Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2026 (pp. 344-361)

WWW.PEGEGOG.NET RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of the University in Promoting Entrepreneurial Culture and Enhancing the Training of Student Project Holders A Theoretical

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Published: 06/01/2026

Abstract

This article examines the role of universities in fostering entrepreneurial culture and supporting student project holders. The Entrepreneurial University integrates traditional teaching and research with a "third mission" of knowledge transfer, commercialization, and community engagement. Entrepreneurial culture is promoted through education, experiential learning, mentorship, role models, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Extracurricular activities such as competitions and networking events further engage students. This holistic approach equips students with the skills, mindset, and resilience needed for entrepreneurial success.

Structured support through incubators, accelerators, funding, and Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) helps students transform ideas into viable ventures. Universities also act as hubs, connecting students to investors, corporations, and government agencies, contributing to regional development. Challenges include risk-averse cultures, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited resources. Future trends emphasize digitalization, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship. An integrated approach combining culture, training, and ecosystem linkages maximizes the university's impact on student entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial University; Student Entrepreneurship; Mentorship; Incubators; Innovation

Introduction

In the 21st century, the global economy has increasingly become knowledge-based, where innovation, creativity, and adaptability drive competitiveness and societal progress. Within this context, entrepreneurship has emerged as a key engine of growth, fostering job creation, innovation, and solutions to complex societal challenges. Universities, traditionally centers for education and research, are now expected to actively contribute to economic and social development, giving rise to the concept of the "Entrepreneurial University".

Universities host critical resources for innovation, including talented students, world-class researchers, and an environment conducive to experimentation. However, effectively fostering student entrepreneurship requires deliberate strategies to create a supportive ecosystem. This study addresses the central question: How can universities design and implement a holistic framework to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture and provide practical training for student project holders?

The study aims to offer a theoretical framework to guide universities in enhancing their entrepreneurial role, covering strategic governance, curriculum design, and support structures such as incubators and mentorship. By exploring these aspects, the article provides insights for academic leaders, policymakers, and students, and establishes a foundation for future empirical research and practical applications in higher education innovation.

1. The Entrepreneurial University: A Conceptual Framework

1.1. Defining the Entrepreneurial University: From the Ivory Tower to the Economic Engine

The "Entrepreneurial University" marks a shift from the traditional Humboldtian model, which prioritized teaching and research in an insulated "ivory tower," toward a proactive role in economic and social development. Modern universities are increasingly expected to demonstrate their societal relevance by commercializing knowledge, fostering innovation, and creating new ventures[1].

Etzkowitz's "Triple Helix" model highlights the interactive relationship between university, industry, and government as essential for innovation. An entrepreneurial university cultivates a deep, institution-wide entrepreneurial culture, integrating

[1] Etzkowitz, H. (2004). The evolution of the entrepreneurial university. International Journal of Technology and Globalisation, 1(1), 64-77.

strategic governance, a motivated academic core, diversified funding, and a belief system that supports commercialization and venture creation[2].

This transformation involves adding a "third mission"—economic and social development—alongside teaching and research. Universities manage intellectual property, establish technology transfer offices, incubators, and science parks, and encourage faculty and student entrepreneurship. This integration creates a virtuous cycle: entrepreneurial activities fund research, industry collaborations enrich learning, and new ventures contribute to regional economic growth, making the university both academically excellent and socially relevant[3].

1.2. The Core Pillars of an Entrepreneurial University: Leadership, Governance, and Strategic Vision

Transforming a traditional university into an entrepreneurial one requires deliberate efforts based on three core pillars: leadership, governance, and strategic vision.

- Leadership is crucial, with university leaders championing the entrepreneurial agenda, making strategic decisions, allocating resources, and fostering a shared purpose. A strong steering core ensures the university navigates institutional change effectively[4].
- Governance must be adaptive and flexible, moving beyond rigid structures to support semi-autonomous units like technology transfer offices and entrepreneurship centers. Effective governance creates enabling policies, such as clear intellectual property rules, while managing industry collaborations and potential conflicts of interest[5].
- Strategic vision integrates entrepreneurship into the university's mission. A clear, well-communicated strategy aligns resources, programs, and incentives, sets measurable goals, and engages the external ecosystem, ensuring that entrepreneurial activities complement rather than distract from teaching and research[6].

