

Intellectual Entrepreneurship and Outreach: Uniting Expertise and Passion

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Abstract

Ernest A. Lynton envisioned colleges and universities as not only instruments for creating new knowledge, but vehicles that engage the broader community to solve society's complex problems. The Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program developed and administered by the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin submits that realizing Lynton's dream requires that academic professionals in the twenty-first century think of themselves as citizen-scholars who integrate (as opposed to apply) their academic discipline with the experiences and objectives of the broader community. This requires that colleges and universities rethink the concept and vocabulary surrounding current notions of outreach. Terms such as "outreach" and "public service" convey the impression that institutions of higher education hold all knowledge and, based upon their goodwill, reach out to an intellectually destitute community. As long as this value system exists, the academic and public spheres necessarily will remain bifurcated.

The Intellectual Entrepreneurship (IE) Program developed and administered by the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin received Honorable Mention for the Ernest A. Lynton Award for Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach. Lynton envisioned colleges and universities as not only instruments for creating new knowledge, but vehicles that engage the broader community to solve society's complex problems. It is our commitment to Lynton's philosophy that compels us to share with readers of this journal the mission and scope of the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program; in so doing, we hope to keep Lynton's dream alive and bring his vision to fruition.

In order to achieve this vision, we suggest that colleges and universities must rethink the concept and vocabulary surrounding current notions of outreach. Terms such as "outreach" and "public service" convey the impression that institutions of higher education hold all knowledge and power and, based upon their goodwill, use those tools to reach out (in a top-down fashion) to an intellectually

destitute community who supposedly requires that knowledge to survive. Instead, we argue, successful and resilient academic professionals in the twenty-first century should think of themselves as citizen-scholars, who integrate (as opposed to apply) their academic discipline with the experiences and objectives of the broader community. Segregating theory from application, content from form, and academic discipline from outreach only serves to perpetuate and reify a value system that minimizes the chances of real outreach, where collaborative partnerships are dedicated to genuine discovery and action. As long as this value system exists, the academic and public spheres necessarily will remain bifurcated, a situation that ultimately hinders the quest to realize Lynton's dream. The IE program seeks to change the philosophical approach to and vocabulary associated with outreach and engagement. Thus, IE is not simply a template or mechanistic set of skills designed to enable graduate students to engage in public outreach; rather, it is a way of thinking about and understanding graduate education, disciplinary identity, and research expertise.

This university-wide program asks: "Thinking as broadly and boldly as possible, how can graduate students take full advantage of opportunities to use their expertise to make a meaningful and lasting difference in their discipline and the community?" IE is premised on the belief that entrepreneurship is not limited to business and that intellect is not limited to the academy. Successful and resilient academic profes-

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sionals are intellectual entrepreneurs. Intellectual entrepreneurs, both inside and outside the university, take risks and seize opportunities, discover and create knowledge, innovate, collaborate, and solve problems in any number of social realms: corporate, non-profit, government, and education. Through sixteen graduate-level, cross-disciplinary courses and internships (addressing topics such as writing, pedagogy, communication, ethics, consulting, technology, and entrepreneurship), the Preparing Future Faculty program, a discipline-specific consulting service (that delivers the IE program to scientific labs, centers, and other academic units), a synergy group initiative designed to help solve community problems, eight cross-disciplinary doctoral and master's portfolio programs, an ad

hoc interdisciplinary doctoral option, and a variety of workshops, the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program aims to educate citizen-scholars. The IE program's goal is to empower students to own their education, so they can make informed choices about where and how to use their research expertise. In the past three years, the IE program has helped over 2,500 UT students in nearly ninety academic fields discover their disciplinary identity, celebrate the enormous value of their expertise, and become successful, engaged, and resilient academic professionals.

