BTU'S THIRD MISSION

POTENTIAL AND ACTIONS RELATED TO POPULARIZING KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER WITHIN UNIVERSITY

About the University– Building Potential for Knowledge and Technology Transfer

Business and Technology University is a relevantly young institution in Georgia (established in 2016), specifically focused on teaching two disciplines **Business and Technologies** using innovative teaching strategies for better student and stakeholder engagement. BTU's portfolio displays BA level programs, Masters, PhD and international double degree diploma programs and equally importantly, high-quality education infrastructure. The university curricula emphasize application of information technologies and effective digital practices as the key tool to achieve the quality education, motivate and empower competitive work-force for both – local and international markets.

The University's third mission is the shared agenda among all organizational units. Multiple activities, directly relevant to the third mission, are ongoing:

- Popularizing the notion and potential of **technology transfer** among Georgia's academic community;
- Working on measures to support the third mission implementation within BTU and beyond;
- Facilitating a dialogue between university, industry, government and society.
- Advocating for **relevance** – transforming knowledge into expertise and making sure that the generated knowledge meet the needs of the real-world.

It is fair to say that the university has established its societal mission to go **beyond the classroom** and deliver quality education to wider society. To bring more contribution to societies – to public and private sector - by producing in-**demand competences**, preparing competitive graduates, facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and delivering social impact to societies.

BTU's strategy to serve the society and address the societal challenges is reflected in its mission – to contribute to the social and economic development of the country –realized in its organizational **structure and initiatives beyond the classroom**.

This article focuses on showcasing the three units: **Development and International relations Office, Entrepreneurship center and Career Center** – their role and services in enhancing **BTU's third mission**. The three administrative units are in constant communication with the employers, private sector representatives and donor institutions across the country to ensure **the positive feedback loop** - identify the needs, opportunities and issues that could **impact** learning processes, demonstrate responsiveness and commitment to improvement. Focus group discussions, reflections in the syllabi, participation in the job fairs and delivering workshops by company representatives are among the endeavors implemented by BTU to engage private sector representatives and students in the learning and teaching environment.

BTU's Career Development center – its services and platform for cooperation – ensure active communication with students and alumni: provides trainings, preparation for job interviews and participation in career fairs. With this purpose the university cooperates with more than 100 companies and disseminates information about 700 vacancies annually. As a result, the university boasts its employment statistics, which is 60% of employment rate among BA students and 90% among MA students (as of 2023).

Entrepreneurship Center is responsible for cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset among students and academic personnel of the university: supporting and mobilizing startups, delivering tailor made workshops, organizing seasonal schools, supporting BTU's startups to reach international platforms and participate in large scale competitions. Activities designed by the center help students to recognize commercial opportunities and overcome temporary failures for better solutions and perspectives.

Global reach is a core direction of BTU's vision. **Development and International relations Office** establishes collaborative ties with the world leading higher education institutions and research-focused centers, supports student and faculty exchange, ensures BTU's internationalization and its presence among international consortia and academic networks. In the context of the University's third mission, the office mobilizes international stakeholders and facilitates the implementation of local initiatives in line with global standards and needs.

Knowledge generated outside academic environment - towards BTU's third Mission

BTU's cooperation with society is largely realized by the initiatives beyond the classroom – projects and programs supported by leading donor institutions, guided by international standards and focused on local communities' needs.

'Coding School for 1500 Women' in Georgia - ongoing project supported by the USAID that aims at delivering meaningful impact to Georgia's local communities in six regions (including areas along the Administrative Boundary Lines and those highly populated by ethnic minority groups), by preparing qualified workforce in the ICT sector. This value driven initiative established inclusive learning environment – preparing relevant infrastructure, giving access to interested women to participate, enabling to gain new skills and empowering participants to transfer knowledge into practical application.

Fully funded training program 'Coding School for 1500 Women[1]' – combines the Tech courses[2], Tech English, Career Boot camp and individual mentorship. This initiative represents a good example on how the needs of the private sector – more qualified ICT personnel in the regions of Georgia – is matched with the needs of individuals – motivated and talented women being currently underrepresented in the industry. Furthermore, to effectively achieve the set objectives, the project team partners with local municipalities and schools to ensure learning infrastructure and equip laboratories in local schools.

"Promoting Information Literacy in Digital Environment among Women in Georgia" – recently completed project, supported by UNESCO Information for All Program (IFAP). The project aimed at contributing to building information literacy society through empowering individuals living in Georgia: increasing their computer literacy skills and information literacy. The project promoted **meaningful use of technologies and participants' critical thinking skills**. In the long run, the project will encourage women in Georgia to engage in technologies and will increase their preparedness in the digital transformation process.

The project team selected 60 participants from different regions of Georgia and provided tailored training courses in three modules: Tech English (preparation for the next phases of the project), Digital Skills and Information Literacy. Overall duration of the courses was 6 month and it covered practical aspects, such as meaningful use of technologies, useful digital products, information security and safeguarding digital information stored on electronic systems etc. field experts and lecturers of the three modules shared useful resources and encouraged participants to present (and discuss) effective and safe usage of technologies in digital environment. To ensure the sustainability of impact within the project, to facilitate networking and knowledge exchange among project participants, strengthen their bonds to each other and to the university beyond the project and to cultivate vibrant community, the Business and Technology University initiated the creation of project *Alumni community*.

