

Entrepreneurship Education as a Third Pathway for Community Colleges: An Interview with Paul Magelli

by Janice Li North, OCCRL Graduate Research Assistant

Community colleges are typically known for their CTE and transfer offerings. Alongside these traditional pathways, however, courses, certificates and associate’s degrees in entrepreneurship point the way to a new and innovative kind of education, even a third pathway through community colleges. To explore entrepreneurship education, OCCRL’s Janice Li North interviewed Paul Magelli, Senior Director at the Academy for Entrepreneurship Leadership and Visiting Professor of Economics Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Paul Magelli brings an array of practical and educational experience in the field of entrepreneurship education. At age 8, Magelli and his twin brother started their first business selling goat milk. Six years later, they joined three elder brothers as partners in Magelli Brothers Super Markets. In 1956 at age 25, Magelli left the business and began his undergraduate studies in economics at the University of Illinois. He completed his PhD at Illinois and also discovered a talent and vocation for education and administration. His past positions include Dean of Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas; Vice President for Academic Administration at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa; and, President of Metropolitan State University of Denver, Colorado. Magelli is also President Emeritus of Parkland College in Champaign.

Magelli holds a Doctor of Law, honoris causa, from the University of Bristol, UK, where he helped to establish the Bristol Enterprise Centre. In May 2016, he will be awarded an honorary doctorate from Wichita State University for his lifetime achievement and visionary leadership. Paul has served as a Scholar-in-Residence at Kauffman Foundation, advising on the development and implementation of initiatives to advance entrepreneurship training and knowledge in American higher education. He continues to serve on numerous boards of technology-based firms.

The Academy for Entrepreneurship Leadership was established, through the support of the Kauffman Foundation, with the aim of infusing entrepreneurship across the curriculum at the University of Illinois. Could you highlight some of your main initiatives and achievements?

Magelli: We are reaching the conclusion our current implementation plan (2010–2015) so let me focus on initiatives during the first years of the award. Our first objective was faculty development. Entrepreneurship is a relatively new field of study with limited numbers of faculty who hold a PhD in entrepreneurship. This is true not only at the University of Illinois but nationwide. At the same time, however, there was increasing student demand for content, courses, and engagement in entrepreneurship. To develop academic content the Academy identified, through a campus wide competition, faculty in related fields who would bring workplace experiences and/or a research interest in entrepreneurship, innovation, and new firm creation. Funding from the Kauffman Foundation enabled us to recruit highly qualified faculty as Academy Fellows. The fellows developed extensive academic offerings by integrating entrepreneur-concepts into existing courses or by designing new courses. Through the faculty fellowships we built bridges to

and between colleges — engineering, business, fine arts, and education, actually all thirteen degree-granting colleges on campus. As a result, the Academy ultimately included nearly 60 fellows across the university. In a given semester as many as 80 different courses are offered with as many as 8,000 students, graduate and undergraduate enrolled.

The Academy also participates in collaborations and activities such as the [iVenture Accelerator](#) for student startups, the [Enterpriseworks Incubator](#), located in the University Research Park, Social Fuse networking events, and the Cozad Business Plan competition. And, as a new enterprise itself, the Academy received venture funding from the Kauffman Foundation with the expectation that the University would generate additional financial support to build and sustain these efforts. Groundwork is being laid for a capital campaign as part of the university’s upcoming 150th anniversary, which will define the next stage in the life of the Academy for Entrepreneurship Leadership.

Turning to community colleges, do you see a similar level of activity and interest in entrepreneurship education?

