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Developing Innovative Students Through Cohort Innovation Programs

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Developing Innovative Students Through Cohort Innovation Programs

Joey Mehlhorn, Rachna Tewari, Scott Parrott, and Ross Pruitt

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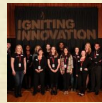
ABSTRACT

Employers are seeking agribusiness program graduates that not just grasp theory, but also apply that knowledge to be successful in the business world. In the fall 2014, a cohort innovation program was developed for undergraduate students to increase business skills and entrepreneurial capacity. The program focused on three primary areas: soft skills, critical thinking skills, and work experience. Students were pre-screened and selected based on an interview process related to potential, not GPA. The program utilized several unique teaching environments including the use of industry mentors, flipped classrooms, internships, video blogs, and student led program development. Students participated in innovation pitch sessions throughout the program to help develop entrepreneurial skills. The program improved students soft skills and the ability to work effectively in unfamiliar environments. Major improvements were seen in teamwork skills, project management leadership, and business and communication skills. Participants stated that the program motivated and empowered them to become industry ready innovators. Faculty mentors revealed that the flipped classroom design did increase student engagement and allowed for increased content and flexibility to the program.

Why is there a need for innovative students?

"Today knowledge is ubiquitous, constantly changing, growing exponentially... There's no competitive advantage today in knowing more than the person next to you. The world doesn't care what you know. What the world cares about is what you can do with what you know."

Tony Wagner, Harvard Innovation Education Fellow



"Knowledge is a commodity. It's really inexpensive and easy to get. Who's going to pay for it?"
Richard Miller, President of Olin College of Engineering

Can we teach innovation to students?

In 2014 The University of Tennessee at Martin initiated a program called the Ned Ray McWherter Innovators. The program was open initially to sophomore, junior and senior students from all colleges through an application and interview process. The program focused on potential, NOT GPA.

NRMI Mission

To uncover, maximize, and empower the potential of passionate and motivated students by transforming them into extraordinarily capable innovators.

"Teach Students to Act or Think Like an Owner"



Cohort Program to build unity: Phase 1: Test Flight

Focus on ABCs Initially (SO)

- Attitudinal Skills
- Behavioral Skills
- Communication Skills



Enhanced Skills Later (JR & SR)

- Critical Thinking Skills
- Problem Solving Skills
- Ability to Pitch These Skills

Treat the process like a video game

- Students will progress through levels
- Meet once a week (2 hours per week)
- 5 Faculty mentors (coaches) for 5 Levels (13 weeks each)
- Final exam is a "performance" of what was learned the previous 13 weeks

Flipped Classroom (Year 1)

- "Collaboratories" not lectures
- It is amazing what is available and free!
- Review lectures at home, apply what you learned in the lectures in the collaboratory.

Igniting Innovation (End of Year 1)

- Scholars developed an innovation conference

What industry lessons are learned?

- RESPONSIBILITY!
- Community service oriented
- Collaborative team skills
- Budget management, securing speakers, venue, etc...
- Marketing, communication, design



Pre-Flight Program (Year 2)

- Streamed from the Nashville Entrepreneurship Center
- 14 weeks
- Focus on understanding the customer and the market
- Ends with a Pitch Night

International Experience (Juniors End of Year 2)

- Purpose: Strengthen scholars ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations and widen their perspective of the global marketplace.
- **Citywide Activity in Tokyo:** Students were given a list of locations and specific items to find an photograph without the use of electronic resources.

International Travel Experience

"This experience showed the innovators that there are different ways to run things; there are different places to station businesses... The world is much bigger than West Tennessee" Summer Bradley, MRMI Scholar

"International travel forces the curious student to see the world from a different perspective... whether it is from a cultural, political or even religious perspective, the ability to understand differences will enhance global awareness."

Tom Hyde, NRMI Industry Mentor

Phase 2: IDEA Workshop

IDEA Workshop (Year 2)

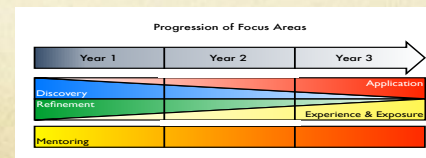
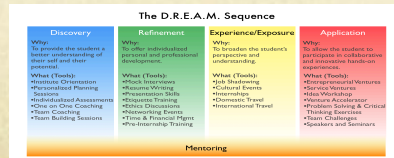
- At the beginning of level 1 encourage scholars to look for problems
- Begin to see every problem as an opportunity for innovation
- All scholars are required to write down 20 problems per week
- At the end of the level all scholars will look for the solutions in a collaborative way during the IDEA workshop

Video Blogs (VLOGS) (Sophomore end of Year 1)

- Summer experience outside of West Tennessee
- Every two weeks complete a video blog (reviewed by faculty mentors and industry mentors)
- Feedback

Final Stage: The End Result for Students

- Student will graduate with a unique set of marketable skills.
- Resume Markers: domestic internship, international experience, conference development experience, industry mentor, time management skills, entrepreneurship tool box of skills, demonstrated communication skills.
- At the end you have an idea ready to go into a business incubator.
- The student has the ability to be a productive asset for a potential employer (Just like an iPhone, ready to work as soon as you take them out of the box)



2016 Southern Agricultural Economics Association Meeting



San Antonio, TX February 6-8, 2016



NRMI Faculty Perspectives and Thoughts

NRMI is beneficial to students, first cohort is completing the program and the experiences and contacts in the institute has opened great opportunities for them following graduation. Many of these students have commented how their appreciation for the institute has grown as they approach graduation. They didn't realize the importance of some of the content and activities as sophomores and juniors, but it is becoming clear the reasons and benefits as they approach graduation.

• Having both internal (faculty) mentors and external mentors in the students area of interest has been successful and gives students a diverse perspective and network

• The flipped classroom is very effective with small groups, both student engagement and learning are increased as compared to the traditional classroom

• These types of programs take a significant amount of faculty time to develop and benefit, they greatly benefit the student, but they are not efficient, large amount of faculty time small number of students

• "I wish the program could reach more students, but due to the time commitment of faculty resources and cost of the program only small numbers can participate"

• Another strength is having faculty and students from all disciplines in the program. This is good for both students and faculty to interact with different areas of campus

• In the future it would be good to increase the number of faculty who participate and possibly rotate new faculty mentors as each new cohort starts the program.