



Finding Confidence and Clarity: Swarthmore College's Journey through CLA



"While I have a lot to learn, CLA made me feel like less of an imposter and more like someone on a journey others have travelled before."

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*Susannah Fishman
Director – Center for Innovation & Leadership
Swarthmore College*

Background:

When Susannah Fishman was recently promoted to lead Swarthmore College's Center for Innovation and Leadership—its closest equivalent to an entrepreneurship center—she faced a familiar challenge: she brought deep experience in leadership education and experiential learning, but little direct knowledge of entrepreneurship education.

"I needed to understand the landscape and find my place within it," she explains. That's when she joined the Center Leader Academy (CLA).

Why Join the Program:

With a background rooted in higher education and co-curricular leadership development, Susannah sought a structured, practical introduction to the entrepreneurship domain. *"I wanted to understand what programs were being offered elsewhere, what reasonable expectations were, and how to build something appropriate for my college," she says.*

Key Learnings:

Through CLA, Susannah gained:



- A broad understanding of entrepreneurship education models—ranging from pitch competitions to incubators, courses, and mentorship.
- Insight into appropriate metrics, expectations, and benchmarks for different types of institutions and students.
- A clearer idea of how to match Swarthmore’s culture and mission with relevant programming.

Equally valuable was the peer learning environment: *“My cohort had deep and varied knowledge. I learned as much from the assumptions in conversations as from the content itself—those ‘taken for granted’ insights really helped.”*

She also connected with guest speakers beyond the sessions. *“I’d reach out for follow-up conversations and learned so much about the day-to-day realities of program management and stakeholder relationships.”*

Impact on Career:

CLA has had a transformative impact on Susannah’s work. *“I now have a much deeper understanding of a domain I’m responsible for. I can better benchmark, plan, and support students in this space.”*

Just as important has been the confidence the program instilled. *“Realizing that others with much more experience still grapple with metrics, data tracking, student engagement—it made me feel like I belonged in this space.”*

Looking Ahead:

“This is a very practical, applied program, filled with smart, creative, empathetic people,” Susannah says. *“It felt like a program designed by people who understand co-curricular learning—everyone knew exactly what they were doing, and it showed.”*