



INNOVATION REIGNS



The Principal's Innovation Fund is paving the way for novel initiatives conceived by faculty and staff that harness creative and transformational thinking

BY KELLY JONES



PRINCIPAL'S INNOVATION FUND: A PRIMER

Launched in 2018, the Principal's Innovation Fund provides support and financial resources for employees of the College to explore new approaches to teaching, learning and problem-solving. Faculty and staff are encouraged to submit proposals for projects and programs that enhance the student experience and emphasize collaboration, engagement and operational excellence across the school community.

A range of exciting initiatives has been put into practice since the fund's inception, with diverse areas of focus that include AI and VR projects to promote creativity and create efficiencies, strategies to tackle digital distractions for students, and initiatives that foster mindfulness and the school's value of pluralism.

Says Principal Sam McKinney, "This fund was borne out of a series of conversations. What could we do beyond professional development to support faculty and staff pursuing growth, passions, and areas of expertise that benefit our students and the school as a whole?"





“An intentional framework for high impact”

From Jim LaPlante
Executive Director, Information and Innovation

Innovation is a key component of UCC’s strategic directions, and this has been supported over the past six years through the implementation of projects through the Principal’s Innovation Fund. The fund was established to improve what we do at the College by strategically introducing something new. By addressing innovation both in academics and operational processes, the fund aimed to dismantle barriers to progress, nurturing a culture of creativity and future-forward thinking.

The Principal’s Innovation Fund offers an intentional framework for defining and prioritizing projects that have the potential to highly impact our institution. From the initial stage of identifying problems and gathering evidence to support them, the program fosters an environment where stakeholders can ask fundamental questions: What problem are we trying to solve? What approaches can we take? How do we define success? And what resources will be required?

It is essential to note that innovation is not solely centred around technology. While embracing technological advancements, the Principal’s Innovation Fund encompasses a broader scope, integrating a range of creative and transformative ideas. Over the years, the program has evolved, inspiring individuals to bring their diverse perspectives and ideas to the table.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic briefly impeded progress, the Principal’s Innovation Fund is once again operating at full capacity, empowering employees to initiate and drive meaningful change. The program has nurtured an ecosystem of continuous learning, with participants often engaging in multiple projects over several years. The insights gained from one initiative spark ideas for further exploration and innovation, amplifying the impact of the fund’s efforts.

This year, several overarching themes have emerged, including leveraging artificial intelligence to streamline efficiencies, cultivating inclusive spaces, and extending our message beyond our institution. These focus areas reflect our commitment to adapt, evolve and remain at the forefront of educational and institutional excellence.

Project Spotlight

SOFTWARE IMPROVES ONBOARDING EXPERIENCES

The College’s talented faculty and staff are integral to the delivery of transformational learning experiences for students. Onboarding new employees has its complexities, and involves multiple steps and different departments across the school. Manager of People and Culture **Timea Godor**, supported by Associate Director of Information and Innovation **Kathleen Peak**, struck out to find a way to make the system more efficient and streamlined. ClearCompany— an award-winning applicant-tracking software organization that enables users to optimize HR initiatives including onboarding — seemed like the ideal solution.



Timea Godor



Kathleen Peak

The Philosophy

ClearCompany’s software improves the recruiting process by automating common tasks and maximizing applicants’ buy-in. The program leverages text, video and scheduling technology through all stages of recruitment. Onboarding becomes more seamless and efficient, with automation simplifying many time-consuming processes, helping ensure efficiency and consistency across the cycle.

The Outcome

Says Peak, “New faculty and staff can fill out all the necessary forms online, hiring managers are assigned tasks to monitor, and departments such as IT and security are notified easily about preparing computers, accounts, keys and access for new employees. Automated reminders are sent so that items don’t slip through the cracks and, when new employees arrive for their first day, they have everything they need to be successful.”

