BLI Fellow Reflects on her Experiences at National Entrepreneurship Conference in California

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I attended the National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance (NCIIA) conference in San Jose, California on March 21-22, 2014. At the conference, it was my honor to present a research paper titled “Measuring the Quality of Innovative Ideas to Strengthen the Scientific Base for Entrepreneurship Teaching and Research” alongside my boss and mentor Professor Richard H. Price. I have been working with Rick since 2011 and have seen our research efforts evolve and grow over this time as we grew in our understanding of our chosen topic: the evolution of ideas. Being a part of sharing our research with a national academic community engaged in entrepreneurship teaching and research was an important milestone for me personally and professionally. I am so honored to have had this opportunity to represent the University of Michigan at a national conference and to hold a leadership role in research as an undergraduate.

I highly encourage future BLI Fellows to seek out opportunities like this in their fields of interest, especially if involved in research. I found participating in the conference to be a rewarding experience of sharing research findings with the larger academic community. Conferences like the one I attended are an excellent leadership opportunity for undergraduates, granting them access to a community of practice, a place to establish connections in a field, and an unparalleled opportunity to participate in a rich exchange of ideas in their chosen field.

For anyone interested in entrepreneurship education trends, here’s a summary of what I learned at the NCIIA conference.

Summary of Key Conference Trends & Learnings

- Universities throughout the US are in the process of building entrepreneurship programs and courses on their campuses. This movement is not limited to large research universities like the University of Michigan, but includes public and private universities and small liberal arts colleges.

- There is a wide agreement that innovation and entrepreneurship do not have a single manifestation, but rather must be defined in the context of each university based on the interests and mindsets of the student body. Some universities are home to students with a design and engineering base, others to students who love tinkering and creating, others to students interested in commercialization.

- A major unresolved question for entrepreneurship and innovation education is of what the curriculum should consist. There is a vague consensus that topics such as communication, business planning, pitching, design, intellectual property, and creativity are important, but very little formalization of the balance or specific programming that is most effective.

- There seems to be a sense that entrepreneurship requires a certain mindset and passion, but also deep knowledge of the field in which an individual is attempting to innovate. For example, a professor with experience in the energy industry spoke about the necessity of teaching his students the content of both
how various renewable energy sources work on an engineering level and the skillsets needed to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship.

-Students are taking the lead on fostering entrepreneurial programs, clubs, and communities on many campuses. Professors and administrators are sometimes viewed as obstacles to progress, but students who come to see these parties as partners and stakeholders see faster and larger scale impact for their projects.