

## **Corporations must look at social values: Prof**

Owing to recent high-profile scandals, consumer vigilance and increasing stakeholder pressure, many corporations are becoming more socially responsible, displaying greater accountability to the communities and individuals they impact.

Ann Armstrong, professor and director of the [Social Enterprise Initiative](#) at U of T, hopes that this trend isn't window dressing, but rather that it reflects a coming sea change in corporate mentality towards a greater social orientation and value-driven business practices.

"Corporations now have to look – at the least – at practicing social values. They are a part of civil society and have to look at stakeholder interests," says Armstrong. "I hope it's genuine and that it becomes pervasive."

Armstrong, along with doctoral candidate [Laurie Mook](#) and Professor Jack Quarter from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, will take part in an extensive \$1.75 million dollar, five-year study of Ontario's social economy, part of a larger \$9 million nation-wide study sponsored by SSHRC and Imagine Canada, an umbrella organization for non-profits in Canada. Five research networks will be established across the country.

Quarter has also established [The Social Economy Centre](#), a multi-disciplinary research and policy unit of OISE.

Changing the corporate climate to one that is more socially responsible is difficult, says Armstrong, because of the typical impatience shown toward systemic change.

"The process is often very slow, and people get frustrated when things aren't taking immediately," she says.

Projects like [Rotman Nexus](#), a U of T student-run consulting agency for the non-profit sector, aim at changing the economy at the source by inspiring graduate students to consider working in the social mission sector.

“Rotman Nexus is an exemplar, and a sign that change is coming very, very soon,” says Armstrong. She points out an increase in MBA students coming from a variety of sectors (such as micro credit) that place a great emphasis on social responsibility and the role of the social sector (Canada has an estimated 175,000 to 200,000 non-profit organizations that generate \$90 billion a year and employ 1.3 million people) in the Canadian economy.

“Students with an inclination to social values can have a profound effect on their colleagues,” says Armstrong.

Armstrong’s own background as a long-time volunteer in social service organizations has fuelled her academic focus and professorial work.

“This is a very exciting opportunity to be involved with upcoming leaders in social mission issues,” says Armstrong.

Armstrong hopes that innovative companies that are profit-oriented but socially driven – such as Bullfrog Power, a green electricity retailer – will become to be seen as a new type of socially responsible company.

Other undervalued sectors – like co-ops – will be highlighted during the course of the five year research initiative.

“In Canada we have a vibrant co-op culture,” says Armstrong. “And the government has begun to look at public policy that pays attention to social mission organizations. It could become a broader trend.”