



TIAA-CREF Institute

PEPPERDINE
UNIVERSITY

Waves of Innovation: Creativity and Community at Pepperdine University

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Financial Services



About this Research

Pepperdine's Waves of Innovation program captured the Institute's attention for its unique approach to stimulating collaboration and creativity across the university. Designed to unleash the minds of students, faculty and staff toward solving problems and addressing inefficiencies, the program has reinvigorated the school's entrepreneurial spirit while inspiring higher levels of learning and new revenue opportunities.

To help other campus leaders start their own "waves," the TIAA-CREF Institute commissioned a case study from the program's principal creators. We wanted to see what's made the program so successful – and how it can be adapted at different types of higher education institutions.

About the TIAA-CREF Institute

The TIAA-CREF Institute helps advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies, and maximize opportunities for success.

To learn more about our research and initiatives for higher education leaders, please visit our website at www.tiaa-crefinstitute.org.



Executive Summary

We posed a question to ourselves about our 75-year-old university: Could a university with a long history of risk-taking and entrepreneurial decision making regain its creative momentum after being slowed by a stagnant economy and a need to conserve resources? After careful internal study we created a new campus initiative called Waves of Innovation (WI), a program that readily could be adapted and launched at a wide range of institutions. Working with an interdisciplinary committee of faculty, staff, students and alumni, we issued a call for innovative ideas that could potentially change the university. The call was open to any member of the university community. We asked that proposals address at least one of five criteria, all tightly linked to the university's strategic plan. During just two rounds of funding held thus far, the university community has responded with enthusiasm, submitting over 250 proposals to improve the university, enhance its reputation, or streamline its administrative processes. Proposal finalists give brief Waves of Innovation Talks (WIT) to explain their idea to a community-wide university audience. These Waves of Innovation evenings have become significant community-building events. To date, funded proposals reflect issues at the forefront of discussions throughout higher education, including sustainability, technology and learning, and accessibility and equity. Without question, the Waves of Innovation initiative has improved Pepperdine and engaged our community in a broad-ranging discussion about getting better and building new bridges. We offer this detailed description of the program so as to share what we have learned and facilitate the creation of similar initiatives on other campuses.

Key Take-Aways

- The Waves of Innovation initiative has been received enthusiastically by our university community.
- An unforeseen, but immensely valuable, outcome of the new initiative has been to bring together the five schools of the university in a broad-ranging discussion about improvement.
- Proposals have been received from all university constituents including faculty, staff, administration, and undergraduate and graduate students.
- Staging the final selection of innovative ideas for funding into a university event that includes brief talks by each finalist has proven popular and generated much discussion of innovation throughout the university.
- Fully-funded projects reflect interest and attention to the topics most pertinent to higher education today, including sustainability, technology and learning, and accessibility and equity.
- The Waves of Innovation model to spur creative new ideas for institutional improvement can be readily adapted and launched across a wide range of institutions.

Waves of Innovation

Businesses and corporations have a long history of turning innovation and problem-solving inward by engaging their employees and constituents in a process that strengthens the company while at the same time generating potential for new revenues (Dahl, Lawrence, & Pierce, 2011). Many people also would think of colleges and universities as rich environments for creativity and innovation. Yet many higher education innovations are centered on business and technology, and most measure success by the subsequent corporate or business partnerships generated by the innovation. Few institutions have structured, institution-supported innovation initiatives that encourage and reward members of the community to think creatively in the broadest of definitions. Universities, even more than the corporate world, are about people. Universities, regardless of discipline, are also about problem solving. Our new idea for Pepperdine University was to unleash the minds of our students, faculty and staff toward solving problems and addressing inefficiencies, both known and previously unknown, within the university and local community.

Like most institutions of higher learning, Pepperdine has a rich heritage of making bold decisions related to its mission, purpose and growth. In fact, Pepperdine University has always been willing to take calculated risks and to try something new. In the past, new schools within our university were born to reflect both societal needs and the interests and passions of our constituents. Our move to Malibu in the early 1970s was a calculated risk and one that certainly has paid off. Another example is our extensive international program offerings in London, Heidelberg, Florence, Lausanne, Buenos Aires and Shanghai, carefully planned, but jump started by a leap of faith that each would add to the learning experience of students. Today, approximately 70% of our students study abroad for at least one academic term. (Integrated Marketing Communications, 2013).

However, the economic downturn of 2008 made inward examination and conservative decision making a forced necessity. We undertook the reallocation of resources across all budget lines, academic and administrative, and sequestered \$25 million to prepare for the unknown effects of the anticipated economic tumult and ensuing malaise. The sequestering was prudent and, later, extremely beneficial as the funds were reallocated to new programs and support for demonstrated academic excellence. In other words, we became more conservative and even a bit risk-averse for a time as we watched the nation's economy begin to heal.

