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Final Profile Story

Southern Methodist University Professor Inspires Innovation in Deason Innovation Gym

Dr. Seth Orsborn leans over a student's workstation at Southern Methodist University's Deason Innovation Gym (DIG), inspecting a 3D-printed prototype. With a quick smile, he adjusts the model in his hands and offers precise instructions.

"Good work so far," he says. "But think about how this will feel for the user. Let's refine it to match their needs."

The buzz of activity in the DIG underscores Orsborn's energy as he guides students through the complex process of turning ideas into functional, market-ready designs. Known for his interdisciplinary approach, Orsborn blends engineering, business, and design principles to help students create impactful solutions.

One of the most memorable projects Orsborn has seen in the lab involved a student who built an electric motorcycle from the ground up. They used old parts and scrap materials found right in the D-I-G, and the end result was incredible.

"This student created something amazing," Orsborn recalls. "It was truly a testament to the creativity and resourcefulness that we foster here."

This story is about Orsborn's work, not just as an educator but as a mentor shaping the next generation of innovators. In the DIG, his students are crafting everything from medical devices to consumer products, transforming their ideas into tangible prototypes. Their work is a reflection of his commitment to building an environment where creativity meets practicality.

Born in Buffalo, New York, Orsborn grew up fascinated by how things worked. After earning his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University at Buffalo, he pursued a master's and PhD in the same field at Carnegie Mellon University. To round out his skills, he later earned an MBA in innovation and strategy from the University of Texas at Dallas.

At SMU, Orsborn teaches courses on product design and innovation while mentoring startups and advising innovation teams. He has taught at SMU for years, where he continues to shape the future of engineering and design. Outside the classroom, he manages a pecan orchard, balancing the rigor of academia with the demands of rural life.

“He’s not just a professor; he’s a mentor,” said JT Ringer, a senior lab engineering major who has worked closely with Orsborn. “Dr. Orsborn pushes us to think beyond the obvious and find creative solutions.”

Ringer credits Orsborn’s guidance for helping him secure an internship at a leading product design firm.

“He doesn’t just teach the theory—he shows us how to apply it in real-world contexts,” Ringer said.

Colleagues echo similar sentiments about Orsborn’s impact.

“Seth’s interdisciplinary approach is reshaping how we think about engineering education,” said Sithindu Sirisooriya, an assistant manager in SMU’s engineering department. “He helps students connect the dots between engineering, business, and design.”

The DIG serves as a proving ground for Orsborn’s philosophy. Students develop prototypes ranging from medical devices to consumer products, often finding innovative solutions to complex challenges.

“I love seeing students have that moment when they realize their idea can become something tangible and meaningful,” Orsborn says. “That’s what drives me every day.”

Looking ahead, Orsborn hopes to expand the DIG’s influence beyond campus, making it a hub for innovation in Dallas.

“There’s so much potential here,” he says. “If we can harness it, we can create solutions that have a lasting impact.”

As Orsborn finishes his conversation with students, he returns to another workspace, picking up a new prototype—a wearable health device—and begins examining it with the same passion that has driven his career. Each design, each idea, is another step toward making something meaningful come to life.

Sources:

- Dr. Seth Orsborn (Director)

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- JT Ringer (Lab Manager)
- Sithindu Sirisooriya (Assistant Manager)

Photo Outline:

Dr. Seth Orsborn, a professor at Southern Methodist University, guides students through a design project in the Deason Innovation Gym, where he emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration and hands-on problem-solving.