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1.3. The University's "Third Mission": Knowledge Transfer, Commercialization, and Community Engagement

Beyond teaching and research, the entrepreneurial university embraces a “third mission” focused on socio-economic impact through knowledge transfer, commercialization, and community engagement.

- Knowledge transfer involves sharing academic expertise with industry, government, and society via collaborative research, consulting, professional training, and public outreach, ensuring university knowledge addresses real-world challenges[7].
- Commercialization is a formalized subset of knowledge transfer, turning intellectual property into economic value through licensing and spin-offs, with Technology Transfer Offices supporting faculty and students. Revenue generated is reinvested to sustain research and education[8].
- Community engagement extends the mission to social and cultural development, public policy support, and regional challenges. Universities act as "anchor institutions," fostering a reciprocal relationship where regional growth and university success reinforce each other[9].

1.4. Measuring the Impact of the Entrepreneurial University: Metrics and Performance Indicators

Evaluating the impact of an entrepreneurial university is complex, as its effects are multifaceted and long-term. Quantitative metrics like patents, licensing income, spin-offs, and venture capital provide tangible outcomes but may not fully capture meaningful impact[10].

A balanced approach combines these with qualitative indicators, such as student enrollment in entrepreneurship programs, participation in competitions, attitudes towards entrepreneurship, and cross-disciplinary innovation projects. These measure the development of an entrepreneurial culture and human capital essential for a sustainable ecosystem[11].

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The most significant assessment considers long-term regional and national economic contributions, including job creation, spin-off survival, attraction of high-tech firms, workforce skill enhancement, and overall regional innovation. Comprehensive measurement often uses case studies, alumni tracking, and econometric analyses, enabling universities to justify investments, identify gaps, and strategically enhance societal impact[12].

2. Fostering an Entrepreneurial Culture within the University Ecosystem

2.1. The Role of Entrepreneurship Education: Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Approaches

Fostering an entrepreneurial culture begins with a well-designed entrepreneurship education program that develops students' awareness, skills, and mindset. The goal is not only to teach business creation but to equip students with competencies such as opportunity recognition, creativity, problem-solving, risk management, and resilience. Programs range from introductory courses to advanced workshops and venture creation initiatives[13].

Experiential and action-based learning is key, emphasizing practice over theory. Methods include lean startup approaches, real-world case studies, simulations, and project-based courses, allowing students to apply concepts and develop viable business models[14].

Curricula should be interdisciplinary and accessible, integrating entrepreneurship across disciplines to encourage diverse, cross-field collaboration. Embedding entrepreneurial modules in non-business courses enhances relevance and fosters innovative ventures at the intersection of multiple fields[15].

2.2. Extracurricular Activities as Catalysts for Culture: Competitions, Clubs, and Networking Events

Extracurricular activities play a crucial role in shaping the entrepreneurial culture on campus. Competitions like business plan contests motivate students to

[12] Fini, R., Grimaldi, R., Santoni, S., & Sobrero, M. (2011). The role of universities in the process of regional innovation. Cambridge Journal of Economics, 35(4), 785-809.

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develop concrete proposals and receive real-world feedback from experienced entrepreneurs and investors[16].

Student-led clubs and societies provide peer-to-peer support, organize workshops, guest lectures, and brainstorming sessions, fostering collaboration, motivation, and social capital essential for entrepreneurial ventures[17].

Networking events, such as hackathons, startup weekends, and investor meetings, connect students with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. By facilitating these interactions, universities help students access resources, mentors, and potential collaborators, embedding them into a dynamic innovation network[18].

2.3. Building a Supportive Campus Environment: Role Models, Mentorship, and Celebrating Failure

Fostering an entrepreneurial culture requires a supportive social and psychological campus environment.

