

Public Abstract

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Title:INNOVATION IN SUMMER SESSIONS: A QUALITATIVE, MULTI-CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES SUMMER SESSION PROGRAMS THROUGH THE USE OF ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The emergence of academic entrepreneurship is a recent phenomenon and the application of academic entrepreneurship is not consistent nor has consensus among institutions (Mars & Metcalfe, 2009). Mars and Rios-Aguilar (2010) posited that to understand the benefits and barriers of supporting and creating entrepreneurial activity in higher education, researchers need to apply the following conceptual dimensions when studying academic entrepreneurship: (1) creative disruption; (2) (dis)equilibrium; (3) innovation; (4) value creation; (5) [and] opportunity recognition. In this dissertation, a qualitative multi case study examined academic entrepreneurship with particular attention focused on the summer session administrator and how that role influences and interprets university entrepreneurial activity. Through data analysis, the researcher sought to understand how university summer session administrators as institutional entrepreneurs foster innovation and entrepreneurship within a university landscape and additionally, how university summer session programs engage in entrepreneurial market and non-market or socially-oriented activities; ultimately recognizing how institutions may adopt the activity into the broader university strategic plan (Mars and Rios-Aguilar).

The participants for the study consisted of three summer session administrators, their supervisors and faculty and staff whom support market or non-market like activity during the summer session. Data collection methods included audio-recorded personal interviews, focus groups, document collection and observations were conducted at three public higher education institutions located within the North Central region of the North American Association on Summer Sessions (NAASS). Through data analysis, three themes and a number of subthemes emerged: 1) Campus Collaboration, with subthemes of: a) Expanded Student Support Services, and b) Facility Usage; 2) Business Enterprise with subthemes: a) Incentivizing and Risk Management, b) Marketing c) Data Analysis and Reporting; and 3) Enrollment Management with the subthemes: a) Outreach to New Audiences, b) Retention and Completion Efforts and c) Year Round University.

The implications of this study suggest a business enterprise dependent on revenue will be aware of competing market forces, will use data driven decision-making and utilize incentive models to drive entrepreneurial culture. Secondly, enrollment management issues such as retention and graduation rates are increasingly reliant on the success of summer sessions. In addition, administrators play a vital role in shaping enrollment goals, fee structures and advising infrastructures for their organizations as supported by Sims, 2007. Finally, summer session administrators are collaborating with offices across campus to provide student support services. The intent is to work across service silos, present a united front to students while maintaining service expectations year-round rather than just Fall and Spring semester. Most entrepreneurial activity identified in this study is portrayed as unique to summer yet could be adapted for Fall and Spring. Adapting summer session activity into the traditional calendar provides universities new teaching and delivery formats, new operating procedures and policy opportunities, and transparency with data driven decision-making resulting in fiscal gain. The future of summer sessions maybe where students attend universities year round and summer is no longer seen as the remedial semester operating outside of the traditional academic calendar.