

**ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY: CURRENT PRACTICES IN THE US BUSINESS  
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM.  
A Romanian Fulbright Scholar's View**

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*Abstract*

*The paper addresses a model of entrepreneurial university embraced by American business schools as perceived by a Romanian Fulbright scholar. The purpose of this study was to highlight the practices pursued by the US entrepreneurial universities in their journey towards increasing performance excellence and strengthening the prestige of the university. The study builds upon two quality management principles --continuous improvement and customer focus-- materialized, within American entrepreneurial universities, in the wide-spreading and strengthening of partnerships with all parties interested in the university's educational process. Results indicate that the entrepreneurial model of university is concerned with the quality of its "products", specifically students' competencies and qualifications, but also with the results and performances obtained both scientifically and technologically, and on the labor market. Results show that the development of the entrepreneurial university model should be supported by direct involvement and total commitment of the entire teaching staff, in partnership with the business environment, other educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and society as a whole. To help consolidating and expanding the concept of entrepreneurial university, schools should be concerned with assessing themselves against three criteria: the teaching and learning activity; the institutional culture and its impact upon society; and the orientation towards market/business environment.*

**1. Continuous Quality Improvement – Premises of the Development  
of the Entrepreneurial University Model**

In USA, the activities of continuous improvement of the quality of university studies represent an equally sustained effort of the teaching personnel and of the university staff, as well as the students and the businessmen (as potential employers of the university graduates). In this respect, the university actively supports the participation in the educational process of the students, the course attendees and their parents, on one side, as well as of the alumni and businessmen, on the other side (Blackmur, 2004; Cole, 2001).

The quality of the educational services offered by the American university is firstly associated with the quality of the people working or being active within its framework, whether they are teaching staff, students, researchers or administration personnel (Dew& McGowan Nearing, 2004). Therefore, the evaluation of the competences and abilities of all parties involved in the university's educational process (done by specialized bodies, large audience, media, etc.) is vital to maintaining or strengthening of the prestige of the university. The same importance is given to the evaluation of the study programs offered, of the educational plans and the syllabi, of the supplied material resources, as well as other processes' evaluation at institutional level (Grant, Mergen& Widrick, 2002; James, 2003).

The profile of the candidates in admission or the course attendees enrolled in the master programs has changed significantly within the past years and this transformation will take place further on. Today's students have access to an enormous information volume concerning the opportunities of applying to university or post-university programs, as well as employment opportunities throughout the studies period. Consequently, the American universities show

continuous interest in making the students' voice be heard and listened to, by actively involving them in the university's internal processes.

Some probable causes, that have been foreseen, have determined the universities across USA to rethink in the slightest details the relationship between the professors' body, the students and the businessmen (Limpert, 1997). That refers to a series of pre-requisites such as:

- The increase in the number of candidates that wish to take university studies, but whose educational background does not meet the requirements of the academic level;
- The lack of selective and differentiated admission criteria, depending on the nature of the study program, the specificity of the study domain, the candidates' profile, etc.;
- Diversifying the students' requests concerning the quality and efficiency of the teaching and learning process;
- Some students' incapacity to better coordinate the time split between course attendance, fulfillment of university tasks, working part-time, and, moreover, involvement in academic evaluation processes;
- Some students' choice of adopting the strategy that allows them to obtain, in the shortest time span, an university degree so as to apply for a job;
- Increase of the number of students that break off their studies in order to integrate in the manpower field;
- Employing students with limited material resources and, consequently, reducing the study time;
- Limited knowledge regarding educational processes within the university, as well as regarding the functioning of the institution in general;
- Lack of enthusiasm regarding active involvement and taking responsibilities for processes within the university;
- Increase in students' freedom of movement from one educational process to another, etc.

## **2. The American Model of Entrepreneurial University: Features and Practices**

The American model of entrepreneurial university, that most universities around the world tend to follow, distinguishes itself through a clear orientation towards its internal and external clients' requests, including those of the business environment, materialized in the wide spreading and strengthening of partnerships with all parties interested in the university's educational process. This type of university is firstly concerned with the quality of its "products", but also with the results and achievements obtained both from a scientific or technological point of view, and mostly from the labor market.