- Role models—successful alumni entrepreneurs—make entrepreneurship tangible and inspire students by sharing both successes and struggles[19].
- Mentorship provides personalized guidance, connecting student project holders with experienced alumni, business leaders, or faculty. Mentors offer advice, encouragement, and access to resources, significantly increasing startup success rates[20].
- Celebrating failure is essential. An entrepreneurial university reframes failure as a learning opportunity, reducing stigma and encouraging experimentation. This can include events where entrepreneurs discuss past failures, courses rewarding iterative learning, and academic support for students whose ventures do not succeed[21].

2.4. Integrating Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration: Breaking Down Silos between Arts, Engineering, and Business

[16] Russell, R., Atchison, D., & Brooks, R. (2008). Business plan competitions in tertiary institutions: an exploratory study of student and faculty perceptions. Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 15(1), 151-167.
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[21] Cope, J. (2011). Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. Journal of Business Venturing, 26(6), 604-623.

Innovation thrives at the intersection of disciplines, yet universities often operate in rigid silos. An entrepreneurial university must strategically break down these barriers, enabling students and faculty from different fields to collaborate and co-create[22].

Interdisciplinary hubs or maker spaces provide shared physical environments with prototyping tools, encouraging students from engineering, business, design, and the humanities to work together and form well-rounded startup teams[23].

Curricular and extracurricular initiatives—such as themed hackathons, innovation challenges, and interdisciplinary capstone projects—foster collaboration across faculties. By managing these intersections of knowledge, universities enhance their capacity to generate innovative, holistic entrepreneurial ventures[24].

3. Enhancing the Training of Student Project Holders: From Idea to Venture

3.1. University Incubators and Accelerators: Structures, Services, and Best Practices

Translating student ideas into viable ventures requires structured support through university incubators and accelerators.

- Incubators provide long-term support (1–3 years) for early-stage startups, offering affordable space, shared services, and a nurturing environment, especially suitable for deep-tech university spin-offs[25].
- Accelerators are intensive, cohort-based programs (3–6 months) that fast-track slightly mature startups through structured curricula, mentorship, and milestone-focused activities, often culminating in investor demo days[26].
- Best practices include selective admission of promising ventures, providing access to mentors and investors, integrating programs with the university ecosystem, and connecting startups to the broader regional innovation system. This ensures ventures receive the guidance and resources needed to grow and succeed[27].

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3.2. Mentorship and Coaching Programs: Connecting Students with Industry Experts and Alumni

High-quality mentorship and coaching are critical for student entrepreneurs.

- Mentorship is long-term and relationship-based, providing strategic guidance, emotional support, and network access. Mentors, often alumni or local business leaders, help students navigate the challenges and uncertainties of entrepreneurship[28].
- Coaching is short-term and task-oriented, focusing on specific skills or challenges, such as pitching, marketing, or team leadership[29].
- The university acts as the architect of these programs by recruiting and training mentors, matching them with students based on expertise and fit, and providing structured support. A well-managed mentorship and coaching system equips student entrepreneurs with the experience, knowledge, and guidance needed to succeed[30].

3.3. Access to Funding: Seed Funds, Angel Investor Networks, and Grant Application Support

Even the best ideas need capital to succeed. Student entrepreneurs often lack track records or networks to attract traditional investors. Entrepreneurial universities bridge this funding gap through:

- University-managed seed funds that provide early-stage capital for prototypes, market research, and milestones, acting as the "first check" to attract further investment[31].
- Angel investor networks, often leveraging alumni, to connect students with trusted, early-stage investors via pitch events and curated platforms[32].
- Grant application support, guiding students through competitive, non-dilutive funding opportunities, helping retain equity while developing their ventures[33].

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[29] Jones, R., & Crompton, H. (2009). Coaching for entrepreneurial success. International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, 7(1), 55-68.

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By providing structured access to funding, universities increase the likelihood that student projects can grow into successful, sustainable startups.

