

College can cultivate innovative entrepreneurial intentions

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Innovative entrepreneurial intentions—or the aim to create new products and bring them to market, rather than replicating existing products—are boosted by college experiences, according to research by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

The multi-country study, published in *The Journal of Higher Education*, suggests that beyond [personality](#), family history of [entrepreneurship](#), and other characteristics, educational practices may actually spur innovation.

"Cultivating innovative entrepreneurship appears to involve both nature and nurture, both personality and experience," said Matthew J. Mayhew, associate professor of higher education at NYU Steinhardt.

Higher education is often scrutinized for how well it prepares [students](#) to solve modern problems. Rather than being viewed as innovation engines, colleges and universities are sometimes thought of as threats to innovation. Now, colleges and universities are working to make innovation and entrepreneurship central aspects of higher education, with the number of entrepreneurship programs increasing in the last few decades.

"With the expansion of opportunities to study entrepreneurship comes important theoretical and practical questions," said Mayhew. "Can innovation be taught? Or is innovation something that a student just has? These questions reflect the need for research that examines how students obtain the entrepreneurial skills required to move ideas from thought to action."

Although recent research has found a relationship between participation in higher education and student intentions to engage in entrepreneurship, differences in educational settings have not been fully explored. This study examined the cultivation of innovative entrepreneurial intentions among

students in three different settings: a U.S. undergraduate four-year environment, a U.S. M.B.A. two-year environment, and a German five-year business and technology environment.

To evaluate the educational settings, the researchers used an interdisciplinary approach grounded in student learning theory, entrepreneurship education, and economics. The students—375 U.S. business undergraduates, 109 U.S. M.B.A. students, and 210 German students in a five-year business program—all completed an instrument to assess personality dimensions, including extraversion and openness to [new experiences](#). Students also answered survey questions about their [college experiences](#) (e.g., challenging learning environments, relationships with faculty, and approaches to problem solving) and their intentions to innovate in an entrepreneurial capacity.

The researchers found that participation in both the German and the American education settings positively influenced innovative entrepreneurial intentions. Personality also played an important role in predicting an intention to innovate, albeit with variations across [educational settings](#). Entrepreneurial intentions were statistically related to a personality that is extroverted and conscientious for U.S. undergraduates; a personality that is extroverted, conscientious, and open to new experiences for German students; and a personality that was open to new experiences for U.S. M.B.A. students.

Confirming earlier findings, undergraduate male students, as well as students identifying as Asian or politically conservative, were more likely than their peers to demonstrate innovative entrepreneurial intentions. For U.S. undergraduates, a [family history](#) of entrepreneurship was also related to innovative entrepreneurial intentions.

"This study disrupts the position that higher

education may not be conducive to fostering innovation by suggesting that both personality and structured [higher education](#) experiences contribute to cultivating innovation potential among college students," said Mayhew. "The good news is that innovative entrepreneurial intentions can be influenced by educators, regardless of the many differences in traits and experiences that students across cultures bring to college campuses."

More information: Matthew J. Mayhew et al, Cultivating Innovative Entrepreneurs for the Twenty-First Century: A Study of U.S. and German Students, *The Journal of Higher Education* (2016). DOI: 10.1353/jhe.2016.0014 , www.researchgate.net/publication/299276332

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