Therefore, the business environment in the US is deeply involved in and collaborating with the academic environment regarding the content of the study plans, methods of teaching and passing newly acquired knowledge, as well as the competences that students must have acquired at graduation. There is a stated interest, declared by both parties, in correctly identifying the problems today's society is dealing with, but also in identifying its requirements, and a clear wish to take the necessary steps in order to correct the deficiencies and non-conformities is manifested, so that both parties get the desired results.

The practices that the American model of entrepreneurial university is pursuing are concerning with the following: university's clients; leadership system; strategic planning; process management; human resource management; and performances evaluation (Dew& McGowan Nearing, 2004; Grant, Mergen& Widrick, 2002; Warnack, 2003). The paper further addresses these practices.

- a) Special attention is given to the *university's clients*. In the US business educational system, the students is looked at from several points of view: as beneficiary of the information and knowledge that the teacher passes; as partner or active participant in the

teaching and learning process; as well as shareholder of the university directly involved in the material support of the academic environment, with all the subsequent rights and responsibilities.

The current reform of the American university educational system awards the rightful importance to the continuous improvement of the system of communication and passing the information and new knowledge to the students, to the development of correct evaluation of students' performance systems, to the improvement of the students' financial support system, but also to the extension of the internationalization effort and increase of the students' mobility (Blackmur, 2004; Kiefer, 2003).

Generally speaking, the university's clients are grouped in two main categories:

- *internal clients* – students, teaching staff, administration personnel, and
- *external clients* – potential employers, students' parents, graduate students, the university community, and the business community.

Because evaluation of client satisfaction represents a permanent activity of the university and a measure to prove its performances, annually (or, if case may be, half-yearly) a series of *data from clients* is collected, both through direct research, and through indirect research – polls, interviews, focus group, parent meetings, meetings with business environment representatives, etc. This data is then analyzed and transformed into information and knowledge, valuable for the participants in the educational process that can further insure reaching the planned objectives and the continuous improvement of performances. For instance, as a result of the analysis of data regarding student satisfaction concerning the courses offered, some of the decisions taken and implemented are aimed at: redesigning the curriculum, revising the syllabi, promoting the teaching staff, distributing the budgetary funds, etc.

- b) As far as the *leadership system* is concerned, various work committees debating specific issues are organized and set-up within universities, such as: The Strategic Planning Committee, The Promotion and Title Committee, The Curriculum Planning Committee, etc. Among permanent members of these committees there are students, graduates and business environment representatives, together with the teaching staff and the administration personnel.
- c) In elaborating the annual *strategic plans*, a series of specific stages are taken into account, such as: defining the mission, the vision and key values the university promotes; establishing the objectives and prioritizing them; identifying the action plans to reach the objectives; identifying and allocating the necessary resources, granting responsibilities to the human resources; identifying the evaluation and progress tracking methods; disseminating results by placing them at the disposal of the interested parties.
- d) Across the universities in the US, special attention is awarded to the *process management*, respectively to:
  - identifying *key processes* that add value to the university's products and services, such as curriculum planning, planning and revising the courses' content, programming and supplying the courses, student assistance, student evaluation, and
  - identifying *support processes* that do not contribute directly through adding value, but support the key processes, such as student counseling, selecting and evaluating teaching staff's performance, attracting funds, etc.

A third category of processes kept under control within the American universities is represented by the *process referring to the relationship with external partners and clients* of the university, processes such as: recruiting students, acquiring equipment, developing efficient infrastructure, etc.

The research in the educational field demonstrates the fact that, nowadays, *the learning process* – as main tool of knowledge supply which develops the students' real competences – is topping the teaching process as subject of interest that has represented until recently the favorite subject in the paradigm of the educational process (Kubiak, 2003; Loh, Yong, Wee, Chong &

Ngin, 1997). Adopting new strategies of teaching and learning that would lead to wider student responsibility concerning acquiring competences truly requested on the labor market, but also the evaluation of one's own achievements and professional evolution has gained more importance.