3.4. Intellectual Property (IP) Management and Commercialization Support: The Role of Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs)

For many student ventures, intellectual property (IP) is their most valuable asset. Navigating patents, copyrights, and trade secrets can be challenging for inexperienced founders, which makes the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) essential[34].

TTOs assist students in identifying, protecting, and commercializing their IP, offering services like prior art searches, patent filings, and strategic guidance. They also help evaluate commercial potential and determine the best pathway—licensing to companies or forming spin-offs—while providing founder-friendly IP policies[35].

Beyond legal support, TTOs connect student ventures with incubators, accelerators, and alumni networks, acting as strategic advisors and business developers. This comprehensive support ensures student startups build on a solid IP foundation, enhancing their chances for long-term success[36].

4. The Integrated Role of the University in Supporting Student Entrepreneurship

4.1. A Holistic Model: Integrating Culture, Training, and Ecosystem Linkages

The preceding sections have examined the various components of university-based entrepreneurship support in isolation. However, their true power is only unleashed when they are integrated into a holistic and coherent model. An effective entrepreneurial university is not one that simply has a good entrepreneurship course, a successful incubator, or an active TTO; it is one that weaves these elements together into a seamless and synergistic system. This integrated model can be conceptualized as a "student entrepreneurial journey," with the university providing tailored support at each stage. The journey begins with the "Inspiration" phase, driven by the broader entrepreneurial culture, role models, and awareness-building courses (as discussed in Section 2). The goal here is to spark students' interest in entrepreneurship and help them to recognize opportunities. As students move into the "Ideation" phase, the

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university provides support through hackathons, business plan competitions, and cross-disciplinary collaboration platforms to help them develop their ideas and form teams[37].

Once a team has a concrete idea, they enter the **"Incubation"** phase. Here, the university's more intensive training structures, such as incubators and mentorship programs (discussed in Section 3), come into play. The focus shifts to validating the business model, developing a minimum viable product (MVP), and acquiring the first customers. The final stage is the **"Acceleration"** phase, where the university's accelerators, seed funds, and angel networks help the new venture to secure external funding, scale its operations, and transition from a campus project into a self-sustaining, independent company. A holistic model ensures that there are clear pathways and "warm handoffs" between these stages, so that a student with a promising idea knows exactly where to go next and does not get lost in the system[38].

This integrated approach creates a powerful "entrepreneurial pipeline" or "funnel." A large number of students are exposed to entrepreneurship at the top of the funnel through cultural and educational initiatives. A smaller, self-selected group moves forward to develop their ideas in competitions and workshops. An even smaller number of the most promising ventures are then admitted into the intensive incubation and acceleration programs. This pipeline structure allows the university to use its resources efficiently, providing light-touch, scalable support to the many, and high-touch, intensive support to the few who are most committed and have the highest potential. The success of this model depends on the level of coordination and collaboration between the different support units within the university—the entrepreneurship center, the TTO, the career services office, and the various academic departments—all working together to provide a unified and student-centric support system[39].

4.2. The University as a Hub: Connecting Students to the Broader Regional Innovation Ecosystem

While the internal ecosystem of the university is crucial, no university can provide all the resources a startup needs to succeed. Therefore, a critical role for the entrepreneurial university is to act as a **central hub or "orchestrator"** that connects its student entrepreneurs to the broader **regional innovation ecosystem**. This ecosystem includes a wide range of external stakeholders: venture capital firms,

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[39] Hayter, C. S., Nelson, A. J., & O'Connor, A. (2018). The role of the university in the entrepreneurial ecosystem: a conceptual framework. The Journal of Technology Transfer, 43(4), 907-927.

corporate partners, government economic development agencies, legal and accounting service providers, and other universities and research institutions. The university, with its credibility and extensive network, is uniquely positioned to act as a trusted intermediary, bridging the gap between its internal community and these external resources. This role is not passive; it involves actively building and managing relationships with key players in the region to create tangible opportunities for students[40].

