January 2020

The Ballard Center

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Marriott Student Review is a student journal created and published as a project for the Writing for Business Communications course at Brigham Young University (BYU). The views expressed in Marriott Student Review are not necessarily endorsed by BYU or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**Recommended Citation**
Available at: [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol3/iss3/3](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol3/iss3/3)

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Cover Page Footnote
THE BALLARD CENTER

Doing Good. Better.

BY DANICA NUSINK AND ALYSSA CLARK
What social problem keeps you up at night? When you watch the news, what do you wish you could change? If you were to change one thing about the world, what would it be? Do you know where to start? The Ballard Center is BYU’s center for social impact, and it aims to help students learn how to solve social problems.

While studying the roots and manifestations of racism, sexism, and class inequality through the sociology program at BYU, Alyssa Clark started to feel, well, sad. She recognized that understanding why problems exist in society is important, but she was weighed down by learning about the problems without learning about how to solve them. And then a friend recommended she take an optimistic-sounding class called “Do Good. Better.” “That class opened the door to the Ballard Center for me, which changed my entire college experience and shaped my future,” she says. “I learned that there is a community of people trying to solve social problems, and how I can use skills I am learning in my major to contribute to finding and creating solutions.” The Ballard Center connected Alyssa with students, classes, internships, and other opportunities to use her skills to make a difference in the world – all while being a student at BYU.

The aims of BYU state: “BYU should produce careful readers, prayerful thinkers, and active participants in solving family, professional, religious, and social problems.” The Ballard Center focuses on helping BYU students achieve this aim. In the 2018-2019 academic year, the center hosted over 14,000 student experiences with students from 95 majors. These students provided over 55,000 unpaid hours to social innovators around the world. What makes the Ballard Center so great? Why do so many students spend their time working with the Ballard Center?

In describing his experience with the Ballard Center, BYU economics student, Juan Camargo said, “I no longer have to sit and watch as people throughout the world suffer. I am empowered to make a difference, and, moreover, have gained the skills to Do Good. Better.” Marketing student, Will Pham, explained, “The Ballard Center has taught me how to be an advocate and influencer for the causes I care about. It has taught me how to make a difference. In fact, it’s taught me what making a difference actually looks like. Ultimately, the center has completely changed my college experience.”

History of the Ballard Center

The Ballard Center was started in 2003 by Todd Manwaring and was named after Melvin J. Ballard. Ballard promoted and implemented self-reliance initiatives during the Great Depression. When Wall Street crashed and sent the United States into a downward spiral, unemployment rates soared to 25 percent. Utah’s unemployment rate was even higher, peaking at 35 percent. During the April 1936 General Conference, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints launched a welfare program. Elder Melvin J. Ballard’s task was to get competing church programs to work cohesively in one church program, and to create new programs to help more people get out of poverty. Elder Ballard was the current President M. Russell Ballard’s grandfather.
Elder Melvin J. Ballard.

Ballard developed a system to divide church membership into thirteen welfare regions. Each region was given a storehouse with resources like food, clothing, and other necessities. Local bishops would work with their members to determine what clothing, food, and house goods they needed. In exchange for supplies, members of the Church were assigned to work at the storehouse in various capacities. This system allowed people to be self-reliant by working for what they received, and the welfare system helped meet their basic needs. Ballard's efforts to scale the program helped tens of thousands of people.

Just like Melvin J. Ballard, social innovators create new solutions to societal problems. Social innovators revitalize systems and fix organizations. No matter what issue, system, or strategy they use, social innovators seek to make the world a better place. Following Melvin J. Ballard’s example, the Ballard Center works to help students understand how they can have a positive social impact and solve social problems.

Becoming a Changemaker Campus

BYU is one of only 45 universities designated by Ashoka U as Changemaker Campuses worldwide. Ashoka U, which is a subset of the international nonprofit organization Ashoka, is an initiative set forth to promote social entrepreneurship in universities. As part of their work, Ashoka U identifies and recognizes universities around the globe as Changemaker Campuses. In order to be designated a Changemaker Campus, a university must have the following:

1. An institutional commitment to building the field of social innovation education,
2. Evidence of strong student, faculty, and administrator interest in social entrepreneurship,
3. Support from president and/or provost, and active championship from one or multiple deans on campus,
4. A programmatic initiative already underway around social entrepreneurship: initiative, major, minor, certificate, center, or a variant thereof, ensuring an “institutional home” for social entrepreneurship,
5. A mandated Change Leader accountable for the partnership from one year to the next, with senior-level support and commitment to this as a multi-year initiative, and
6. A commitment to developing a long-term funding strategy to keep social entrepreneurship as a core part of the institution's offerings.

BYU was named a Changemaker Campus for its ability to produce influential students who make a difference on a local and a global stage. BYU received the Changemaker Campus title through the efforts of the Ballard Center. The center is the largest university social impact effort in the world.

To help students from all over campus learn the skills of social innovation, the Ballard Center invites them to participate in a variety of different programs. The programs at the Ballard Center orient around four main focuses.

