Omotola Akinsola (Tola) and Madelle Mbong:** After meeting as roommates at Watson, Madelle and Tola merged their organizations to create JumpStart Academy Africa (JSA), which develops the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs in Nigeria and Cameroon (their home countries). JumpStart works with 350 students and has increased the annual income of their students by 300%. Madelle was recently featured in Forbes and Tola received a \$250,000 prize after being selected to join Who Deserves to Be a Millionaire Nigeria.

These Watson Scholars, 55 others from over 20 countries, have attended either the semester program or are earning their Bachelor degree for advancing the solutions they are passionate about - and they have done so without accruing debt. Watson provides them the space, the

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access to mentors, the training, and the community of supportive peers to develop projects and the skills to solve the challenges facing our world.

Watson's first campus is in Boulder, Colorado – a city full of entrepreneurship, nature, and passion. The vision is to create a network of campuses embedded in key cities across the world so that Watson scholars can study in the cities most relevant to their solutions and in turn, those cities will inform their education. Watson has been backed by leading funders including Ashoka, Echoing Green, Halloran Philanthropies, The Enlight Foundation, and received the 2016 Cordes Innovation Award at AshokaU for excellence and innovation in social entrepreneurship education.

As a result of this unexpected revolution, the educational experience of students is beginning to look very different. Maybe by the end of this decade education can emerge with a new purpose that will equip today's students to realize their dreams and solve the biggest challenges of the 21st Century.

Eric Glustrom, Founder and President  
Watson  
[eric@watsonuniversity.org](mailto:eric@watsonuniversity.org)  
[www.watsonuniversity.org](http://www.watsonuniversity.org)

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