One of the most important connections the university can facilitate is with **corporate partners**. Large corporations are increasingly looking to collaborate with startups as a source of external innovation (a practice known as "open innovation"). The university can act as a matchmaker, connecting its student ventures with corporations that may be interested in their technology as potential customers, strategic partners, or even acquirers. This can be done through corporate-sponsored innovation challenges, "reverse pitch" events where corporations present their problems to students, and by facilitating pilot projects between startups and corporate business units. These partnerships provide startups with invaluable market validation, resources, and a potential path to scale, while providing corporations with access to cutting-edge ideas and talent[41].

Furthermore, the university serves as a key **anchor institution** for its region. By producing a steady stream of new, innovative companies, the university directly contributes to job creation, economic diversification, and the overall dynamism of the local economy. A thriving cluster of university spin-offs can, in turn, attract more talent and investment to the region, creating a virtuous cycle of growth. The university's role as a hub, therefore, is not just about supporting its own students; it is about taking responsibility for the economic and social well-being of its community. As Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's "Triple Helix" model suggests, the proactive engagement of the university as a central node, connecting government, industry, and academia, is the fundamental driver of innovation and development in a knowledge-based regional economy[42].

4.3. Challenges and Barriers to Fostering Student Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

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Despite the growing consensus on the importance of the entrepreneurial university, the path of transformation is fraught with significant **challenges and barriers**. One of the most deeply entrenched barriers is a **risk-averse institutional culture**. The traditional academic culture, which values peer-reviewed publications, grant acquisition, and a stable career path, can be inhospitable to the risk-taking, uncertainty, and potential for failure that are inherent in entrepreneurship. Faculty members may be reluctant to devote time to commercialization activities that are not recognized or rewarded by traditional promotion and tenure criteria. This cultural inertia can create a powerful undertow that resists the changes needed to build a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem[43].

A second major challenge lies in **bureaucratic and administrative hurdles**. University structures are often rigid, slow-moving, and designed for administrative efficiency rather than entrepreneurial agility. This can manifest in numerous ways: a slow and cumbersome process for approving new interdisciplinary courses, inflexible IP policies that are unattractive to founders, and procurement rules that make it difficult for startups to engage in pilot projects with the university itself. Overcoming this "institutional sclerosis" requires a concerted effort from university leadership to streamline processes, delegate authority, and create "fast tracks" for entrepreneurial initiatives, effectively carving out protected spaces for innovation within the larger bureaucracy[44].

Finally, there is the persistent challenge of **resource constraints**. Building and sustaining a comprehensive entrepreneurship support system is expensive. It requires funding for dedicated staff, program activities, incubator facilities, and seed capital. In an era of declining public funding for higher education, securing the necessary resources can be a major struggle. This is further complicated by the fact that the returns on these investments are often long-term and difficult to measure, making it hard to justify the expenditure in the face of competing demands for resources from other parts of the university. While successful programs can eventually become self-sustaining through licensing income or donor support, the initial upfront investment represents a significant barrier for many institutions, particularly those that are not already research-intensive or well-endowed[45].

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4.4. Future Trends and the Next-Generation Entrepreneurial University: Digitalization, Sustainability, and Social Entrepreneurship

The concept of the entrepreneurial university is not static; it is continuously evolving in response to broader technological and societal trends. Looking forward, several key trends are shaping the **"next-generation" entrepreneurial university**. The first is **digitalization**. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning and remote work, and this is having a lasting impact on entrepreneurship support. Universities are now developing virtual incubators and online mentorship platforms that can reach a much broader and more diverse student population, including part-time students and those at satellite campuses. Digital tools are also enabling new forms of entrepreneurship education, such as AI-powered simulations and global virtual team projects, making the learning experience more scalable, personalized, and accessible than ever before[46].

