

## Visit Cornell University, 2008

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The aim of my visit was to better understand the organization, the content and the aspirations of the Cornell entrepreneurship program.

I was able to use the opportunity offered by John Jaquette Jr., executive director of Entrepreneurship@Cornell, to talk with him as well as with members of the Cornell faculties. The talks unveiled lots of the issues that play a role in maintaining and extending the position of entrepreneurship at the university.

It is not my intention to describe what otherwise can be found on websites of the Cornell University, the Cornell schools and colleges and the entrepreneurship program. Nor what can be found in publications (see appendix). I'd like to try to describe the most important impressions I was able to catch during my stay at the Ithaca campus. The first section serving as an introduction, however, partly is a collection of data from websites that can easily be checked and extended if necessary.

### *Cornell at a glance*

Cornell is a prestigious university, member of the Ivy League, highly ranked at most of the university quality lists. The university is partly state-funded (land grant) and partly dependent on private funds. Cornell's main sources of income are tuition, federal and state support, gifts, and endowment. (Ezra Cornell's founding gift of \$500,000 and his farm was Cornell's initial endowment). Cornell's endowment as of June 30, 2006 was \$4.3 billion.

Reflecting the distinct funding one can distinguish between endowed colleges and contract colleges. The land grant part (contract colleges) comprises: College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Human Ecology, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, College of Veterinary Medicine. Students from New York state have easy access to land grant programs, and research in these areas is directed towards regional issues of the NY-state. As New York's land-grant college, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences for example reaches out locally, nationally, and internationally with extension programs that benefit the public, rural communities, and industry. Endowed colleges are Architecture, Art & Planning; Arts & Sciences; Engineering; Hotel Administration, Law School, the Medical School and the Graduate School of Medical Sciences. There is also a faculty Computing and Information Science, which is cross endowed and state..

Total student body: Ithaca, 19,518; medical, New York City, 781; 13,000 undergraduates.

Tuition is \$36,504 for endowed colleges; \$20,364 for New York residents at contract colleges; \$35,404 for non-New York residents at contract colleges (2008-2009).

Cornell builds on a long history of need-blind admissions and need-based aid for students applying for admission. The university provides a wide range of financing options to help make education affordable. For students from families with demonstrated financial need, financial aid packages are available including grants, employment, and loans. Other non-aid financing options are also available such as loans from outside sources and federal parent loans.

Alumni of Cornell are strongly committed to their alma mater and the university puts a lot of effort in binding their graduates to activities on the campus. Students and staff members gain from these ties that are kept intact carefully. Much attention is paid to alumni who are successful as entrepreneur or who are well-known for their entrepreneurial spirit and who can act as “role model” for current students.

### *Entrepreneurship as cultural phenomenon*

Entrepreneurship can be considered as an economic-cultural phenomenon recognizable in most of the societies on this globe. In capitalist, market-driven societies with liberal features, entrepreneurs have a widely accepted function in the economic system. Entrepreneurs own and lead companies, provide employment, seek opportunities, assess risks, innovate products, services and processes; thus creating wealth for the nation. In their personal life, (successful) entrepreneurs are experiencing a degree of freedom to determine their career, different from employees.

In both the USA and Europe the traditional demarcation between people that prefer to be an employee and entrepreneurs is changing. In Western Europe, state-owned companies and organizations in public service, health care, education etc. are becoming more and more market oriented, thus asking for leaders and managers that act as entrepreneurs. Besides, the state-directed social security system (the welfare state) is changing into a system based on personal responsibility for insurance and retirement, implying a more independent position of citizens towards the security system. Furthermore globalization and rapidly changing technology makes careers of employees uncertain, causing awareness of their vulnerable position and stimulate an entrepreneurial attitude in steering their own career.

The situation in the US is more or less comparable. A growing number of students have a drive of being entrepreneurial in the sense that they want to create their own business or to become the sole proprietor of their own career. Whether they plan to practice a profession, become a leader in a corporation, run a not-for-profit organization, return to a family business or work in government, students see value in learning what is taught in entrepreneurship classes: opportunity recognition and analysis, leadership, teamwork, and creative problem-solving.

