OPEN

VENTUREWELL™
idea to impact

MARCH 21-23, 2023
ALEXANDRIA, VA

Event Report

Connecting for Impact

The VentureWell OPEN 2023 conference took place March 21-23 in Alexandria, VA and brought together hundreds of faculty, administrators, staff, and students from the STEM fields to share innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) experiences and research, learn best practices, and forge dynamic new relationships. This year's conference marked the return of our community gathering in-person—for the first time since 2019—to engage with the tools, trends, and new strategies that will advance I&E education and prepare entrepreneurs with the skills they need to launch their ventures and ultimately create social impact.

As a result of attending OPEN...

86%
of attendees made new connections or strengthened their connections

75%
intend to stay in touch with their new colleagues

72%
are likely to collaborate with others from different organizations or institutions in the next 6-12 months

OPEN 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

331 individuals **registered for OPEN 2023**

7,000+ **unique visitors to the OPEN webpage** between September 2022 and March 2023

95,360+ **social impressions** from sponsor shared content

35 **Sessions** offered at **OPEN 2023**

84% of **attendees** said the conference **fulfilled their reasons** for attending

115 **Presenters spoke** at OPEN 2023

Top 3 organization types by attendee

78%: US Higher Education Institutions

10%: Business/industry

7%: Philanthropic & nonprofit

Top 3 organizational roles by attendee

39%: Faculty (tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure track)

15%: Higher education administrator

14%: Student

Top conference aspects that drove satisfaction

- Networking
- Learning new content

Pre-conference Workshops

The convening opened with three pre-conference workshops: **Inclusive Innovation: A Forum for Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Leaders**, during which participants explored how to embed inclusive innovation into strategy, programs, and policies; the **Innovation Futures Fellowship** workshop, where VentureWell Course & Program grantees delved into the Universal Design for Learning educational framework and equity-centered design as tools for fostering belonging in higher education settings; and the **Reimagining STEM I&E by Centering DEI** workshop, which gathered STEM I&E DEI experts from underrepresented groups to design a new vision for STEM I&E that will be welcoming, comfortable, engaging, safe, and inspiring for all.

> "I appreciated the shift to HOW to address inclusion in I&E and WHAT we should do—not just WHO is impacted and why it's essential.
>
> – *OPEN 2023 attendee*

Conference Program

From highly immersive sessions to a mix of networking opportunities that ranged from content-rich and topically focused to fun and informal, OPEN 2023 once again proved why it is the premier innovation and entrepreneurship experience in higher education.

OPEN 2023 kicked off with an engaging and interactive keynote from Raja Schaar, IDSA, Program Director and Assistant Professor of Product Design at Drexel University, exploring ways to make space for vulnerability, authenticity, and humanity during uncertain times. Subsequent keynotes throughout the conference continued to captivate and engage attendees, offering a deep dive into the federal policy landscape and building entrepreneurial ecosystems; advancing racial equity in higher education; and an interactive, trans-disciplinary, and nature-inspired exercise to engage teams in sustainability.

This year's conference featured 35 dynamic and interactive breakout sessions encompassing a range of leading-edge content in higher education innovation & entrepreneurship, as well as a selection of hand-curated foundational topics for those new to the field.

Top Areas of Interest (indicated during registration)

• Academic Impact/Student Experience in the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Space

• Institutional Impact and Change

• Off-Campus/Community Engagement

Most Highly Rated OPEN Sessions

• An Unlikely Teaching Experiment Led to Our Most Successful Course Ever: A 100% Asynchronous I&E Course That's 100% Experiential Learning

• Leading Campus Innovation with LEGO SERIOUS PLAY

• Designing and Running Effective Mentor Programs

• F*ck Ideas: How to Innovate After the Failure of Ideation–A Workshop and Discussion on a New Approach to Engaged Innovation and Entrepreneurship

> **I find OPEN to be a close-knit community of practice with great opportunities to forge connections for future collaborations, more so than other I&E conferences I attend."** *– OPEN 2023 attendee*

Sustainable Practice Impact Award

The Sustainable Practice Impact Award and Plenary honored Dr. Sylvia Robles, Assistant Professor of Practice at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship (RCVCOBE).

The award, presented in partnership with The Lemelson Foundation, honors individuals, companies, or institutions that have made an exceptional contribution toward developing clean technologies, implementing sustainable practices in their businesses, or providing sustainability-focused educational opportunities to university students.

> **" Our 2023 awardee is a visionary entrepreneur, educator, researcher, and advocate of humane-innovation-sustainable-based entrepreneurship and community engagement."**
>
> — *Cindy Cooper,*
> *Senior Program Officer,*
> *The Lemelson Foundation*

Read more about Sylvia's story at
venturewell.org/sylvia-robles

Teaching Tooolkit Poster Session

This year's Teaching Toolkit poster session, held at the US Patent and Trademark Offices, was a poster session reimagined. During this 90-minute, reception-style session, presenters discussed their teaching techniques with participants, using a poster as a visual aid. Attendees cast their vote for the "most likely to adopt" and "most innovative" teaching approaches.

> " The speakers were passionate and helpful. I also felt that people were generous in sharing their ideas, material, and help."
>
> *– OPEN 2023 attendee*

Most Likely to Adopt:

An Unlikely Teaching Experiment Led to Our Most Successful Course Ever: 100% Asynchronous I&E Course That's 100% Experiential Learning

Presenters:
Dean Chang
Brooke Smith
University of Maryland

Most Innovative:

Innovation in Scrubs: What Can We Learn From How Nurses innovate on the Job?

Presenters:
Jeana M. Holt
AkkeNeel Talsma
Ilya Avdeev
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

OPENminds

Every year our OPEN conference concludes with the OPENminds Innovator Showcase–a signature event celebrating the work of VentureWell E-Team Program grantees. Each student team presents their innovation and practices their pitch with hundreds of OPEN attendees, who then invest up to $3 million "Venture Bucks" in the team whose invention they find most promising.

Audience Choice Prize:
READI
$5,000 prize

READI's venture is a tech-enabled workforce training platform that re-skills workers with only a high school diploma to close the skills gap for the underemployed or unemployed.

Sustainability Prize:
Easeebot
$2,000 prize

Easeebot's solution, a drone that safely and noninvasively auto-generates 3D models to diagnose building issues using advanced computer vision and AI techniques, aims to lower inspection costs, increase safety, and generate higher-quality reports than current diagnostic tests, changing the game for building owners.
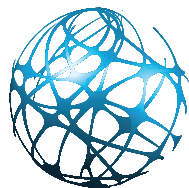
IMPACT Center ChangemakerTech Award:
Acorn Genetics
$1,000 prize

Acorn Genetics has developed a low-cost, at-home DNA testing kit that enables users to privately test for genetic conditions without any data privacy concerns.

We deeply appreciate our sponsors, whose generous support makes this conference possible.

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improving lives through invention

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