Developing Innovative Students Through Cohort Innovation Programs

Joey Mehlhorn
University of Tennessee at Martin
254 Brehm Hall, Martin, TN 38238
mehlhorn@utm.edu

Rachna Tewari
University of Tennessee at Martin
265 Brehm Hall, Martin, TN 38238
rtewari@utm.edu

Scott Parrott
University of Tennessee at Martin
205 Brehm Hall, Martin, TN 38238
sparrott@utm.edu

Ross Pruitt
University of Tennessee at Martin
254 Brehm Hall, Martin, TN 38238
rpruit10@utm.edu

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Developing Innovative Students Through Cohort Innovation Programs

Joey Mehlhorn, Rachna Tewari, Scott Parrott, and Ross Pruitt
Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources, University of Tennessee at Martin

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 created a unique teaching environment 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?

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.

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

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

The student has the ability to be a productive asset for a business environment, 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).

“Teach Students to Act or Think Like an Owner”

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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)
• Every two weeks complete a video blog (reviewed by faculty mentors and industry mentors)
• Feedback

Phase: 2 IDEA Workshop

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.

“International Travel Experience”

“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, NRM Industry Mentor

Can we teach innovation to students?

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“No one can teach innovation to students. What we can do is teach them how to learn to be better and better at creating.”

Richard Miller, President of Olin College of Engineering.