

DREAM, BUILD GREENSBORO

INNOVATION AT UNCG ISN'T JUST ON CAMPUS. TOMORROW'S HIGH-ENERGY ECONOMY IS GERMINATING AT PLACES LIKE HQ GREENSBORO AND THINKHOUSEU.

STEPHANIE MCGILL, A MARINE CORPS VETERAN and UNCG business administration major, calls herself a hands-on learner. Classroom learning, she says, crystallizes when she can apply it in real-world situations.

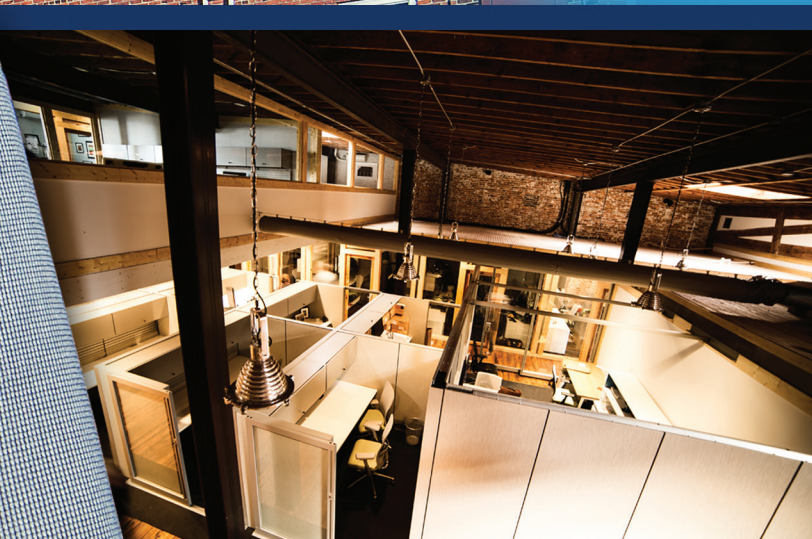
Through ThinkHouseU, an entrepreneurial, residential program near campus, McGill takes classes, meets with mentors, and trades ideas with other students who want to launch scalable businesses. ThinkHouseU, a national pilot, is a partnership between UNCG and Forward Impact. The Raleigh-based organization supports community-based strategies to develop high-impact entrepreneurs.

Justin Streuli, director of the N.C. Entrepreneurship Center at UNCG, calls ThinkHouseU “a bridge between the campus community and the startup community.”

HQ Greensboro is steps away from brewpubs, galleries, and eclectic South Elm Street. Modeled on a similar Forward Impact project in Raleigh, every element of HQ Greensboro is designed to stimulate interaction between members and the city's business community. Think of it as a hothouse for entrepreneurs.



ALL LOVE YOUR WORK



On any given day you will find one of UNCG's economic ambassadors at HQ Greensboro. Walk in to bounce ideas off Streuli, Director of the Office of Innovation Commercialization Staton Noel, or Associate Vice Chancellor for Economic Engagement Bryan Toney.

As a ThinkHouseU Fellow, McGill automatically has membership at HQ Greensboro and access to these resources.

McGill is a student-entrepreneur. Her Kova Coffee Co. sells cold-brew coffee kits online, allowing her to test concepts and practices with little risk. Her goal: a storefront coffee shop in Greensboro.

"Being able to meet people who can help me with ideas and support is the biggest thing ThinkHouseU has done for me," she says. "And having access to HQ Greensboro has been a lifesaver. It's like being in the workforce as opposed to being in the classroom. It tells you whether you're cut out for what you're doing."

ThinkHouseU and HQ Greensboro are fundamental to UNCG's strategy to reach into the business community and engage. UNCG's goal is to attract students, leverage faculty, foster entrepreneurship, retain talent after graduation, and spur economic development.

Associate Vice Chancellor Bryan Toney is the sparkplug behind ThinkHouseU and HQ Greensboro. He introduced Greensboro entrepreneur and developer Andy Zimmerman to Forward Impact and HQ Raleigh. Zimmerman saw the HQ concept's potential, assembled a team, and went to work. The 11,000-square-foot innovation space opened last August.

Some HQ Greensboro members rent workspace, which ranges from cubicles to offices large enough for eight or more. A co-working membership, the most affordable type, provides access to the common area where members, visitors, and staff chat, critique, and create. The commons resembles a coffee shop by design, and the java is free.

HQ Greensboro quickly became an epicenter for entrepreneurial activity. "There's constant energy," says Cindy Thompson, launch director for the Global Opportunity (GO) Center. "People want to come here."

The GO Center, to be located downtown, will leverage Greensboro's

strengths as a center for foreign investments and exports with the city's international population, higher education assets, businesses, and economic development interests. The center is the nation's first public-private partnership devoted to global engagement. "No other city or state has something like this," Thompson says.

The GO Center concept won 2015's Strong Cities, Strong Communities Challenge, sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The \$500,000 prize plus matching funds of \$1.5 million will provide a five-year operating budget to the center.

Toney worked with colleagues from UNCG, NC A&T State University, and several other public and private organizations to formulate the GO Center proposal. Collaboration with other campuses and building alliances with the business community are the new norm at UNCG.

"Everything we do is about connecting and collaborating," he says. "When we do that well, new opportunities are created and everybody wins."

InnovateNC is another new gear in the city's economic engine. Greensboro is one of five communities chosen to participate in this two-year learning collaborative to spark innovation-centered economic development. The Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University launched InnovateNC with nine other statewide partners.

Greensboro's proposal focuses on creating a "culture of inclusive innovation" to energize economic development. All of the city's colleges and universities are involved.

"UNCG is helping to provide some of the critical direction to develop Greensboro's InnovateNC program," says Deborah Hooper, chief operating officer for the Greensboro Partnership, an economic development organization.

Her co-chair for InnovateNC is UNCG's Bryan Toney.

*By Tom Lassiter • Photography by Mike Dickens
Learn more at <http://research.uncg.edu>*

LEFT TO RIGHT Individual working spaces available at HQ. | UNCG Assistant Professor of Political Science Allison Bramwell, an expert on community economic development with a particular focus on inclusive innovation in mid-sized cities, is helping Greensboro's InnovateNC develop its strategic direction and policy ideas. | Stop by UNCG's offices at HQ to meet Director of Innovation Commercialization Staton Noel, N.C. Entrepreneurship Center Director Justin Streuli, or AVC Bryan Toney and launch your big idea. | UNCG also maintains space at HQ for spinoff companies to conduct business.