1. **Sustainable.** Social impact should be sustainable or be able to be maintained over time.
2. **Innovative.** This means that it is better or more effective than previous products, ideas, or ways of doing things—and that the effort becomes the new standard for working on the respective social issue.
3. **Impactful.** Unlike traditional corporate views of impact correlating to amount of money earned, the Ballard Center focuses more on the social outcomes and impact that they or their projects have on solving a problem.
4. **Replicable.** A socially innovative solution has more impact if it can be replicated over and over again in many different places.

The Ballard Center helps students learn how to implement these focuses to solve social problems by offering a variety of programs and classes for undergraduate and graduate students. Some program offerings include classes, internships, and ventures.
Because many of the social problems in the world today are more complicated than they seem, learning about a social problem and understanding it is the first step to solving it. Shelby Hunt, director of the Ballard Brief program, says, “We didn’t expect how empowering writing a Ballard Brief could be for the students. So many of our students have gained confidence in their ability to think critically about complex problems and the potential solutions.” By understanding the problem and what is being done (the good and the bad) to fix the problem, progress can be made to come up with a better solution for the social issue.

Internships

The Ballard Center also offers students experiential learning opportunities through two on-campus internship programs: (1) Social Innovation Projects (SIP) and (2) Corporate Social Impact Projects (CSIP). In both of these programs, students are placed on teams of 3-5 students and partnered with an organization to complete a semester-long project. Past projects have worked on issues like recycling, human trafficking, immigration, and environmental conservation.

Juan Camargo, who grew up watching the displacement and abduction of millions of people on the evening news in Colombia, was an intern with Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT) through the Social Innovation Projects program at the Ballard Center. Because of his background, Juan was determined to stop human trafficking. His team was given the task to help the U.S.-based nonprofit expand their organization from the U.S. to Mexico. “On 5 December 2017 our team was excited to see news coverage of TAT and a Mexican nonprofit signing an agreement to start the program in Mexico City,” Juan says, “Being involved with SIP and the Ballard Center has helped me find training and resources to make an impact. It was remarkable to make a difference in Mexico without stepping foot off campus.”
For students who want to get involved with corporate social responsibility there is the option of the Corporate Social Impact Projects. Corporate Social Responsibility is the process where businesses ethically build sustainable livelihoods for employees, surrounding communities, and society at large. This on-campus internship program partners student teams with top companies such as Microsoft, Cisco, LEGO, and doTERRA. Students have the opportunity to work directly with corporate social impact leaders and directors of world-class organizations to solve social issues and gain project management, teamwork, and communication experience.

Students who participate in the internship offerings at the Ballard Center have the opportunity to make a real, immediate impact, all while working on campus and gaining experience to put on their resumes.

**Ventures**

The Ballard Center also encourages and supports student social entrepreneurs through the Social Venture Academy and Social Venture Challenges. These programs provide student social entrepreneurs with coaching and resources to make their socially minded businesses a reality.

Students with their own, novel ideas for social ventures can participate in the Social Venture Academy (the Academy). This program provides mentorship and funding to increase the chance of a social venture’s success. Student teams are mentored by judges and navigators and are offered funding as they demonstrate that their organization has the potential to be sustainable, replicable, and impactful.

The Social Venture Challenges are similar to the Academy, but students are provided with a social problem and a challenge to solve. Students are then mentored through the process of developing a solution to the challenge. Currently, the Social Venture Challenges focuses on two global problems: maternal/newborn health and women’s health. Teams of students work to come up with a solution to the challenge for the individual social problem and successful teams can earn up to $24,000 that goes towards implementing their proposed solution in country. All participating teams have the chance to receive funding as benchmarks are met.

One recent and intriguing enterprises to come out of the Ballard Center is Speedy Tuk Tuk which tackles the problem of poverty traps in Madagascar. In Madagascar, three-wheeled automobiles called tuk tuks go from place to place picking up and dropping off people like a taxi service. “Unfortunately, many tuk tuk drivers throughout the world are stuck living in poverty because they must pay rental fees to wealthier tuk tuk renters,” one of the founders of Speedy Tuk Tuk, Jason Koncurat, explains. To help Malagasy tuk tuk drivers break out of rental poverty, Speedy Tuk Tuk has developed a rent-to-own business model. So far, they have helped 129 drivers work towards owning their own tuk tuks, helping them potentially quadruple their livelihoods. Personally, Jason says that, “Learning about the social innovation model and roles in Do Good. Better. and receiving mentoring and funding from the Social Venture Academy revived my purpose as a changemaker.”

Other social ventures like Speedy Tuk Tuk have come out of the Ballard Center. A few examples are:

- EcoScraps which takes unused but deteriorating food from grocery and big box stores and turns it into organic compost,
- Recyclops which has found a way to bring recycling to rural areas of America, and
- SimpleCitizen which has created a software that resembles TurboTax to help immigrants through the US green card process, making it easier, quicker, and cheaper to apply for a US green card or citizenship.

These and many other enterprises and organizations come from students in the Ballard Center receiving support and funding from center resources.
By taking classes, doing internships, and participating in ventures and other Ballard Center programs, students learn how to use their skills to solve social problems. Because of the Ballard Center, BYU is leading the world for universities and social innovation programs. Thousands of students each semester take advantage of the resources of the Ballard Center to gain the knowledge and skills to create social impact. As the Ballard Center grows, so does its influence and ability to change the world we live in to make it a better place.

Footnotes