Project Elevate: Article Written By: Rtr. Hikma Imam , Rtr. Piravena Paheerathan

"Never too young to build an empire and never too old to start a new dream!"

To be an entrepreneur is a dream for many of us out there. How cool is it to have your own business, call your own shots and be your own boss! Being the founder of a new venture gives you a sense of freedom and empowerment that's hardly found in anything else. Having said that, even entrepreneurship doesn't quite manage to evade the universal law of "There is no big reward without big risks". Yes! Building your own empire is no child's play. Especially not to all those amazing student-cum-entrepreneurs out there. To create a business from scratch, be committed to its development and hold responsibility for the operations all while managing the academics takes perseverance and courage. That's where project "Elevate" comes to aid. It is an initiative of RACUOCFMF, catered exclusively to the undergraduates of University of Colombo. The objective was to empower the current and aspiring entrepreneurs through mentorship sessions and a panel discussion.

As the first step of this project, a google form was shared among the university students to gather information about the entrepreneurs and the main issues they face. Based on the analysis of the responses, entrepreneurs were found from the areas of fashion, education, art and crafts etc. It also has to be noted that irrespective of the differences in their fields, all of them faced common hurdles when it came to managing their start-ups. Marketing and sales problems, time management issues and financial / cash flow difficulties were seen to be quite prevalent among the entrepreneurs. Taking these points into consideration, extensive research was done to find relevant mentors to address these issues.

Inorder to benefit both entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs it was decided for the project to be conducted under two main segments, namely, a series of mentorship sessions and a panel discussion.

The series of mentorship sessions were conducted to provide support and assistance to the entrepreneurs at UOC, to help them overcome their problems by providing first-hand knowledge, strategies, tips and tricks tailored according to their requirements. The mentorship sessions were closed sessions, with only the entrepreneurs and the mentors participating, as individual attention and focus can be given directly to our entrepreneurs in closed sessions which also enhances the mentor mentee relationship. Accordingly, the mentorship sessions were conducted in the months of March and April 2022, with Mr. Imran Hasheem, Mr. Tharindu Jayasinghe, Ms. Suraiya Farook and Mr.Nilendra Vithanage as mentors.

Thereafter a panel discussion was organized to encourage entrepreneurship and inspire the young generation to take action on their business ideas! The panel discussion was held on 10th of April 2022, with Mr.Dilrukshan Fernando (CEO of Zengage Connect and Millionaires Club), Ms. Chamya Liyanage (Founder of Read & Return Co) and Ms. Suhara Malwattege (Founder of Scerendip) as our panelists. The panel discussion was a fruitful session where the panelists shared many insights on running a business, what it takes to be an entrepreneur and with many more tips on facing some ground reality issues as an entrepreneur.

All in all, Project Elevate sparked the entrepreneurial spirit in many while helping many businesses to scale their businesses to the next level!







