GSE Welcomes Entrepreneur-in-Residence Sergio Monsalve

In-house entrepreneur looks to share expertise in industry, startups, and employment landscape

Sergio Monsalve is a Silicon Valley-based investor, consultant, and entrepreneur specializing in education technology startups. With more than 20 years of experience, Sergio has been a part of several innovative educational and consumer companies such as Udemy, Kahoot!, eBay, and PayPal. He is also active in several non-profit organizations and schools that foster diversity and inclusion within STEM education.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your connection to Stanford.

I grew in Mexico in a modest middle-class family. My family and I moved to the United States when I was in middle school without knowing English or even knowing anyone in the US. Growing up, I remember two things that mattered to me and my family: innovation and education. Those two areas of focus helped me focus and propelled me to Stanford as a bright-eyed freshman. Stanford opened my eyes to a whole new world of opportunities I would have never have had access to anywhere else. I owe a lot to Stanford and to the great community of educators here.

What are your goals as Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EiR)?

Ideally, the EiR helps the broader GSE community foster new ideas and launch new projects with a focus on social impact and innovations in edtech and the future of work. My mission is to expose the Stanford GSE community to education innovations, technologies, and entrepreneurship outside of Stanford, and to enable collaboration. If nothing else, I want to encourage everyone to expand their base and discover non-traditional career paths.

What inspired you to return to Stanford as EiR?

I'm concerned about the future of learning and work. If you don't focus on education and retraining, folks will continue to be left behind. There are some big questions to be answered in this area and we don't have much time given the unprecedented pace of change we are experiencing in the world today. Does the current model of instruction, especially in higher education, need restructuring? How do we cultivate lifelong learners? How do we imbue traits like courage and creativity into our future leaders? Learning paths are often rocky, and entrepreneurial traits can make all the difference in a world where we are seeing an acceleration in landscape changes. The pace of change is unprecedented in human history, thanks to technology and globalization.

What topics interest you most?

I'm interested in how technology can improve access, support, and opportunities when done right. One avenue could be big data and predictive analytics to improve education. This goes hand-in-hand with iterative and life-long learning. We need to create engaged, curious, and productive humans.

On a personal note, I'm also interested in exploring the power of learning differences. My daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia, which gave rise to a stronger appreciation of varied methods of instruction and thinking. Some of the most renowned innovators — Walt Disney and Albert Einstein, for example — experienced learning difficulties. Should we be treating these as challenges to learning or as alternative ways of processing information?

What challenges are you looking to address?

Facilitating non-traditional career paths is a big challenge. Stanford has a lot of bright minds, but the post-Stanford pathways are not always clear, especially considering the evolving nature of jobs and employment demands nowadays. There will likely be many jobs in 10 years that do not exist today. How do we prepare our graduates for these new vocations? What avenues are out there to help graduates hone skills or shift expertise for new demands in the workforce? The potential impact in this area is huge.

What unique viewpoints do you bring to the GSE as an entrepreneur?

Thinking as a businessman, people are the most important resource. When looking at startups to invest in, there is no scarcity of ideas or money. These are a dime a dozen. The difficulty lies in finding capable, creative, and courageous leaders who can thrive in ambiguity. We need to cultivate these kinds of people, and to teach the skills that will always be key to success across groups, namely collaboration, empathy, and creativity — qualities, it turns out, that computers and robots have difficulty demonstrating.