The vision concerning entrepreneurship at Cornell, based on the abovementioned considerations is reflected in the statement on the entrepreneurship@cornell statement: *To support a diverse group of university-wide activities that finds and fosters the entrepreneurial spirit in every Cornell participant - in every college, every field, and every stage of life.*

### *Learning for entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurial courses or classes offer lectures and programs that are infused with experiential learning from real world examples, blended with conceptual learning in classrooms. Students write business plans, work with small businesses as consultants, do internships in entrepreneurially-run businesses or help to run venture capital funds. These type of learning experiences are traditionally anchored in and offered by business and engineering schools. Since a decade or so individual students from other disciplines are gradually showing

more interest in business courses. They were touched by the success stories of the dotcom start-ups. Also alumni who felt that the programs they graduated from had shortcomings in business topics, showed the desire to enhance the curricula. The university thus received signals from students and alumni as well, to foster entrepreneurship education.

The question at the university was how to support the wishes of students, alumni and faculty members to extend the learning possibilities for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills. Cornell decided to offer university-wide programs targeted at students beyond the business and engineering fields alone. For example, university-wide programs may include courses aimed at those in arts and sciences, agriculture or in physical sciences. In such a situation there is a desire to extend the opportunity for entrepreneurship education to all students whether or not they are majoring in business or engineering. The courses at Cornell are not taught at a single institute (school or college), but the teaching of entrepreneurship education is diffused throughout the university (actually in nine schools and colleges).

### *Entrepreneurship at Cornell*

Based on the idea of presenting a university-wide program to students, **Entrepreneurship@Cornell** ( E@C ) was founded to support the infusion of entrepreneurship courses into various academic units, resulting in an entrepreneurship curriculum that reaches across the institution and is taught by faculty in various disciplines.

E@C can be considered as

- a virtual portal to all entrepreneurial courses at various schools and colleges;
- a physical office that organizes events for promoting entrepreneurship at Cornell;
- an expression of the entrepreneurial mindset at the university;
- a major node in the network with external entrepreneurs;
- a coordination point for diffusion of didactical approaches in experiential entrepreneurial learning;
- a focal point for alumni-entrepreneurs.

The content of the courses is the faculty's responsibility. Which courses to offer is for the schools and colleges to decide. E@C can make suggestions about and connections with similar courses at other institutes. Depending on the lecturer's didactics, experiences of (mostly local) entrepreneurs are used in class: assignments for small businesses and internships. Special attention is directed to the E-clips project of Prof. Deborah Streeter, where a database with digital videos of entrepreneurs can be accessed by students.

Funding of the course depends predominantly on the number of registered students. New courses however need investments in faculty positions and research for which endowments from alumni are appropriate. Likewise, at university and college level calls upon alumni are being made, so approaching alumni by E@C is a matter of careful consideration. E@C however is completely free to approach alumni to share their entrepreneurial experience with the students. Because of the commitment of alumni to Cornell it is one of E@C's strong points to foster the students' entrepreneurial spirit by exposing them to successful entrepreneurs, proud of their education at Cornell. E@C uses various ways for this: entrepreneur of the year, feature articles in alumni magazine, Cornell Entrepreneur Network, Entrepreneurship Expo etc.

*E@C, summarized*

E@C has quite some experience in dealing with possibilities, challenges, obstacles and impediments of an university-wide program. To better be able to analyze the core issues E@C is coping with I made a kind of mind map (a very free interpretation) of the topics concerning the entrepreneurial program (figure 1).