- e) *Human resources management* represents yet another interest focus point of the leadership of American universities oriented towards quality, concerning: planning and describing the working system – description of jobs, performance recognition and reward, human resource planning, etc.; identifying the necessity of professional improvement – education, training, qualification, improvement, etc.; and identifying the requests concerning the insurance of the entire personnel's welfare and satisfaction.
- f) Some of the *results* that the American universities oriented towards quality and excellence obtained and proved are presented below (Grant, Mergen & Widrick, 2002; Kiefer, 2003):
  - Results concerning the *students' performance and satisfaction evaluation*, such as: degree of graduation, student satisfaction level regarding the assistance, with the resources they benefited by, with the educational programs offered, student satisfaction concerning the acquired competences, etc.
  - Results concerning the *human resource performance*, such as: number of publications in specialized magazines with reviews, participation of teaching staff in editorial groups or in the activity of different work committees set up at institutional level, supplying community services, etc.
  - Results concerning the *financial results*, such as: number and nature of grants earned through competition, number of research contracts, number of personal contributions on internal and external level, volume of funds attracted from the alumni etc.
  - Results concerning the *market performance*, such as: positioning of educational programs at local, national and international level.
  - Results concerning the *university's global efficiency*, such as: student profile, bachelor degree grade, salary received upon employment, etc.

### 3. Findings

The entrepreneurial university model that has been embraced by the majority of universities around the world attracts a series of responsibilities that mainly aim at its business partners. This type of university is, above all, concerned with the quality of its “products”, specifically students' competencies and qualifications, but also with the results and performances obtained both scientifically and technologically, and on the labor market. The improvement of the university's “products” requires the improvement of the quality of both internal and external educational processes.

The following remarks and findings would help consolidating and expanding the concept of entrepreneurial university within the frame of business schools all over the world:

- a) ***Concerning the teaching and learning activity:***
  - Compatibility between teaching methods and the course's nature;
  - Constant evaluation of the teaching and learning methods used in the university;
  - Lending assistance and consultancy to students, offering educational support according to their competencies and accomplishments;
  - Making fully use of communicational and informational technologies in teaching and learning activities;
  - Identify, encourage and challenge exceptional students;
  - Offering a diversified and ample material support for each of the courses;

- Using adequate methods for students' evaluation, combining sustained assessment with final evaluation;
- Identification of methods that would stimulate self-evaluation;
- Providing an equilibrium between the number of students and the number of professors including administrative staff, depending on the nature of the course and the syllabus;
- Periodical assessment of professors' competencies and performances;
- Increase of students' participation in the process of providing quality in the university.

b) ***Concerning the institutional culture and its impact upon society:***

- Launching of actions having as target increasing the notion of affiliation to an institution;
- Launching of actions having as target the development of pride between students, and also university's employees that spend much of their time in the university campus;
- Encouraging students and professors to dedicate to certain activities in community's benefit in their university;
- Development and cultivation of the notion of "academic culture";
- Encouragement and motivation of students to feel themselves free in expressing their opinions (in written form) in what concerns the quality of instruction and learning process;
- Encouragement and motivation of students to feel themselves free in expressing their opinions (in written form) in what concerns the quality of institutional services that they beneficiate from, also about the strengths and weaknesses of operational procedures within the university;
- Collecting data and centralizing information referring to the evaluation of courses and teaching process, implementing corrective, preventive and improvement actions where needed together with spreading the results, and putting them to students' disposal;
- Increasing students' power within the organs with decisional roles in developing the institutional processes of the university.

c) ***Concerning the orientation towards market/ business environment:***

- Increasing the communication between the educational offer (knowledge passed on from professors) and students' expectations (for example, graduates' integration in the field of labor as soon they have finished their studies);
- Diversification of educational offer by inserting disciplines correlated directly with the demands on the market;
- Improvement of students' competencies, capacities and potential of finding their selves a job after graduation;
- Finding new ways and methods in order to identify the expectations and the real demands of students concerning the educational system, also determining their behaviors;
- Correlation between number of students and demand of specialists in the market;
- Including between universities' criteria of benchmarking analysis, other ones like: graduates' marks obtained at the end of their studies, level of integration of graduates in the market of work force, positions obtained by graduates at their employment and their salaries within the first year of work.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The continuous improvement process of the quality of the educational process offered as part of university studies is a basic premise of the development of the entrepreneurial university model. It should be supported by direct involvement and total commitment of the entire

teaching staff, in partnership with the business environment, concerning the accomplishment of performance excellence related objectives.

The entrepreneurial university model emphasizes not only the improvement of the quality of the internal educational processes, but also the improvement or redesign of its external processes that concern the relationship with other educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, community or society as a whole. In the US, this view led to the broadening of the partnerships between the university environment and the industry or the business environment in general.

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