Following Pepperdine's resource reallocation process and, later, as market confidence returned, we observed that previous institutional growth had created unintended consequences, including boundaries between departments,

centers, institutes, schools and disciplines. Each posed a stumbling block to collaboration and creativity. In 2013, with a renewed confidence, we felt it was time to encourage a return to a more entrepreneurial spirit. To reinvigorate the risk-welcoming genetics that had prevailed and helped build the foundation of our institution, we decided to create a new initiative whereby the whole community—students, staff, and faculty—would be invited to help the university think anew and creatively, with the ultimate goal of elevating Pepperdine to new levels of learning and excellence.

For the initiative to succeed, we knew it could not focus on just one or two of our schools or solely on faculty or staff. True institutional creativity would need to flow from the full breadth of our institution, including its largest component: our student body. A new scholarly book coauthored by one of our faculty members, J. Goosby Smith, entitled *Beyond Inclusion*, begins by noting that inclusion occurs when “all organizational members feel welcome and valued for who they are and what they bring to the table” (Smith and Lindsay, 2014). We felt there was no better way for us to begin a creativity initiative than to invite all members of the community to bring their ideas for teaching, learning, campus efficiencies, and revenue possibilities to one communal campus table. Ironically, while many critics of higher education complain that institutions are not teaching students to think critically (see for example Carey, 2015), we felt confident that our students not only are analytical thinkers but that they could contribute significantly to the pool of ideas for improving the university.

We surveyed similar initiatives in higher education and did not find any that took our desired community-wide approach. Some initiatives were clearly focused on specific fields such as engineering or technology. Others are sponsored and housed in the university's business school (see for example the Wharton School: <https://whartoninnovationfund.fluidreview.com>). Still other university initiatives encourage innovation primarily within the faculty ranks (see for example USC: <http://research.usc.edu/for-investigators/funding/usc/zumberge/>). While these are important initiatives, they neither reflect the breadth of innovation that we were looking for nor welcome the type of participation we hoped to see from our community as a whole.

To illustrate our interest in broad community participation we invited a wide spectrum of community members to serve on a new innovation committee. We chose faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, undergraduate and graduate students whom we knew to be creative and interested in the development and growth of the university. Without exception, these individuals were delighted to receive our invitation and all accepted the challenge of serving on the inaugural Waves of Innovation Committee.

Innovation Criteria and the Proposal Process

The committee accepted the challenge to create a simple, fair, efficient and welcoming application process that would generate great interest within our community. Also, tasked with more specifically defining innovation, the committee affirmed five traits that were connected to the university's strategic plan that would be used to evaluate proposals (see: <http://www.pepperdine.edu/about/administration/president/innovation/how-it-works.htm>). That is, to:

1. Enhance teaching and learning;
2. Foster scholarly and creative activity;
3. Create new revenue opportunities through increased enrollment, new programs, community involvement, or collaboration with corporations and industry;
4. Streamline our organization, physical plant, and operating processes; and
5. Strengthen the Pepperdine University "brand" and reputation.



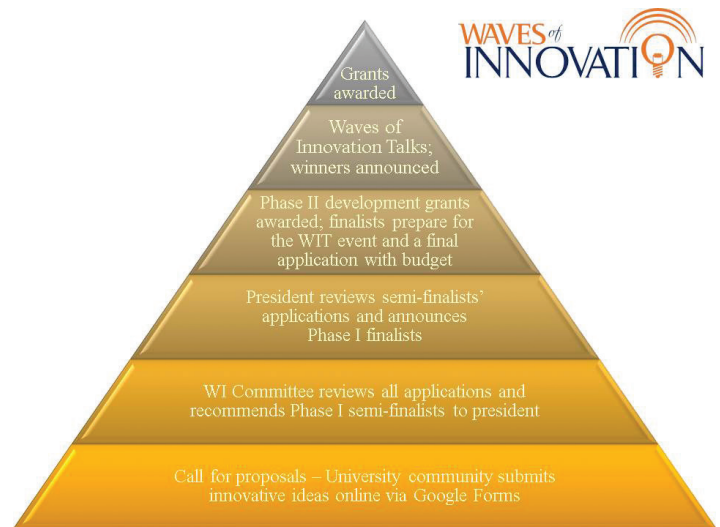
"Your proposal is innovative. Unfortunately, we won't be able to use it because we've never tried something like this before."

www.CartoonStock.com

The committee was well aware that the success of the initiative would be dependent upon its ability to generate both enthusiasm and energy for the initiative throughout the university community. Further, the committee knew that to sustain enthusiasm for the program the application process would need to be easy and straightforward. Gerard Tellis, in his book *Unrelenting Innovation* (2013), aptly notes that "bureaucracies inhibit radical innovations."

The less bureaucratic we could make the application process the more buy-in the committee felt it could get from the university community. Yet the committee also knew that proposed ideas would need to set forth specific details and

include a rough budget before any final funding decisions could be made. Thus the committee decided to go with a two-phase application process. Phase I would welcome ideas in an abbreviated form: a few short paragraphs describing which of the five criteria the idea most closely supported would be all that was required to give the committee a sense of a proposal and its merits. Authors of ideas that made it through phase I would be invited to submit a more detailed phase II proposal that also would include an approximated budget.



Stages of the Waves of Innovation (WI) initiative. The WI Committee is involved in the second, fourth, and fifth stages and with marketing/promotion of the program throughout each round. The program is run through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives on behalf of the president.