Essentially, the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program creates “spaces” and opportunities for doctoral students to discover their personal and professional identity by asking them to consider what things they are passionate about and then discover why and to whom they wish to communicate. The program's mantra is: “I know therefore I must act.” Traditional methods of graduate education and academic outreach start by training students to be experts in a particular discipline; then, somewhere along the way, students are asked about matters such as teaching and outreach. Both rhetorically and in practice, this creates a categorical division between students' understanding of their disciplinary expertise and the application of that expertise. By contrast, the IE program starts by subsuming teaching and outreach within the very discovery of what one's discipline is and to whom it has value. Outreach for IE participants works (or can work) because people learn to own their education and make conscious choices about how to use it. Outreach is not after the fact—something one has to do; rather, it is an essential part of building one's academic professional persona and voice. And that is precisely why IE is not merely an initiative to reform graduate education by offering students professional development as an add-on to their degree. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We ask readers to imagine a system of graduate education that begins by asking students to think about what matters to them most and then uses their answers to create not only programs of research, but also (and simultaneously) exciting and varied possibilities of how and where to utilize their knowledge. We call this approach to education and outreach “passion plus expertise,” and it is the linchpin of IE.

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In its largest sense, therefore, the IE program is committed to developing innovative, collaborative, and sustainable ways for

universities to work with their communities to solve complex problems. Toward this end, IE is pursuing three broad initiatives that speak directly to the definition and practice of outreach: (1) creating relationships and “spaces” where diverse groups of people can jointly own issues and problems, creatively utilizing their expertise, experience, and passion to bring about change; (2) conducting research on the emergent and organic processes by which innovative collaborations between universities and their communities occur and are sustained; and (3) developing curriculum to empower and support people in making lasting change in themselves and their organizations. To meet its goals, IE seeks the support of faculty, students, academic administrators, foundations, government agencies, businesses, and philanthropists who are interested in:

Promoting entrepreneurial thinking in all spheres of society

- Implementing collaborative models of discovery and action in the academic and public/private sectors
- Encouraging genuine reform in higher education through increased access to the intellectual assets of the university; greater responsiveness by the university to the needs of the community; and additional cross-disciplinary initiatives
- Developing methods for creating a more civil society
- Building relationships within and between organizations that result in a productive, passionate and resilient workforce.

The program has been spotlighted repeatedly by the national media, receiving praise from numerous administrators and educational organizations. In 2000–2001, the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program received a prestigious Innovation Award from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. Others have given high praise to the program, commenting on its unique way of integrating expertise and outreach. Dr. Robert Weisbuch, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, notes that:

The new concept of graduate study, though, is not about jobs as much as it is about the application of knowledge for the benefit of society. And that is nowhere plainer than in the groundbreaking Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program begun at The University of Texas at Austin graduate school under the direction of associate dean Richard Cherwitz. The stated goal, to produce scholar-citizens by enabling students to decide how best to contribute their

expertise and in what particular venues, takes us a long way past the narcissistic old notion of professors using the Ph.D. to create clone-slaves. Best, it is not an add-on, not a mere enhancement, but about “helping students to discover their discipline and their value,” about “harnessing intellectual energy and talent” and creating “connections between the academy and the public and private sectors.” I think that they [UT’s Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program] are a great model of what you can do in doctoral education. They have done the best job in the country. (*Weisbuch 2001, 3*)

Roberta Shaffer, executive director of the Special Libraries Association, offers the following assessment:

This approach [Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program] has enormous implications for an intellectually rich public university like UT to assume a critical role as a public servant and institutional citizen. The solutions to huge social issues do not fit neatly into one box (one discipline) in terms of solutions. These challenges require people who have been trained to think as “intellectual entrepreneurs.” (*Grund 2001, 5*)

Five years into the program, it is clear that graduate students are thinking in new ways and seizing new opportunities as a result of their experience with the IE program. One UT student described the program as “a progressive move toward understanding the complex twenty-first century graduate student who needs to be challenged to think critically, competitively, and responsibly.” Another student, who contends that he is now a better engineer directly as a result of enrolling in IE courses, claims that the most compelling feature of the program is that, by making them stand outside their discipline, it better enables graduate students to discover what they are passionate about and the enormous value of their chosen academic field. The notion of “going outside to discover what is inside” is certainly a unique way of thinking about expertise and outreach—one that stands in stark contrast to the conventional idea that one should become an expert in advance of thinking about outreach.

