

The Inaugural Faculty - Who Starts a New College During a Pandemic?

E Shirl Donaldson

Assistant Professor, University of Michigan Flint
shird@umich.edu

Abstract

An academic start-up is truly entrepreneurial. The entire landscape of higher education is changing. Most public universities are not for profit businesses, but they still require customers and cash flow. Starting a new college during a pandemic requires flexibility, adaptability, and resilience, as well as a willingness to navigate uncertainty and change. A regional midwestern university took on this challenge in 2021 and has interesting lessons learned as it flourishes. The College of Innovation and Technology was launched with masks still required. Two years later the masks are off, and the unit is thriving. The college embraced the polytechnic learning model with heavy emphasis on student engagement in STEM. This paper discusses the brave undertaking and its perceived obstacles for success. Social distancing and other safety measures in place made it challenging for students to build connections and establish a sense of community with their peers and instructors initially. It was important for students to stay informed, stay connected with their peers and instructors. Extensive support, technology, and resources were availed when needed. Today corporate partners are supportive and awaiting the first graduates of the newly created majors.

Keywords

Start-up, students, STEM education, polytechnic, entrepreneurial mindset.