

# WAYB ON BOARD



Lundquist faculty members and MBA students partnered with the Knight Campus and others to reimagine the car seat.

BY JIM MUREZ AND JIM ENGELHARDT



When Michael Crooke, a professor of practice in the Lundquist College of Business, was approached with the idea for creating a car seat made of sustainable materials, he didn't hesitate. He knew the University of Oregon was the perfect place to pioneer such a product thanks to its strengths in green chemistry, applied science, sustainable business practices, entrepreneurship, marketing, and sports product management.

"Nobody can get close to that," Crooke said of the combination of skills found at UO.

In less than 18 months, WAYB was born, with UO faculty members, students, and staff contributing to the design and development of the Pico car seat as well as WAYB's business plan.

The students gained useful, real-life experience working with Crooke and his team while WAYB benefited from the expertise and labs at the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact.

"Experiences such as this are exactly what the Knight Campus and the Master's Industrial Internship Program are all about," said Jim Hutchison, associate vice president within the Knight Campus. "Our students were able to work on and contribute their expertise to a project with an industry partner who is trying to disrupt a major market."

Another high-profile member of WAYB's team is Jeff Lockie, who earned his bachelor's and MBA from the UO and played quarterback for the football team. Lockie took a course with Crooke while working toward his MBA and so impressed Crooke that the founder made him one of WAYB's first hires. Lockie is innovation discovery chief at WAYB.

Crooke also consulted with Troy Campbell, an assistant professor in the Department of Marketing at the Lundquist College of Business, for insight on how to build WAYB's brand and mission, as well as senior instructor of chemistry Julie Haack and Hutchison for their thoughts on materials. Haack also teaches in the Lundquist College's Sports Product Management Program in Portland.

Through Haack and Hutchison, two students in UO's Master's in Industrial Internship Program—Alyson Sillin and Hannah Eshelman Hutchison—were given the challenge of evaluating alternatives to Styrofoam that could absorb impact forces during a crash while being more recyclable and less-toxic.


Although they didn't find a substitute that met WAYB's needs, their efforts helped define what is needed to invent new alternatives in the future.

"What we found with the foams we selected was that even though you could improve some of the 'green-ness,' you couldn't get the same performance," said Aurora Ginzburg, a graduate student in Hutchison's lab who served as the liaison between WAYB and the students.

"This was an amazing opportunity to use our research for the better," added Sillin. "It gave me the chance to see how projects in industry adapt to consumer values and how to adapt to real-world problems. I felt prepared to enter the workforce because it allowed me to see how science works in an industry setting."

Looking ahead, Crooke expects to collaborate with the Knight Campus on future projects. WAYB has also already brought on interns from the Lundquist College of Business's MBA program. In fact, Jenna Salazar '16 joined WAYB as financial journey manager in March 2019. Salazar was president of Net Impact, the student-run sustainable business club, while a student at the Lundquist College.

Lockie said the university is perfectly positioned to contribute to fields such as the one WAYB is looking to shake up.

"There's such a tremendous need for more research and action around sustainable design, and the UO has a better chance than anyone at filling the pipeline," Lockie said. 

WAYB's Pico car seat (opposite page) is disrupting the market. It uses an aluminum frame instead of plastic, making it more recyclable and reusable. (Plastic car seats actually have expiration dates because temperature changes, humidity, and time degrade the plastic and render the seats unsafe). In addition, instead of foam, the Pico uses a tensioned, technical mesh similar to that found in tents and high-performance framed backpacks. It makes the car seat supportive yet lightweight and breathable. When the Pico went on sale at Nordstrom, it sold out in less than 36 hours. Amazon.com began carrying the car seat on August 4. More at [wayb.com](http://wayb.com).