A second major trend is the growing emphasis on **sustainability and the green transition**. There is increasing pressure on all sectors of society, including universities and startups, to address urgent environmental challenges like climate change. The next-generation entrepreneurial university is actively fostering "green entrepreneurship," encouraging and supporting student ventures that are developing solutions for renewable energy, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, and the circular economy. This involves launching dedicated "CleanTech" incubators, integrating sustainability principles into the entrepreneurship curriculum, and aligning the university's seed fund with sustainable investment criteria. This focus not only addresses a critical societal need but also opens up vast new economic opportunities for student entrepreneurs[47].

Finally, there is a rising focus on **social entrepreneurship and impact**. Students today are increasingly motivated not just by financial returns, but by a desire to create positive social change. The next-generation entrepreneurial university is responding to this by expanding its support for social ventures—enterprises that use business models to tackle social problems in areas like education, healthcare, and poverty. This involves creating dedicated social innovation labs, offering courses on measuring social impact, and connecting students with impact investors and foundations. This broadening of the definition of entrepreneurship—from a purely commercial activity to a powerful tool for problem-solving in all its forms—is perhaps the most significant evolution,

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positioning the university as a key driver of not just economic value, but also social progress and human well-being[48].

Conclusion

This theoretical exploration has systematically unpacked the multifaceted role of the university in fostering an entrepreneurial culture and enhancing the training of student project holders. The journey from the traditional "ivory tower" to the modern "entrepreneurial university" represents one of the most significant transformations in the history of higher education. The analysis has demonstrated that this transformation is not a superficial addition of a few new programs, but a deep, systemic change that requires visionary leadership, adaptive governance, and a clear strategic commitment to a "third mission" of socio-economic engagement. The research has established that an effective entrepreneurial university operates as an integrated ecosystem, seamlessly blending cultural initiatives, curricular innovation, and structured training programs to guide students along a comprehensive entrepreneurial pipeline, from initial inspiration to the launch and acceleration of a new venture.

The central argument of this article is that the university's role is that of an indispensable **catalyst and orchestrator**. It acts as a catalyst by creating a fertile environment where entrepreneurial ambitions can emerge and flourish, providing the essential nutrients of knowledge, mentorship, and early-stage resources. It acts as an orchestrator by not only managing its own internal ecosystem but also by serving as a central hub that connects its student entrepreneurs to the broader regional innovation system of investors, corporations, and government agencies. The findings affirm that success in this domain is contingent upon a holistic approach. A university that excels in entrepreneurship education but fails to provide post-curricular support like incubation and funding will see its best ideas wither. Conversely, a university that builds a state-of-the-art incubator but lacks a vibrant campus culture to feed it with talent and ideas will find its expensive facilities sitting empty. It is the synergy between culture, training, and ecosystem linkages that creates a truly powerful engine for innovation.

Based on this theoretical framework, several key recommendations emerge. For **university leaders**, the priority must be to embed entrepreneurship into the core strategy of the institution and to champion the cultural and structural changes necessary to support it. This includes reforming promotion and tenure criteria to recognize and reward faculty engagement in entrepreneurial activities and empowering dedicated

[48] Mair, J., & Martí, I. (2006). Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight. Journal of World Business, 41(1), 36-44.

support units with the autonomy and resources they need to succeed. For **policymakers**, the study highlights the need to view universities as strategic assets in national innovation policy. This means providing targeted funding for university-based entrepreneurship programs, supporting the creation of university-managed seed funds, and enacting policies that facilitate knowledge transfer and university-industry collaboration.

This article, being theoretical in nature, opens up numerous avenues for future empirical research. There is a need for more longitudinal studies that track the long-term outcomes of graduates from entrepreneurship programs to measure their impact beyond simple startup creation rates. Comparative studies of different university support models across different national and institutional contexts could yield valuable insights into best practices. Furthermore, research is needed to better understand the challenges and success factors for fostering entrepreneurship in non-business disciplines, such as the arts, humanities, and social sciences. As the world continues to grapple with complex challenges, from climate change to global health crises, the role of the university as a source of innovative, entrepreneurial solutions has never been more critical. By embracing this role with strategic intent and a commitment to building a holistic support ecosystem, universities can unlock the immense potential of their students to create a more prosperous, sustainable, and equitable future.

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