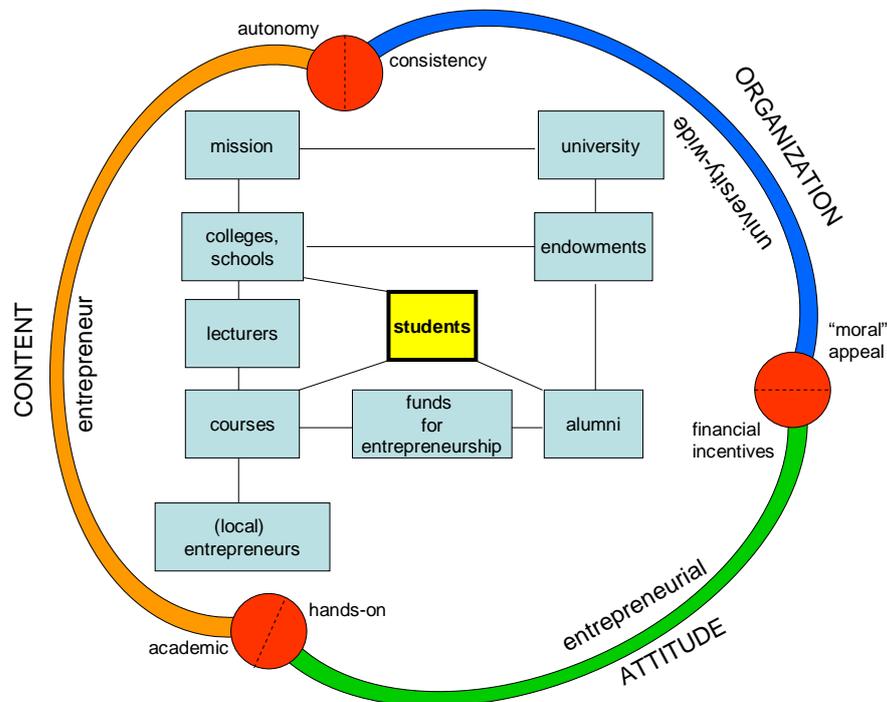


Figure 1, "mind map" of E@C issues.

How to interpret figure 1?

The inner part:

- E@C helps students to find their way in the supply of courses.
- E@C makes use of existing courses offered by various schools and colleges. Lecturers are responsible for the course and how they include experiential learning in their classes. Sometimes they involve (local) entrepreneurs, physically or virtually by means of videoclips.
- E@C can support lecturers or colleges to introduce new entrepreneurial courses by persuasion because students are asking for it or sometimes by financial incentives endowed by alumni.
- The mission of Cornell University is a strong recommendation for student's personal development and for supporting economic activities in state and country by emphasizing entrepreneurship.
- Supporting alumni can make funds available for entrepreneurship on college level and sometimes at course level. Fund raising is a crucial activity for E@C to provide the possibilities for maintaining the quality of the total program.

The outer "circle":

- Represents the three essential areas of attention of E@C and the tensions one has to deal with.
- The objective of the program is twofold: (a) knowledge about entrepreneur subjects ( business plan, acquisition of venture capital, marketing etc.) and (b) focus at the importance of an entrepreneurial attitude.
- It is E@C's strategy to connect these two objectives by a proper university-wide organization.
- There are three fields of tension:
  - Faculty members want to maintain the academic quality of their courses whereas entrepreneurship asks for hands on training. Conceptual and practical approaches should meet in harmony.
  - E@C has no direct influence on courses. There are two ways to persuade a school or college to change an existing course or to offer a new one: arguments and/or money. Both can come from alumni.
  - The program makes use of courses offered by autonomous institutes. Students however who are putting together their study program are looking for consistency and want to avoid doublets. To offer a consistent program to students of different disciplines is a challenging task.

## **Appendix.**

### People I have met:

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### Web Sites:

<http://eship.cornell.edu/>  
<http://www.cen.cornell.edu/>  
<http://e-clips.cornell.edu/>

### Publication:

Streeter, D.H., J. P. Jaquette, Jr., K. Hovis. 2002. *University-wide Entrepreneurship Education: Alternative Models and Current Trends*. Working Paper WP 2002-02. Department of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853-7801 USA.