The Coleman Foundation Faculty Entrepreneurship Fellows Program was developed by the private, independent Coleman Foundation to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment education. Every year, grants are awarded to college and university faculty members across the country who are actively incorporating entrepreneurial concepts and activities into their teaching. WPI is proud to have a number of our faculty members recognized as Coleman Fellows for encouraging the spirit of entrepreneurship in our students.

Oleg Pavlov, Associate Professor, Social Science & Policy Studies
2011 Coleman Fellow

One of the first things you might notice about Oleg Pavlov, associate professor of social science & policy studies, is what he’s not. He’s not an engineer or a laboratory scientist. He’s an economist.

“At WPI, I teach economics,” says Pavlov. “Often, it’s Introduction to Microeconomics. There are many future engineers and scientists in my classes where, before I became a Coleman Fellow, I was typically emphasizing to students that the knowledge of economics would be helpful in understanding the business decisions in the world around them and in the workplace.”

Pavlov was approached by Francis Hoy, who runs WPI’s Coleman Fellowship program and is the Paul R. Beswick Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, as well as the director of WPI’s Collaborative for Entrepreneurship & Innovation. Hoy thought it would be a good idea to introduce entrepreneurship to the world of economics at WPI.

“We spoke about the possibility of including elements of entrepreneurship education in my economics classes, which I thought was a great idea,” says Pavlov. “I saw the fellowship as an opportunity to do something new and exciting in my classes, something that the students could potentially use right away. It was also a great chance to connect with other faculty and staff on campus and elsewhere who participate in entrepreneurship programs and teaching.”

As a Coleman Fellow, Pavlov changed the format of his classes, forming teams and encouraging students to work together. “Entrepreneurship is a team activity and they needed to learn to work with others,” added the soft-spoken Pavlov. “That experience alone proved to be a challenge for many students.”

To get them thinking entrepreneurially, Pavlov assigned them two projects. “For the first project, I asked them to research the humble beginnings of some well-established companies such as Apple, HP, and Facebook. I wanted them to realize that a great company can start small.” Once students realized that all businesses start with a concept, Pavlov assigned the second project, asking them to validate or reject a business idea.

Pavlov, who recently completed an Executive MBA program at Cornell, has taken several entrepreneurial courses himself and worked on an international consulting project with a Middle Eastern start-up, helping formulate the company’s strategic vision and write the business plan. He believes that while it might not be possible to teach everyone entrepreneurship, “I can teach my students economic foundations of entrepreneurship, including how to recognize business opportunities and how to think about those opportunities in a structured way.”