

***The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) presents***  
**Rethinking higher ed: Beyond {the buzzwords}**  
**November 7-8, 2013**  
**Sheraton Centre Toronto**

**Day Two**  
**November 8, 2013**

**Session 6A | Entrepreneurs: Gotta be startin' somethin'**  
*Initiatives that open doors for students to PSE and beyond*

*Facilitator: Leslie Church, Google Canada*  
*Suzanne Tyson, HigherEdPoints.com*  
*Hadi and Marwan Aladdin, CoursePeer*

Hadi Aladdin described the role of startup software business CoursePeer, designed in response to what he saw as a significant cost and capability shortfall in higher education software. It costs an average of \$300,000 a year per faculty to collect data about learning outcomes, and learning management systems add a further \$120,000 per year cost to the faculty. Hosting these systems on your own servers costs even more, which expands more with every online component you add. CoursePeer is designed to aggregate all of these systems in the cloud, in order to save money and make using the system easier.

Suzanne Tyson from HigherEdPoints.com identified a similarly large gap in the market with her own project, which allows students to pay for their education using Aeroplan points, thus leveraging a huge untapped resource for many families. Like Aladdin, she emphasized the importance of the various connections she has made throughout her career to getting the project off the ground, although where Aladdin had benefitted from institutional organizations like MaRS and UTEST, Tyson relied on years of experience in working with higher education institutions.

Both speakers also identified ease of use and accessibility as a key differentiator of their products. Every time Aladdin uses Facebook and other web 2.0 platforms, he feels the gap in the ease of use and design between those and current learning management systems. Some of the core abilities in higher education software are assessment and surveying tools, which are very difficult to implement with traditional systems. Aladdin argued that they have made CoursePeer easy to use even for technophobes. Unfortunately academic adoption is at least two times slower than enterprise adoption, partially because of fear of trying something new, and this is a major problem we need help to address.

Tyson's impetus for her project was that higher education is good, but expensive to access even for middle class families. HigherEdPoints was born by looking at ways for parents and students to tap into alternative sources of funding. If there are 5 million active loyalty card members with \$100 each, that's \$500 million of untapped currency that could be used to pay for higher education, and Tyson is excited about the possibilities her project offers for diversifying access to higher education.