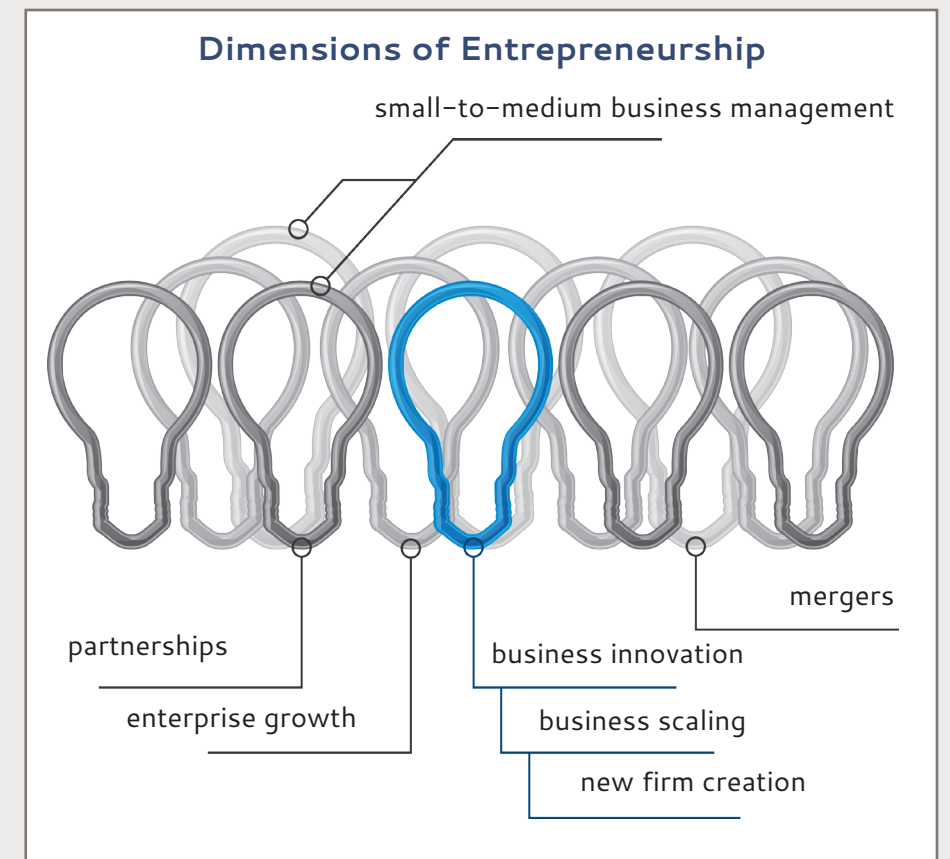
Magelli: Together with Dr. Cindy Kehoe and a team of researchers, we are just completing an exhaustive inventory of entrepreneurship education in higher education around the country including community colleges — again with financial support from the Kauffman Foundation (Magelli & Kehoe 2016). Based on a review of over 1600 community colleges¹, the research team has determined that there has been an infusion of entrepreneurship into the curriculum, in addition to or alongside the traditional focus on small business management. You might ask, what’s the difference? Small business management entails the know-how to manage a small- or a medium-sized business. To this set of skills entrepreneurship adds the dimensions of business innovation, new firm creation, business scaling, partnerships, mergers and enterprise growth.

1. Degree-granting, accredited two-year colleges (which also included for-profit institutions) as designated by the Carnegie Classification served as the selection criteria for this study.

With that in mind, of 1,6315 community colleges surveyed, 1,132 (70%) offer at least one course in entrepreneurship and/or small business. We also determined that 613 colleges (38%) offer a degree or certificate program in entrepreneurship, which entails a range of courses. Importantly, it appears that community colleges make a clear distinction between small business management and entrepreneurship, which has enabled the research team to make clear distinctions about the state of entrepreneurship education and small business management.

As the former president of a community college, Parkland College, are there particular challenges that community colleges face in building an entrepreneurship program?

Magelli: Historically, community colleges have benefited from internal and external support, the latter especially from the Small Business Administration. Thus, a solid base of qualified instructors is in place to teach small business courses. With regard to entrepreneurship, community colleges face the same challenge the Academy has faced: a limited number of faculty who were prepared and available to teach the entrepreneurial aspects of new firm formation.



Specifically, increasing demands on shrinking or static budgets also limit the prospects of adding new faculty or retooling faculty to teach new offerings. Like new firm creation, new educational programming requires financial resources, particularly as student interest and demand grow. Faculty fellowships in the Academy aforementioned translated into the time and resources to develop new courses and areas of study. In contrast, faculty at community colleges often have fixed and defined instructional responsibilities, are teaching full-time and, with limited resources, new program development is a tremendous challenge.

At the community college level, what kind of credentials does an instructor need?

Magelli: An appropriate set of credentials is a mix of business and teaching expertise. A course really benefits from instructors who have had entrepreneurial experience, new firms, been successful, and can enable students to see the myriad steps required to develop an idea into an enterprise. But there is the concern that this can result in teaching simply by telling “war stories” without the appropriate blend of the analytical and conceptual along with the experiential. Instructors as it stands may have one knowledge base or the other. Ideally they would have both. And this ideal points to a kind of career path for instructors who move back and forth between business and education. Someone might obtain a bachelor’s or an MBA, spend time in a business environment, come back and pursue more graduate studies, possibly obtaining a PhD, which deepens his or her understanding of research, theory, and teaching methods. There are enormous opportunities in the Academy for these individuals as students seek, even insist upon, more pragmatic engagement.