Says Godor, “This system cuts out all the back-and-forth emails to candidates, managers and departments. Information is consolidated in one place versus a number of documents and spreadsheets that need to be shared with others. It will reduce the time to pre-board new hires and will provide step-by-step tasks for all individuals to simplify the process. For HR, the gift of time is given back, as they are the hub between individuals both inside and outside the organization.”

“The fund is adapting to the needs and interests of those across our school community. Faculty and staff are capitalizing on opportunities that arise, and possibilities that they imagine. I’m excited to see where this continuing journey takes us.”

–Principal McKinney



Ryan Archer



Anne Kaye



Joanna Martin

Project Spotlight

IMMERSIVE VR TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS UCC CLASSROOMS

The Principal’s Innovation Fund has invested in multiple projects that focus on the incorporation of VR technology to enhance student learning and creative expression at the College. **Ryan Archer**, tech integrator and design teacher, and **Anne Kaye**, art and design teacher, have been investigating how adding a VR interface to 3-D art can heighten students’ experiences. For this Principal’s Innovation Fund project, Year 9 media design students were asked to select one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a starting point for the creation of a 3-D superhero or supervillain character, using an Oculus Rift and Tilt Brush to bring their character to life in 3-D.

A second Principal’s Innovation Fund project focusing on VR, spearheaded by Prep School tech integrator **Joanna Martin**, focuses on enhancing SK to Year 5 student learning through the incorporation of VR goggles in the classroom. Students in Year 1 “explored” the castle, gardens and tower featured in *Rapunzel* after reading the book together in class. In Year 3, students created blueprints for community design, and Year 4 students navigated the International Space Station landscape. Some of the Year 5s created digital games for their Primary Years Programme Exhibition projects.

The Philosophy

These VR programs share a common philosophy of using VR technology to transform students’ learning experiences. Archer and Kaye’s 3-D art program seeks to revolutionize the art-creation process, allowing students and spectators to interact with artwork in a simulated 3-D environment. With Martin’s VR program, students learn actively and have multisensory experiences that cater to diverse learning styles. Says Martin, “One of the goals in implementing this technology is to empower students to create rather than just consume content.” Both programs inspire students to become active creators, promoting deeper engagement and offering new perspectives.

The Outcome

The VR 3-D art program has potential for many new and exciting projects at the College. Says Archer, “We are always looking for ways to enhance the learning experience using different and engaging tools. One idea that came out of this experience was how we might use VR to design 3-D products that could then be exported to 3-D printable files and realized in the physical world.”

Says Martin of the VR goggles project, “This immersive technology is transforming classroom experiences and is bound to have a significant positive impact on student learning and engagement.” Students are showing a keen interest in mastering skills in this new dimension. Martin adds, “They are always eager to get the cart of goggles in their classrooms and explore new worlds, and even more excited when these worlds have been created by their peers!” 🧢

ON THE ROSTER: 2023-24 PROJECTS

- ↘ **Becoming a paperless music department**
 Tony Gomes, UPPER SCHOOL ARTS AND MUSIC DEPARTMENT CHAIR
- ↘ **Spreading “making” into non-design courses**
 Lynda Yearwood, DESIGN AND COMPUTER SCIENCE FACULTY
- ↘ **Development of a University Counselling Office communication app**
 David Hanna, DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING
- ↘ **Automated classroom attendance**
 Lisa Francolini, DIRECTOR, PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND DATA ANALYTICS
- ↘ **Highlighting the creative process in Primary Years Programme art for families and UCC peers**
 Monika Kastelic, PREP ARTS CO-COORDINATOR
- ↘ **Inclusive language commons at the Prep**
 Peter Labancz, PREP FRENCH FACULTY
- ↘ **Using AI to support efficiencies in workflows**
 Patti Cawker, BLUES SHOP MANAGER
- ↘ **Developing AI tool to support timetable development**
 Joe Smith, UPPER SCHOOL ASSISTANT HEAD
- ↘ **Building a culture of data-driven decision-making in the student life and wellbeing department**
 Alejandro Adler, DEAN, STUDENT LIFE AND WELLBEING

