Why not start?

That’s the question behind the Why Not Me? speaker series, which features George Brown College alumni detailing their entrepreneurial journeys. Aiming to craft a more realistic path to entrepreneurial success, the panelists relay the ups and downs, the lessons and the warnings, and the inspiration behind their businesses. The series is coordinated by startGBC, the entrepreneurial hub connecting students, alumni and the community with resources, programs and support.

For some students, it’s asking this simple question—why not me?—that can spark a growing ambition to break out on their own.

Since kicking off in November 2014, the series has seen three successful events, with more planned for the future. Jeff Wong, a speaker at the January event, was a graduate of the Mechanical Engineering program at George Brown, but had always wanted to be a dancer. Now, he and his wife are the owners of danceinc.ca, a prosperous dance studio in Markham, Ontario. Putting his knowledge of the manufacturing industry to use, Wong also owns a dance clothing business and a manufacturing operation.

His final word to the students? “Take advice with a grain of salt. You are the ultimate decision maker.”

Wong’s career trajectory—more of a zigzag than a straight line—was the real impetus for the Why Not Me? speaker series: the panels are designed to encourage would-be entrepreneurs to think outside the box when it comes to their futures.

Another panelist, Maddie Kessell, is a recent graduate of the Postgraduate Certificate in Business, Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations. She runs Migdal Jewellery, which refashions heirloom and upcycled materials to create one-off pieces of jewelry. As an early stage entrepreneur, Maddie stressed the importance of just taking the leap: “Take action. Get out there and make sales,” she told the attendees. “Have a plan, but be prepared to adjust it based on the market.”

The series is open to anyone in the George Brown community, in part to encourage innovation of all kinds and also spark interdisciplinary collaboration. To date, students from Marketing, Construction, Fashion, Jewelry Design, Architecture and Community Service have attended.

Early buzz styles the series as a way to test the entrepreneurial waters and start building connections. More often than not, students are just looking for guidance, from starting their own business to rallying resources to finding a mentor; they come to the speaker series to hear from people who have already done it.

And, if startGBC has its way, imagine themselves doing exactly the same thing.

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NEW SPEAKER SERIES AT GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE GETS STUDENTS THINKING OUT OF THE BOX

PROJECT ESSENTIALS

startGBC is funded by the On-Campus Entrepreneurial Activities (OCEA) fund. The CLAO/CEA program is an initiative of the Government of Ontario under the Youth Jobs Strategy and is being managed by Ontario Centres of Excellence. Funded by the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs (ONE) is Ontario’s innovation system. The ONE is made up of regional and sector focused organizations designed to help Ontario-based entrepreneurs rapidly grow their companies, and create jobs. For more information visit oneinnovation.ca.

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-Jeff Wong, speaker at January event

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