

Hit your career running

Nick Bontis preps students for the real business world

BY DIANA CAWFIELD

Click onto the web site of Professor Nick Bontis at www.bontis.com and you know you've tapped into the mind of an innovative thinker.

A neon-blue brain pulsates and twirls to the beat of sci-fi music, accompanied by homey links to family photos. Creative energy virtually zings off the screen.

That's no surprise when you meet the associate professor of business policy and strategy at the Michael G. DeGroot School of Business. Bontis's energy practically bounces off the walls of any space he occupies, cyber or otherwise.

McMaster students take note: "Your web site is your calling card," says Bontis.

As one of the bright Faces of Innovation, it is fitting that Bontis pushes the envelope in creativity. Known as a pioneer in the field of intellectual capital, Bontis brings his talents in knowledge management to MBA students and is the business policy and strategy course coordinator for the undergraduate commerce program.

Bontis's contagious enthusiasm and love of teaching all add up to an award-winning teacher. The personable professor, with an open-door policy, was awarded the most outstanding professor of the year in 2001 and 2003 at the business school by the MSU.

Sharing innovative energy and creativity is a big component in the classroom. A full 25% of the final grade stems from classroom participation. Bontis feels that classroom presentations offer students hands-on experience to enter the business world. "We train our students to, Hit your career running, the motto of the business school," says Bontis.

Bontis also tells his students, "You know what? You have a sixth course: Managing your life after university."

The most common remark that Bontis hears from students who are graduating concerns career management – what tactics are necessary to get noticed. In this regard, Bontis highly recommends that students tap into the skills and resources offered by the Career Services Offices on campus. "Taking advantage of those services is very important," says Bontis. "You owe it to yourself as a student, you already paid tuition."

Bontis is also on a mission. "I live and breathe the mission statement of the university – a research-intensive, student-centred institution – and I'd like to continue to push the fore-

front because that's what McMaster is known for and I have the responsibility as a faculty member to sustain that reputation. The competition is fierce."

There are three main research thrusts that Bontis is focussing on: leveraging intellectual capital in organizations, measuring intellectual

extra-curricular sports is a natural fit for the 34-year old athlete.

Many "fortuitous steps" led to a career change for Bontis and McMaster University. After graduating in 1992, with a HBA from the Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario, Bontis was personally recruited by the CEO of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in Toronto.

Shortly afterwards, his mentor retired.

Prior to that time, Bontis was intrigued by the June 1991 cover story of Fortune magazine,

citing the importance of intellectual capital. In fact, Bontis was so excited about this burgeoning field that he decided to take a "huge" risk and pursue further studies in the new area.

In 1994, Bontis left CIBC and returned to Ivey to do his Ph.D. Then in 1996, while giving a Ph.D. presentation at the first World Congress on intellectual capital at McMaster University, he met Dr. Christopher Bart, who would later become his mentor and fellow colleague.

Two years later, Bontis was invited for a recruitment interview at McMaster. That is when he found himself driving, unbeknownst, towards his future destination, accompanied by his girlfriend of just a few weeks. As Bontis turned off the 403 onto Main Street, his future wife pointed to the hospital in the distance. "I'm going to give birth at that hospital to your baby son," she predicted.

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Don't miss the next World Congress on intellectual capital – the largest in the world – celebrating its 25th year anniversary at McMaster University, from January 14-16, 2004.



Nick Bontis (centre), surrounded by his business students

capital among countries, and knowledge management.

The hot topic is knowledge management. No wonder. By the year 2010, the world's cumulative codified information base will double every 11 hours – that's a lot of knowledge to manage.

Any student or faculty member can benefit by learning more about their computer software, especially the automatic folder capacity of e-mail messages.

What does Bontis like about McMaster? "It's got to be the people, no question," he says. "And one of the reasons why I like the business school is because the McMaster vision aligns so well with who I am as an individual."

When it comes to student-centred commitment, you need look no further than the soccer field (Bontis plays soccer semi-professionally), or any sports event for that matter. The university's strong tradition with varsity and