
The Power of Empathy: Anita Nowak

When **Anita Nowak, GrDip 99**, studied in the graduate diploma program of Concordia's Department of Communication Studies, she says "a whole new world of cultural studies opened up to me."

That experience **ushered in** an era of activism for her as she first became interested in women's issues, in particular their representation in the media. And following a rather **circuitous** academic path, she eventually discovered her passion for social entrepreneurship — one grounded in empathy.

Now with a long list of awards and international speaking engagements **under her belt**, Nowak still looks back to Concordia as having **pointed her in the right direction**. "My graduate diploma is what led me to pursue a master's in media and communication studies at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University."

She returned to Montreal to earn her PhD in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, graduating in 2011. While there, Nowak took on a full spectrum of professional and volunteer roles before even graduating.

Upon graduation, she helped launch the Social Economy Initiative (SEI) at McGill's Desautels Faculty of Management, serving as its integrating director for two years. The SEI was launched to integrate social entrepreneurship and social innovation into the faculty's teaching, research and **outreach**.

She was then invited to become director of operations for the Social Learning for Social Impact Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that was produced by McGill's Teaching and Learning Services and launched last fall by the non-profit **open-source** provider edX. Co-designed by Henry Mintzberg, BA 62, LLD 01, Leslie Breitner, Carlos Rueda and Nowak, she describes the course as "the ultimate opportunity for like-spirited people who want to work together to change the world." She adds, "When a group of strangers meet online and successfully launch a **crowdfunding** campaign to



create a mobile school for a Syrian refugee camp, you have to just step back and say ‘wow’ to the power of online collaboration.”

Nowak also advised the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation on its youth-focused, social entrepreneurship initiative called RECODE, as well as the Jeanne Sauvé Foundation on its inaugural Public Leadership Program. She is currently writing a book called *The Empaths Strike Back*. “I don’t think good social entrepreneurship happens unless it’s actually grounded in empathy. And empathy — unlike pity, sympathy or compassion — allows us to really feel and see that we share a common humanity.” She **adamantly** adds: “But empathy alone is not enough. Empathy plus action, or what I call empathic action, is what leads to positive, **sustainable** social change.”

Nowak also teaches social entrepreneurship at McGill and earned the 2014 Professor of the Year Award from the Desautels Management Undergraduate Society.

She thoroughly enjoys watching her students take concepts from the class-room and translate them into concrete social impact projects, such as the Centre Magnétique, a co-working space launched in Lac-Mégantic to support its **nascent** SME community. “I have dozens of examples of former students creating change in the world,” she says. “That’s the beauty of the work I’m doing.”

Source: <http://www.concordia.ca/content/shared/en/news/offices/vpaer/aar/2016/02...>

Vocabulary

to usher in (verb)

to start; to cause; to create

circuitous (adj)

long; prolonged

under her belt (expression)

accomplished

pointed her in the right direction (expression)

gave her good advice

crowdfunding (adj)

paid for by online contributions

adamantly (adv)

firmly

sustainable (adj)

viable; long-lasting

nascent (adj)

developing

Questions

Question 1

Where did Anita Nowak first discover the world of cultural studies?

Question 2

What kinds of women's issues did Novak first become interested in?

Question 3

What encouraged Nowak to pursue a master's in media and communication studies at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University?

Question 4

At which university did Nowak earn her PhD in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education?

Question 5

What was Nowak's position in the Social Economy Initiative (SEI) at McGill's Desautels Faculty of Management?

Question 6

The SEI (Social Economy Initiative) was launched at McGill. What three activities make up this initiative?

Question 7

When was the Social Learning for Social Impact Massive Open Online Course launched?

Question 8

Who were the four designers of this MOOC?

Question 9

What is RECODE?

Question 10

What does empathy plus action produce?



Question 11

What do Novak's students succeed at?



Answers

Answer 1

She discovered it when completing a graduate diploma program in Concordia's Department of Communication Studies.

Answer 2

Women's representation in the media.

Answer 3

Her graduate diploma program in Concordia's Department of Communication Studies.

Answer 4

She earned her PhD at McGill University.

Answer 5

She was the integrating director of the SEI.

Answer 6

1. teaching
2. research
3. outreach

Answer 7

It was launched "last fall."

Answer 8

1. Henry Mintzberg
2. Leslie Breitner
3. Carlos Rueda
4. Anita Nowak

Answer 9

It is a youth-focused, social entrepreneurship initiative.



Answer 10

It produces positive, sustainable social change.

Question 11

They create change in the world.