

Stakeholder Summary

Business is booming in entrepreneurship education

From for-credit courses to business incubators, entrepreneurial activity is on the rise in Ontario's colleges and universities, according to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

Although variously defined and documented across the province's 44 postsecondary institutions, entrepreneurial education has been a growing priority of the Ontario government as a part of employment, innovation and economic development goals.

Project description

The study, *The State of Entrepreneurship Education in Ontario's Colleges and Universities*, examines how Ontario postsecondary institutions define entrepreneurship in the programs and initiatives they offer, the range and type available and how institutions are measuring their impact. Information was collected from university and college websites, while a web-based survey of entrepreneurship education program leaders identified the goals, operational characteristics and evaluation mechanisms.

Findings

There is a diversity of entrepreneurial curricular and extracurricular opportunities available to Ontario postsecondary students, with numerous delivery modes, target audiences, objectives and evaluation mechanisms, both across and within institutions.

At the graduate and undergraduate level, there has been a proliferation of entrepreneurship majors, minors, concentrations, options and specializations. Non-degree options include diplomas, certificates and other credentials that either focus on entrepreneurship or include a substantive entrepreneurship component.

Extracurricular activities have increased substantially in recent years -- including business incubators and accelerators; student residences, workspaces and mentoring programs emphasizing and encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour; internships and co-op placements that allow students to experience working in start-ups; competitions and awards for seed funding or business plans; and an array of speaker series, workshops and networking events to support entrepreneurial learning and culture.

A total of 174 entrepreneurship education courses were identified among the province's 24 publicly supported colleges and 114 (undergraduate and graduate) courses among its 20 universities, although the authors note that relative to the sizes of the populations served, the availability of entrepreneurship courses is greater in universities.

The three most popular topics for university undergraduate entrepreneurship courses are introduction/principles of entrepreneurship, new venture creation/development and entrepreneurship strategy. For colleges, the three most-offered course topic areas are introduction to/principles of

entrepreneurship, business plan development and small business. Most individual courses subsist on annual budgets of less than \$1,000, while 10 programs have budgets exceeding \$100,000 per year.

The study found 75 extracurricular entrepreneurship activities -- 17 offered by 8 colleges and 58 programs in 13 universities. Non-students, including alumni and members of the local community are more likely to participate in such programs. For both curricular and extracurricular programs, “imparting entrepreneurship skills and knowledge” and “engendering entrepreneurial attitudes and culture” are very important goals, while “generating revenue for the program or institution” is least important.

Extracurricular programs are often evaluated informally, while curricular programs are subject to normal academic review processes. Formalized evaluation for extracurricular entrepreneurship education programs appears to be much less developed than for curricular programs. Learning outcomes are commonly used for evaluation of curricular programs but less so for the extracurricular programs. More than 90% of extracurricular programs and 60% of curricular programs use participant satisfaction as an evaluation criterion.

The authors note that the vast majority of programs surveyed do not formally define the concept of entrepreneurship, complicating comparability, evaluation and collaboration. However, they anticipate growing demand for new streams of entrepreneurship education funding or for distinction as an entrepreneurial institution.

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