At age 14, Aaron Fitzgerald began looking for ways to earn money. He started doing odd jobs for neighbors and family friends. Less than five years later, he had 15 employees and more than 500 clients. And he had yet to graduate from high school.

So when the senior Finance and Entrepreneurship major from Conifer, Colo., heard about Baylor’s Accelerated Ventures Program, it seemed like a natural fit.

Accelerated Ventures is a two-semester course that encompasses everything you’ve ever learned in every other class and brings it together: accounting, marketing, finance. Every skill you’ve learned in business school comes into play, and you use it again in the real world.

The program began in 2011 when LesPalich, the W.A. Mays Professor of Entrepreneurship, and Kendall Artz, director of Baylor’s Entrepreneurship Program and chair of the department of Management and Entrepreneurship, began discussing how social media was being used in entrepreneurship. They began thinking about a course that could teach the use of social media and other emerging technologies that would be timely and relevant.

“At the same time, Dr. Artz was having similar conversations with an alumnus, David Grubbs,” Palich said. “I asked them to come up with an idea for a course. When I heard what they had in mind, it was all I’d imagined and more. It’s more than just a course, it’s a program.”

Their choice to facilitate the program was Grubbs, who graduated from Baylor in 2007 with a BBA in Finance. Grubbs is a serial entrepreneur who has founded seven companies and serves as a consultant.

When I heard what they had in mind, it was so our other team member is male.”

“We each have our roles and we’ve each grown in them,” she said. “I feel like I’ve gotten to sharpen my communication skills, and I’ve really enjoyed that. I’ve learned so much more than I thought I could. I never thought I could negotiate with a large company in another country as a senior in college, but I have.”

The Baylor Angel Network provides startup funding for the ventures. The investing group consists of alumni, faculty, and students on the team each retain 30 percent of the company. From the second day forward, the students are building their companies, which are required to launch in 45 days. By the end of the first semester, companies are expected to be generating revenue. By the end of the second semester, they should be profitable.

“It’s a huge workload, they assign it to themselves. I assign none of it,” Grubbs said. “They are extremely motivated.”

Allison Kusenberger, a senior Entrepreneurship and Marketing major from Little Rock, Ark., said the program is teaching her to balance the body’s pH levels.

“My goal is to be self-sustaining and in 50 retail locations by the end of the year,” O’Brien said. “Our goal is to move to Addison [Texas] and continue to try to get into as many retail locations as possible,” said Sam O’Brien of his team’s company, WHOLE WATER which sells an alkaline-enhanced bottled water that is touted as a healthy way to balance the body’s pH levels.

The senior Public Relations and Journalism major from Austin, Texas, hopes his company continues to grow.

“We want to generate enough profit to start our own distribution center,” he said. “Our goal is to be self-sustaining and in 50 retail locations by the end of the year.”

O’Brien’s desire to move to Addison is not just because of the town’s growing economy. The town has offered the students some amazing incentives.

The town will provide the student-run businesses the opportunity to move to the community where they will receive free office space and support for 12 months after graduation. Additionally, the Greater Waco Chamber has partnered with Baylor to launch Y Inc. Space, a business incubator for creative startups that will be the headquarters for the Accelerated Ventures Program.

While enrolled in the program, students will receive free office space from the Greater Waco Chamber. Upon completion of the course, students can continue to use the free space for one year while they expand their businesses.

“This will be a tremendous opportunity for these students, and another example of the community where they will be moving this program to be successful,” Patich said. “Like the Baylor Angel Network, we’re getting help from so many places.”

And Patich hopes the program can help other universities as well.

“Our goal is to create a national model that other schools can adopt,” he said. “Next year, we expect to have three other schools starting up their own programs using our model. This is another situation where Baylor Entrepreneurship is a leader among schools, and that’s exactly where we want to be.”

www.acceleratedventuresprogram.com