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IB4E: Advancing a Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (But what if they are not buying what you are selling?)

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Two words that have permeated academic culture, only slightly behind other industry sectors, are *innovation* and *entrepreneurship*. Yet experience has shown resistance by faculty frequently results from efforts to create, foster, leverage, or even promote innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities at some universities, particularly those that identify as primarily liberal arts institutions or those that have strong liberal arts traditions or intellectual cores. These terms are generally associated with STEM disciplines, business, and perhaps academic medicine. At first mention, these terms appear foreign to some, crass to others, and decidedly corporate to more still.

Why is that?

Is it as simple as the tacit assumption that such initiatives (presumably with investments) favor some disciplines over others? Is it being viewed as a statement of a change in university focus toward more corporate engagement, something long resisted in some academic circles? Is it viewed more as a “money grab” than something that opens new doors and pathways for students as well as for faculty?

Most often, faculty (and students) assume both *innovation* and *entrepreneurship* refer to technical disciplines and/or business. One way to get past that limiting yet widely held and understandable misperception is to encourage this simple exercise:

Instead of putting the word “technical,” “scientific,” or “medical” before the word *innovation* or *entrepreneurship*, try using the word “social,” or “artistic,” or “educational.”

There are many examples of each, known or accessible to scholars in virtually every field, that can help to expand thinking about what *is* being done, and what *could* be done, in these broader spaces of innovation and entrepreneurship.

It’s worth remembering that few universities realize significant financial return on investments in innovation and entrepreneurship. The return is in *opportunity* – to students, faculty, the business community, and often community members more broadly. Perhaps more importantly, expansive thinking about *innovation* and *entrepreneurship* almost always leads to collaborations across traditional disciplines and academic units².



¹ *Across the Green* was started as a series of periodic letters from Provost Rosowsky to provide updates on current initiatives and information on topics of interest to the broader UVM academic community. Started in 2013, *Across the Green* was published three times per year during the six years Dr. Rosowsky served as UVM’s Provost and Senior Vice President. The ATG Brief series continues in the spirit of this communication with topics focused on higher education and leadership.

² The essay, [*The Disciplinary Trench*](#) (by Rosowsky and Keegan, Nov. 2019), expands on this point considerably.