Measuring entrepreneurship in the academic heartland

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As a result of turbulent conditions, institutions are changing the way they operate. Research that illustrates the growing importance of activities on the edges of institutions is an important part of portraying entrepreneurship accurately; the growth of areas like intellectual property, applied research, fundraising, and increased university partnerships with public and private sectors are vital to the sustainability of postsecondary institutions. However, these activities alone are only part of what Clark (1998) has described as the Entrepreneurial University. To holistically portray organizational transformations, the core of the academy—academic disciplines, teaching, and educating—must be examined for patterns of adaptation and change (Mars & Aguilar, 2010; Clark, 1998; Becher & Trowler, 2001). However, the diverse and ambiguous nature of higher education and entrepreneurship make measuring such a phenomenon challenging (Cohen & March, 1986). This makes defining entrepreneurship clearly and contextually difficult, and may partially explain the scarcity of measures that capture entrepreneurial activity within the core academic function; educating people (Mars & Aguilar, 2010).

This quantitative, longitudinal study analyzed how institutions may differentially engage in academic entrepreneurship between 2004-05 and 2008-09. Measurements based on the change in the number of unique degree and certificate fields conferred by an institution were created to represent entrepreneurship. These measures were developed based on the historic parallels between institutional change in academic units and disciplines, and evolving societal and economic demands (Thelin, 2004; Brint, 2005; Bok, 2003; Drucker, 1985). Following quantitative analysis, these measures were analyzed for patterns in fields of study.

This study concluded that schools with a balance of professional, and arts and sciences programs were most likely to demonstrate academic entrepreneurship. Research oriented institutions changed their degree and certificate conferrals more so than masters or baccalaureate colleges. Private, not-for-profit colleges and universities were more engaged in academic entrepreneurship than their public counterparts. Additionally, larger institutions demonstrate higher levels of entrepreneurship in the academic heartland than smaller ones.

Additional analysis revealed patterns in the types of programs being added and disbanded that mirror market demands (based on a comparison to occupational projections provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics). Furthermore, these newly created measures of academic entrepreneurship provide insight into innovative activity outside of research and development.

Institutions of higher education are being asked to increase access, affordability, and quality, but they are also expected to do so with dwindling state and public subsidy, growing student price burdens, and slashes to critical programs. These harsh realities require that institutions evolve in many ways to meet the varied expectations and demands placed upon them. The goal of this study was to...