Julie Kern, a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the College of Pharmacy, Division of Pharmacology and Toxicology, wanted to gain experience beyond the strong science emphasis of her program

in order to discover new ways of using her expertise. Kern participated in the IE program's consulting class, which is designed to foster collaboration among academic disciplines and put into place effective and sustainable structures that enable graduate students to "own" their education and professional development. Graduate students from many different disciplines have taken and benefitted from the class. Kern explains how the consulting course broadened her perspective:

This course opens your mind to thinking about what you can do as a professionally educated individual to improve a program or situation for the betterment of others. I, myself, got an opportunity to think "out of the box" about what I could do to improve life for others, develop a plan to act on this vision, and ultimately, make it happen. I knew there were many things I could do with my degree, but not really how to go about using it. This course helped me gain initiative confidently, and I learned more about how to gather resources to get my ideas moving. Overall, I think the class opened my mind to what I could really do with a higher degree and how I can put my ideas into place with just a few key steps. (*Grund 2002, 11*)

What a terrific example of conceiving of outreach as the union of expertise and passion. Kern has decided to pursue an academic postdoctoral position, but "after that the possibilities are endless."

The IE program's courses and internships also are of value to graduate students interested in a more traditional career in academe. One of the better-known IE projects is Preparing Future Faculty (PFF), a national initiative to develop model programs that better prepare graduate students interested in a teaching career. GRS 390N (PFF Internship) gives graduate students from research universities like UT the opportunity to work with local institutional partners that primarily serve undergraduates, such as liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and comprehensive universities. These local partnerships offer graduate students the chance to gain firsthand experience by observing and participating in carrying out responsibilities such as teaching and advising, curriculum development, and departmental and committee service that will form the core of their responsibilities as new faculty members. Currently, five partner institutions constitute the University of Texas cluster: Austin Community College, Huston-Tillotson College, St. Edward's University, Southwest Texas State University, and Southwestern University.

Theater doctoral candidate Carolyn Roark participated in PFF at St. Edward's University. She explains that the PFF internship was a perfect match for her, as she eventually wants to be a professor at a college similar to St. Edward's. Her position as teaching assistant for an acting class was such a positive experience that she started her own teaching workshop last semester as part of PFF to help prepare other graduate students going into internships—"it lays out the groundwork for students," she said.

Roark is one of many graduate students who praises the IE program, particularly for what it can offer students seeking a career in academe. Like many doctoral candidates, she was well aware of the lack of academic jobs, and discovered that the IE program

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can open new doors for students. "IE lets students know that they will fit in somewhere, that there's a place for everyone—whether it is academe, government, the private sector, etc.," Roark said. "It lets students know that their goals are not secondary if they don't fit a mold for what grad students are supposed to want. In my case, my experience with IE taught me that it was OK

to want what I want, and that is to eventually teach at a small, liberal arts college, versus a large research-oriented university. IE also helps students find alternatives to academe, if that's what they want." "Essentially, it helps students look at things realistically, and ask themselves, what can I expect to accomplish? IE helps you find a way to make that happen," she said. "IE lets you regain ownership of what you're doing now, re-claim your educational process now, and get a head start to get ownership over your career and life after graduate school," Roark added.

The IE program's distinctive approach to outreach perhaps is best revealed by the fact that it enables and encourages graduate students to become scholars who can use their expertise to promote change. As citizen-scholars, UT graduate students utilize their expertise to engage a wider public. They are, in a sense, intellectual entrepreneurs—holding values, critiquing based on those values, and above all else, willing to act on those values. Put simply, values, passion, experiences, and expertise are not segregated in the IE program; in fact, they are intertwined. "In addition to furthering my education, the IE program has made me feel not just like a

graduate student in search of knowledge, but a person who can actually make something beneficial happen in the world with my knowledge,” said Kern.

