Student Entrepreneur Tackles Social Isolation with New Platform

Brett Schultz seeks to enhance campus engagement with College Connector

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Brett Schultz ‘26 meets with his team at the Peter T. Paul Entrepreneurship Center to work on the development of College Connector, a social media and e-commerce platform that he is aiming to launch at UNH in the fall of 2024.

Could a back-to-basics social media approach like the original Facebook help University of New Hampshire students feel connected?

That’s what Brett Schultz ’26 hopes as he works to launch his social media and e-commerce platform, College Connector.

Schultz, majoring in business administration with options in finance and entrepreneurial studies at the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics (https://paulcollege.unh.edu/), is developing the platform to help ease students' social, emotional and financial concerns.

A recent Gallup (https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/512618/almost-quarter-world-feels-lonely.aspx) survey found that one in four people worldwide feel lonely, with the highest rates reported among young adults ages 19-29. According to Schultz, these statistics, coupled with the stresses some students feel from being away from home and the lingering social impacts of COVID-19, enhance the urgency to improve student engagement.

“Coming out of COVID-19, we’ve realized that overall student engagement is down, and we’re trying to find a way to fix it that’s better than current alternatives,” Schultz says. “I want to build that sense of community for incoming students and help them find their spot on the UNH campus and take advantage of high-impact opportunities.”
College Connector would help address some of these concerns because UNH students could connect exclusively with each other on the platform while joining specific interest groups where they can chat with like-minded individuals, according to Schultz. Campus clubs and organizations could also promote activities and resources on the platform.

Schultz points out that traditional social media once offered exclusive communities like those College Connector would provide but had to adapt to changing business models and advertising methods.

“With traditional social media or like attempts at student engagement apps, we’ve found that it’s an ingenuine solution … what we’re trying to do is build a genuine solution that solves the problem of social isolation while also having a sound business model,” Schultz says. “We’re not trying to reinvent the wheel; we’re trying to change the model.”

To be financially sustainable, College Connector would utilize a marketplace feature where students can sell textbooks, school supplies, furniture and more. Schultz notes the marketplace could also be a good revenue stream for students, alleviating financial stress.

Schultz aims to fully deploy College Connector on the UNH campus by the fall of 2024. His team is also entering the UNH Paul J. Holloway Prize Competition. College Connector recently won $2,750 for being the most financially sustainable solution at the NH Social Venture Innovation Challenge. Schultz has used the funding to hire four additional developers to improve and grow the platform.

Schultz envisions extending College Connector to other college campuses and has visited different schools to assemble a team of student ambassadors. The aim is to establish a structure where students manage each school’s page continuously.

The development of the College Connector platform originated from Schultz’s participation in the Paul Entrepreneurship Center’s Maurice Prize for Innovation Competition, which he won. Schultz was recently selected for BostInno’s annual 25 Under 25 list through his work at the Entrepreneurship Center. BostInno is a digital media outlet that covers startups, technology and innovation.

Joshua Cyr, interim director of the Peter T. Paul Entrepreneurship Center, said he’s impressed with the amount of effort Schultz has put into College Connector.

“The challenge with such a technical idea is that if you don’t have the technical knowledge to build it, you either have to learn it or you need to partner with experts,” Cyr says. “Brett decided to do both. He started teaching himself how to build websites and how to install plugins and has been doing research. At the same time, he’s been having great conversations with students to work on the project with him.”

The ECenter is a place where many new ideas are hatched and discussed, and Cyr advises when needed. He says the evolution of College Connector has been rapid and exciting to see.

“While the core ideas remain the same the approach and specifics evolve as Brett has spent more time on it. He has met with many students from multiple colleges, mentors, competition judges, etc., and continues to do so while synthesizing those varied and sometimes even contradictory bits of feedback into his own vision and plan for the startup’s future,” Cyr says.

Beyond College Connector and his business studies, Schultz is a dual major in sustainability and has been highly active at UNH. He said the ability to study entrepreneurship and a dual major in sustainability made UNH stand out.

“Not all schools have one of those programs, let alone both,” he says. “I see entrepreneurship as a tool of problem-solving, and when you think about sustainability-related problems, there’s a bunch; that’s why I think the Social Venture Innovation Challenge is great. There are so many systemic social, economic, and environmental problems in this world, and there are so many niche ones too, like social isolation, that I think can be solved with business serving as a mechanism and an overall force for good.”
UNH Celebrates Students and Alumni at Annual Social Venture Innovation Challenge