But what “technical” qualifications or certifications does this entail? I think the teaching of entrepreneurship is at a very early stage of development. We have a limited number of advanced entrepreneurship degree-holders, and in a broader sense, entrepreneurship is a nascent field or discipline that is not yet widely recognized within higher education. I think the answer lies in a greater

focus on professional development along two pathways: academic training and education for those with business experience, and more business immersion opportunities for college instructors.

I am optimistic about the development of the field. I think it’s an iterative learning process as colleges and universities work out the right professional development models that can foster entrepreneurship educators who combine business experience, academic rigor, and sophistication. Ultimately, I think students will benefit from a teacher who has both done it and can teach it successfully. In a sense, this is not new. We want teachers of science, law, and medicine, for example, to have experience in the laboratory, the courtroom, or the clinic. The challenge is to dedicate financial and institutional resources that will build and empower this kind of human capital.

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Can you speak to examples of successful entrepreneurship in community colleges?

Magelli: In general terms, a solid program begins with an introductory course that provides students the basic tools and vocabulary concerning opportunity recognition and actualization, competitive intelligence and industry analysis, for instance. Then, there are the traditional courses in finance, economics, accounting, and management that supplement or complement the entrepreneurship pursuit. Additionally, a program will offer a series or a specialization in entrepreneurship, new enterprise investment and financing, or business scaling for example. In all, an entrepreneurship program will have a basic entry point, then do two things: first, it will respond to the students’ interests and directions, and second, it will lead them toward new educational horizons that enhance their individual pathways.

Is there any research on the entrepreneurial pathway that community college students end up taking, based on their education and training?

College Exemplars in Entrepreneurial Education Cited by Magelli

- **Johnson County Community College** (Overland Park, KS) offers a series of basic entrepreneur courses and specialization courses tailored to specific industries or business sectors.
- **Montgomery County Community College** (Blue Bell, PA) offers a 30 credit hour entrepreneurship management certificate that combines a range of course from business planning and business law to ethical decision making.
- **Chabot College (Hayward, CA)** offers a range of specialized entrepreneurship programs in music recording, real estate, and family childcare.
- **Columbia College** (Columbia, MI) takes concepts of entrepreneurship and relates them to specific industries such as culinary arts, automotive technology, or communication technology. Columbia College is also home to the Steven and Barbara Fishman Center for Entrepreneurship (Mr. Fishman is president and chairman of Big Lot; and the Fishmans are both college alums), which offers mentorship, internships, networking, and seed capital for startups.
- **Southern State Community College** (Hillsboro, OH) offers an associate’s degree in entrepreneurship infused with courses in speech, ethics, law, leadership and psychology.

Magelli: As researchers, we need to know more about outcomes: enterprises created, future academic paths, and the overall economic impact of entrepreneurship education. Unfortunately, in the absence of significant longitudinal studies, we do not know the aggregate impact. This is a question and issue that begs for more study and research.

However, let me point to a different set of outcomes, or perhaps educational aims. A student who takes an entrepreneurship course or who completes a program may or may not start a new business. What else do they gain from their studies? I would say they gain an understanding of law, of the economy, of public policy; they learn leadership and management skills; they acquire tools or ways of doing analysis; they learn how to develop and complete a successful project. This kind of awareness and ability can translate into a range of successful careers, not just new firm creation. Again, unfortunately, we do not have the type of longitudinal study that would document my assertion.

Do you have any final thoughts on entrepreneurship education and community colleges?

Magelli: At the heart of a flourishing economy is business innovation, new firm creation, and successful ventures. These translate into a healthy mix of wealth creation, job creation, tax revenues, and a citizenry with a stake in the success of the economy and public policy. Community colleges serve as the grassroots educational foundation by meeting student demand and providing them with the kind of entrepreneurial education that will prepare them to play a vital role in these many important aspects of society. This of course calls for administrative leadership and financial investment. But I think the payoff for students and the broader economy are immense.

Alongside wealth creation, another important part of entrepreneurship is wealth distribution to meet the needs of a growing population. In this sense, the entrepreneurial mindset is also one of civic responsibility. I would say that an important dimension to entrepreneurship education, which we see in many corporations, is social responsibility: how to give back. This is more important than innovation or enterprise, it is the attention to the human condition.

Reference

Magelli, P. & Kehoe, C. (January, 2016). Preliminary results from the 2015 Kauffman Entrepreneurship Education Inventory. Unpublished.

Janice Li North may be reached at jlnorth2@illinois.edu.
Paul Magelli may be reached at pmagelli@illinois.edu.