In order to afford faculty and students direct experience using their expertise, the IE program has developed a natural extension of its curriculum in working with community partnerships: these collaborations are called synergy groups. They bring together people with different perspectives from various academic fields as well as stakeholders from the public and private sectors. Synergy groups are a cross-disciplinary, multi-institutional and integrative approach to intellectual entrepreneurship. In fall 2001, a synergy group was begun to look at questions regarding community health care is-

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issues. A collection of individuals from divergent backgrounds and with varied experiences (graduate students and faculty members in advertising, sociology, history, psychology, and communication; workers from private and non-profit organizations; and medial administrators) pooled their ideas, experience, and expertise in order to begin the process of formulating innovative ways to approach

the difficult and complex health care issues confronting Austin, Texas, and the Central Texas region. As the discussions evolved over the fall, two immediate issues emerged that now serve as the focus of the synergy group: (1) increasing the enrollment of eligible families in Medicaid and the state-supported insurance plan for children; and (2) developing a regional perspective on health and wellness. In the meetings, the group has moved simultaneously on two tracks. First, there has been discussion of the broader issues surrounding health care and brainstorming about general ways to approach those issues, which include funding, political support, and provider participation. And, second, the group began to identify some specific projects that can be undertaken to help them achieve their goals, such as outreach.

As the work of the group progresses, graduate students and faculty will become involved in collaborative projects to help a community health care provider define its challenges and goals and then make progress toward meeting those goals. The synergy group model underscores the IE program’s theme: “Discovery,

Collaboration, Action.” The potential value of synergy groups and their unique method of outreach and engagement are summarized in a letter dated 22 May 2001 by U.S. Representative Lloyd Doggett (10th District of Texas):

Synergy Groups will be a valuable asset to our community as they bring UT students together with non-profits and government entities outside of the UT Campus to work on important local issues. Bringing a fresh perspective and a practiced understanding of academic research and problem-solving methods, UT students can serve as an important resource and, through their service, gain insight on developing collaborative solutions to the challenges in our community. *(copy online at http://www.utexas.edu/admin/opa/oncampus/02oc_issues/oc020301/oc020301.pdf)*

While IE has moved us in the right direction to bring Lynton’s vision to fruition, perhaps we must go even further—taking a page from our community college PFF partner. And this can be accomplished while still preserving the distinctive identity of a research institution. Specifically, the philosophy of the IE program lends itself to new ways of forming collaborations among universities, community colleges, and the community itself. In fact, the relationship between the PFF program at UT and Austin Community College has prompted much discussion about creative partnering. Community colleges typically thrive on the type of partnerships and outreach efforts that the IE program promotes at the university level, especially in the areas of workforce development. Such efforts are the norm at two-year schools. Thus, when communities face problems, they often turn first to community colleges, believing that community colleges will act in a quick and nimble fashion; unfortunately, research universities house a wealth of unaccessed talent relevant to those community issues. IE is about harnessing and integrating that talent and, following the lead of our PFF community college partner, learning how to work more collaboratively and responsively with those in the public and private sectors. Therefore, when University of Texas PFF students (who will become the next generation of academic professionals) complete internships at Austin Community College, they often have participated in department-level meetings during which such outreach efforts are routinely planned and discussed. These students take with them a unique partnering/outreach mind set: being a citizen-scholar is something they have seen first hand at a two-year school.

Indeed, several plans are being devised that will permit the leadership of and students in the IE program to study how community colleges work effectively with the community. These plans are premised on the IE program's ability to form powerful networks with the outreach experts who already exist at two-year schools. The value lies not only in the expertise that the university can lend to community college/community partnerships, but also in what the university can learn about how to utilize research to respond in a timely fashion to the needs of the community.

The Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program embodies Lynton's image of an engaged discipline, where graduate students learn to work with the community at large to address the problems of society. We submit that "outreach" and "public service" do not accurately depict the interchange of knowledge and value between institutions of higher education and the wider public. Instead, it is our belief that academic professionals should think more in terms of being citizen-scholars, who combine their strengths with those of community partners in order to jointly accomplish societal objectives. In this way, the very mission of higher education is transformed from being a repository of knowledge, which is bestowed upon a fortunate few, to being a partner of the larger society with an intellectually adventurous and fierce civic orientation.

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