What is social entrepreneurship?

“Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better.”

http://www.ashoka.org/social_entrepreneur

The mission of the Middlebury Center for Social Entrepreneurship is to be a world leader in social change and development.

Based on our conviction that social entrepreneurship education is integral to the 21st-century liberal arts, we offer students opportunities to reflect, to connect, to analyze, and to engage. Building on and complementing Middlebury’s commitment to educating students in the tradition of the liberal arts, our students learn to be effective agents of social change by reflecting on who they are, connecting with others, analyzing systemic challenges, and engaging the world around them. The center is designed to be a hub within a global network of schools, NGOs, government agencies, businesses, and foundations that share a commitment to creating 21st-century solutions.
Annual Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship

In January 2012, Middlebury launched the MCSE at its inaugural symposium. The symposium is designed to excite, inspire, and educate the Middlebury community about social entrepreneurship. At the inaugural symposium, the MCSE hosted Bill Drayton, CEO and Founder of Ashoka, Jacqueline Novogratz, CEO and Founder of the Acumen Fund, and 12 leading educators.

This first symposium was a springboard for many student innovations, including Sword and Plough (www.swordandplough.com), a new social enterprise conceived, designed, and launched this past year by Middlebury alumna, Emily Núñez ’12 (left).

At our second annual symposium, to be held January 24–26, 2013, we are excited to welcome Billy Parish, Majora Carter, and Bill McKibben as our main speakers, along with our workshop leaders Kenny Williams ’12, Edie Stone, Katie Sparkes ’10, Lisa Nitze, and Anke Wessels.

Undergraduate Fellowship Program

Fellowship recipients become a cohort during their sophomore year at Middlebury College. Over the next two-and-a-half years, they will learn collaboratively and give back to the community. The goals of this program are to extend the cohort’s exposure to opportunity, encourage humility and awareness of the complexities in trying to effect social change, and help students avoid isolated experiences as they learn from failures and successes.

The students are expected to integrate social entrepreneurship into academic work, pursue relevant summer experiences, and lead in social entrepreneurship activities on campus and beyond. In the fall of 2012, we welcomed our first cohort of six sophomores to the fellowship program.

Friday Speaker Series and MLab

Held during the academic year, this weekly gathering has two parts: a lunchtime talk by a member of the college community or a visitor and a collaborative “MLab.” The lecture series offers Middlebury students a variety of insights on social change, lessons from the field, and career paths in social entrepreneurship.

Following each talk, MLab provides a forum to continue the discussion from the speaker series, develop ideas, pitch projects, and consult with peer mentors about available resources and possible next steps.
Summer grants provide seed funding for teams of Middlebury College students to implement social change projects. In the grant program's pilot year, 23 groups applied for grants of which five were selected. The projects included developing a composting system in a local high school, training youth changemakers in Mexico, initiating GIS mapping in Rwanda to aid a grassroots health organization, helping street children in Africa, and creating insect-based food products to help at-risk populations in developing countries. The summer in the field was a challenging experience as the groups faced bureaucratic roadblocks or political issues, but proved to be rewarding as many of them felt they left a legacy of changemaking in the communities they worked in.

**LESSONS LEARNED from the field**

“I would like to think that we have put in something that can empower students at Vergennes Union High School—to know that an idea that they have can actually come to reality, and perhaps this will motivate more environmental action in the future and set a legacy for a strong environmental club.”

Eleni Polychroniadou '14 and Sam Koplinka-Loehr '13

“All four of us went into this program with our own personal baggage of previous experiences and expectations. However, we all had a common vision; we felt the need to reciprocate for the privileged education we have been receiving, expand our participants’ worldview, and share our passion for action with them.”

Andrea Cruz '14, Fernando Sandoval '15, Rebecca Hicks '15, and Krisztina Pjeczka '15

“The maps we are making will enable Gardens for Health International to plan their training, target families more effectively, organize transportation for community health workers and agricultural agents, and track progress. In the fall of 2012, we continued this work as an independent study to develop the model of our project and think about how we could make it scalable.”

Anna Clements '12.5 and Hannah Judge '12.5

“The best thing we did was shake up the town and make people realize that these [street] kids deserve some attention.”

Biructait Seyoum '13 and Evelyn Rotich '13

“The opportunity to work on a real-world project of our own has been one of the most educational endeavors we have undertaken here at Middlebury. From becoming cricket experts, to learning how to communicate effectively, to learning how to repair an electric motor, we have engaged all aspects of our liberal arts education.”

Alex Bea '12, Max Bacharach '14, Sebastian Schell '14, and Bjorn Peterson '14.5
The Middlebury Center for Social Entrepreneurship Vision Award is designed to recognize leadership and vision in the world of social entrepreneurship. Each year, the awards will honor the contributions of leaders who share a commitment to the ideals embedded in the center’s goal of preparing individuals to lead a life of social change. Recipients of the MCSE Vision Award include:

- Bill Drayton 2012 Recipient
- Jacqueline Novogratz 2012 Recipient
- Billy Parish 2013 Recipient
- Majora Carter 2013 Recipient

Learn More

Bread Loaf Forum on Social Entrepreneurship in the Liberal Arts

In June 2012, we hosted a forum on social entrepreneurship in the liberal arts at Middlebury College’s Bread Loaf campus. Staff and faculty from 17 colleges and universities gathered for three days to discuss goals for transforming their institutions. From June 10–13, 2013 we will host a forum titled Social Entrepreneurship in the Liberal Arts: What’s Working and What Isn’t? The focus of this forum will be to discuss lessons learned and will be an opportunity for institutions to learn from one another’s best practices.

High School Program

We are working with three local high school partners to develop programs for students throughout Addison County, Vermont. These students will participate in our January 2013 Symposium. By fall 2013, we aspire to have resources for high school facilitators and to award grants annually to high school students at selected schools worldwide—a program in which current Middlebury students will act as active mentors.

Ashoka and International Opportunities

In September 2011, Middlebury was selected by Ashoka as a Changemaker Campus. This designation is offered to leading institutions in social entrepreneurship education. In close partnership with Ashoka, we hope to foster a long-term relationship between the MCSE and Middlebury’s many schools abroad by establishing social entrepreneurship opportunities for study-abroad and local students.

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For more information, visit http://mcse.middlebury.edu or contact Heather Neuwirth ’08, Associate Director for Operations and Development, Middlebury Center for Social Entrepreneurship, at 802.443.5961, hneuwirth@middlebury.edu, or at 118 S. Main St., Middlebury, VT 05753.