

Bialystok University of Technology
Remarks by Ambassador Stephen D. Mull
November 13, 2013

Good afternoon. Thank you to [senior university and local government representatives present] for the kind invitation to speak to your students. I am happy to be here at one of Poland's most prestigious and creative polytechnic universities. Bialystok University of Technology is a vibrant center of learning that brings together some of Poland's best and brightest minds.

I'm here to talk about innovation, and I'd like to start by acknowledging the achievements of Team Hyperion, your peers here at the Bialystok University of Technology, who won the 2013 Mars Society's University Rover Challenge. Your colleagues took first prize, beating the closest competition by 91 points!

Recently, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Poland and had the chance to meet Team Hyperion. Team Hyperion- Your Mars Rover is a fine example of the kind of creativity and innovation that could lead to the next great technological breakthrough that transforms our world, or even our solar system.

Poland is among the most highly educated, industrious and creative societies in the world, with a long history of producing educated people that have enlightened and opened our minds. However, despite Poland's long history of excellent higher education, today the country lags behind many parts of Europe in innovation and technology driven investment.

Many Polish leaders recognize the need to transform the Polish economy through innovation, and the government has already established a variety of programs to encourage innovation and cooperation between business and academia.

Such programs include:

- The Top 500 Innovators, a Ministry of Science and Higher Education program that sends some of Poland's brightest scientific people to training programs at Stanford and UC Berkeley where they learn techniques to commercialize their research and connect with business;

- The Foundation for Polish Science, which directs EU funding to relevant innovation programs;
- And technology parks, such as the one here in Bialystok, that encourage business and research institutions to work together.

Despite these great programs, there is more that can be done. Here are some of the things you can do, as university students, to encourage development of a culture of innovation, among yourselves and your peers:

- **Internships** – at some point in your education, I encourage you to apply for an internship here in Poland or abroad. This will help you to understand better how the business world works, how businesses make decisions, and where you might be able to add value. You will also make valuable personal connections to people who might be able to help you in the future. Innovation often does not come from just one person, but from partnerships and teams.
- **Volunteer Opportunities** – Look for chances to help your community through volunteering at either nonprofit organization or government-sponsored program. Take time to learn about the problems and issues your community faces on all levels, and ways you can help. Innovation often times doesn't necessarily mean the "next big thing", but can come in small ways that can end up having big impacts.
- **Business and Management Classes** – don't be afraid to take classes outside your major. Learning some practical management skills will also help you identify where you can add value through innovation. Again, they will also help you understand how businesses make decisions and how you can use that decision making process to guide your own research.
- **Participate in Contests** – Like Team Hyperion, you too can find opportunities to test your skills on a practical level. By getting involved in a group project while you are in school, you get the chance to work together in a team environment to solve a practical problem. Teamwork and group problem solving skills will be integral to your future career.

- **Find People with Similar Interests** – Look for people in your community, here on campus, or even over the internet with similar interests to your own. Find small projects you can work on together, either for school, or for yourselves that let you collaborate and build your teamwork skills. Again, some of the best innovations come from working together with a team of like-minded individuals on a project. Facebook started out as a simple side project to connect students to each other, and has now transformed how the world communicates.
- **Don't be Afraid to Fail** – Many young Poles who've spent time in Silicon Valley – for example on the great Top 500 Innovators Program – say that the single greatest lesson they bring back from there is the idea that it's okay to fail. That's a pretty radical statement, but one which is central to the success of many of the greatest inventors and entrepreneurs. They take risks, and they keep trying, over and over again. Thomas Edison did not invent the light bulb on his first try. He reportedly said that through his failures he successfully discovered hundreds of ways NOT to invent a light bulb. Steve Jobs was fired from Apple, and later said that that freed him up to enter one of the most creative periods of his life. Both English and Polish have the expression, “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger” – “*Co cie nie zabije, to cie wzmacni.*” Taking risks, whether it's by studying an unfamiliar subject or striking out on your own to create a company, is key to innovation.

Universities are where people and ideas come together. As students, you are fortunate to have access to two different worlds for innovation. The first is the classroom, where the theories and lessons taught and passed on to you by your professors give you the necessary grounding and knowledge base. The other is the world of your peers and social media. You need to utilize both of these worlds. Innovation is no longer a solitary process, and you can't innovate alone.

Remember that fostering a culture of innovation begins with your own community. Think about what you can do to foster innovation here on your campus, in your home town or *województwo*. Think about how you can bring other people with similar ideas or interests together right here at your university. Work with your university to forge ties with the business community through co-sponsored design or research projects. And find people with similar interests so that you can work together on your own creative projects.

And don't be afraid to reach out to us at the Embassy, if you believe there is some way that the U.S. business community can help you accomplish your goals. We in the U.S. Embassy are here to be facilitators. We connect people in the countries where we work with U.S. communities that have shared interests or ideas.

Poland has already made great strides in transforming its economy. Now you need to take the knowledge learned here at the Bialystok University of Technology and apply that knowledge in ways that will boost Poland's economy and help Poland become a leader in innovation in the EU and in the world. And it may just help you create the career of your dreams in the process.

When Secretary Kerry met with a group of Top 500 innovators in Warsaw last week, there was a sign in the corner of the room, a photograph of words on the wall of their California workshop. They said: "Nothing is a mistake. There is no win and no fail. There's only MAKE!".

Thank you.