Junior Tech – Child Development Initiative (ongoing) represents a special case of designing and implementing a **value driven initiative**. An eight-month training programme has been designed in collaboration with UNICEF Georgia to build digital skills of the most vulnerable young people living in Georgia. The funding has been raised from private sector – companies as well as individuals – expressing commitment and readiness to support children's upskilling. The program learning modules include: Basic course in digital literacy, Cyber hygiene and internet safety, Principles of digital technologies, Graphic design, Social media marketing and Tech. English. **The Junior Tech project** is a result of an intensive communication with UNICEF, social workers, private sector and academia.

All the above mentioned initiative constitute to expanding knowledge, hands on skills and practices beyond the classroom – reaching out to local communities and even the most vulnerable youth to EDCUATE, ENGAGE AND EMPOWER them for better social and economic environment in Georgia.

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[1] Detailed information on the project (its regional coverage, information on trainers, content etc.) is available on the **BTU's website** and dedicated website: https://cs-women.com/ inquiries can be addressed to the project team at: wcode@btu.edu.ge

[2] Program curriculum includes the following courses: Tech English (Level A1/A2 and Level B1/B2 courses) Digital Marketing, Graphic Design, Testing digital products, UI/UX design, Front-end development, Back-end development

Raising Awareness on Technology Transfer Processes

Another approach of BTU to serve its THIRD MISSION lies in raising awareness on **Technology Transfer processes** among academic and non-academic community. In collaboration with the US National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA[3]), BTU has established **NCURA South Caucasus and Ukraine Initiative.** The goal of the initiative is to strengthen the dialogue and partnership between the academic institutions of the South Caucasus region and Ukraine, to share knowledge and resources, to strengthen the scientific research potential and to share the best practices of the higher educational institutions and research institutes of the USA.

"Our history began years ago and we continue to implement its mission by sharing knowledge and experience. We connect researchers and administrative managers both in the US and around the world. A recently launched partnership with the University of Business and Technology, covering the South Caucasus countries and Ukraine, aims to make information on collaboration opportunities widely available. It is important that the experience and knowledge of NCURA will be the basis of the initiative that BTU will implement. It's about sharing knowledge with each other," said NCURA Executive Director Kathleen Larmet.

Why to participate?

- To share experience, participate in NCURA workshops, seminars and knowledge exchange activities
- To exchange with partner HEIs and potential partners towards commonly defined goals
- To co-create proposals or new projects in response to open international call
- To improve the understanding on US funding landscape
- To co create a collaboration platform with likeminded individuals and organizations.

NCURA's South Caucasus and Ukraine initiative organizes monthly informational events, knowledge sharing and exchange sessions to showcase the best practices, share useful resources and updated information among interested workshop participants (for example, recently [completed Proposal Writing Workshop](), delivered by Ms. Claire Chen and the Director of Research Development: Arts & Sciences Dr. Camilla Darling, Kings College London).

Tech Transfer Course at BTU - Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Tech Transfer course curriculum was designed by the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) in collaboration with the Business and Technology University (BTU)

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[3] The National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA), founded in 1959, is a non-profit professional society dedicated to advancing the profession of research administration through education and professional development programs, the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and the fostering of a diverse, collegial, and respected global community. With over 7,500 members from over 1,100 colleges, universities, teaching hospitals, and research institutes in 40 countries, NCURA is actively involved in furthering communication and understanding between research administrators both within and outside the US. NCURA's purpose is to serve all members by advancing expertise in the profession of research administration. NCURA website: https://www.ncura.edu/

NCURA's Director for Global Initiatives coordinated the faculty and speakers from the world's leading higher educational institutions – George Washington University, American University of Beirut (AUB), Czech Technical University in Prague, King's College London, University of Pennsylvania to share their in-depth knowledge and extensive experience to course participants. Online discussions covered variety of topics: Week 1: Define Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship. Define the role of research and innovation in economic development and the importance of investing in research and innovation infrastructure. This week also helped learners define type of entrepreneurship and university spin-offs. Weeks 2 -3 Commercial value of research ideas and products, Commercialization journey and strategies. The following meetings: invention disclosure process, evaluation and protection of new technologies, the role of research managers and administrators in the Tech Transfer cycle, the role of Tech Transfer offices in developing academic-corporate alliances…(Format – Online, Duration - 6 weeks, selected participants – with different background, working language – English).

A panel discussion for researchers, patent owners and company representatives at BTU

The university has recently hosted a dialogue among patent owners, researchers, private sector representatives and national funding agencies (GITA, SRNSFG). The aim of the meeting was to understand the complexities of transferring research outcomes into a business product. Panel discussion participants highlighted the need for more active facilitation mechanisms – more meetings and networking activities among researchers and private sector representatives – to actually demonstrate the benefits of technology transfer for academic as well as non-academic communities.

Final thoughts

The need for more intensive and comprehensive institutional cooperation is beyond doubt. Georgia has achieved much in terms of brining higher education institutions closer to the international and European standards, however, rapid technological change, turbulent regional development and inherited gaps in science-business collaboration, leaves room for improvement.

To strengthen its social and economic mission, BTU seeks to establish relevant **organizational structure and engagement system** within the university. Well-connected centers provide a framework for faculty and students, co-create enabling environment and co-create impact for society. Another tool for achieving the mission is a knowledge generation outside academic environments, through initiatives, large scale projects and community building activities.