Roll Out

The new innovation initiative was announced to the university community approximately four months before the first deadline for phase I proposals. Inspired by the university mascot, a wave, the initiative was dubbed Waves of Innovation. This title is especially apropos in two ways. First, it taps into the enthusiasm and spirit of our school athletics program, since our mascot is a wave. Second, since the innovation program was to be an ongoing effort, the title illustrates successive cohorts of innovative ideas that would roll into the committee with each call for proposals.

We were fortunate that two alumni who served on the first- and second-round WI Committee were not only local professionals well versed on innovation, but also had significant experience with marketing. With their guidance, the committee worked to get the word out to each of the five schools within the university, and to the staff across all units and schools. In addition, the committee connected with the student newspaper and engaged in dialogues about the new initiative and proposal deadline through social media and

electronic marketing, which spoke more directly to the communication styles and preferences of our tech-savvy students.

As the phase I proposal deadline approached, members of the WI Committee, and particularly its chair, were approached by people interested in submitting ideas, many of whom were hoping for immediate feedback on whether their idea was in line with the goals and ambitions of the Waves of Innovation initiative. Much has been written about spurring innovation, and so we knew that for the initiative to succeed we would need to encourage not only a large number of proposals, but also a wide range of ideas. Given that higher education is notoriously slow to change and often suspicious of new ideas, we felt it important to encourage all of those who initiated a dialogue about their own ideas. In general, we listened to and suggested that all interested parties put their ideas into the context of the five traits that most reflected the goals and aims of both the Waves of Innovation initiative and the university's strategic plan. The closer their ideas reflected one or more of these five attributes, we told them, the more favorably they would be evaluated.

Pepperdine has five distinct schools spread across five campuses in Southern California and on five international campuses around the world. In the first year, 160 phase I proposals were submitted, in numbers that were directly proportional to the size of the school. Almost 40% of the proposals, for example, were from students, faculty and staff at the primarily undergraduate college of arts and sciences, Seaver College; Seaver students comprise roughly 45% of Pepperdine's enrollment. We were pleasantly surprised that of the 160 submissions, half were from students. We are unaware of any other university innovation program that so broadly welcomes participation from the entire university community.



Dr. Mark W.S. Chun, professor of Strategy, Information Systems and Decision Sciences at the Graziadio School of Business and Management presents the WI proposal, "Developing, Launching, & Implementing a New Degree Program: Masters of Science in Applied Analytics" on behalf of the other faculty in his department who support this new program offering.

Assessment of First Round of Proposals

The Waves of Innovation Committee constructed a rubric with which to evaluate the 160 phase I proposals. The rubric heavily weighted the five traits set out in the initial announcement, and added a category for cross-discipline or interdepartmental collaboration. Success of new ideas often is associated with building broad consensus and developing a framework for moving the idea forward. With that in mind, a new metric evaluated the potential of the proposed idea to form new collaborations either across schools within the university or with local community members or businesses.

The committee worked in subgroups to review subsets of the submissions. At the end of phase I during the first year, the committee forwarded 16 proposals to the president from which eight were selected for development grants and the opportunity to submit more detailed phase II proposals, which also would include a project timeline and budget. The eight advancing proposals included ideas from an undergraduate student, a graduate student, a group of staff members, and five faculty members.



Waves of Innovation phase II finalists presented their proposals at the Waves of Innovation Talks in mid-January 2014. Six of the eight proposals were funded that evening for between two and three years of their requested budgets totaling \$440,000; and one presenter received \$1,500 for the Audience Choice Award. The runners up received a \$500 consideration for their hard work and for the university to retain intellectual property rights for their proposed innovations.

Winners of the phase I process moved forward to become phase 2 finalists and were publicly announced via email, the university website, and at public gatherings of the university community. Development awards of \$4,000 were granted to each phase II finalist to enable them to meet with project consultants, technical advisors, illustrators, or other professionals who could help them develop a detailed, well-illustrated phase II project proposal. To further enhance inclusivity, we wanted to make sure the community felt included and informed on all aspects of the initiative—including the selection process (Smith and Lindsay, 2014). Thus we required that in addition to submitting a detailed phase II proposal, all finalists also would present their idea

at a public community event via a brief (8-10 minutes) Waves of Innovation Talk (WIT). Because it is sometimes difficult to find an event that brings together community members from all groups—students, faculty, staff and administration—and from across multiple schools like our university has, we endeavored to make the talks a celebratory event to get together and exchange ideas.

WIT Event

One week before the WIT event the proposal authors submitted their detailed proposal, timeline and budget. The WI Committee then ranked the ideas for the university president's consideration at the event. The WIT event was held in the largest theatre on campus and attracted a very interested and enthusiastic crowd. Each participant or team of authors presented an 8-10 minute talk (the 2014 and 2015 WIT talks can be accessed here: WIT 2014: <https://youtu.be/jB03cbXkJRO>; WIT 2015: <https://youtu.be/u-JK9LWhuG0>). Each speaker included specific information about the problem or institutional issue that their idea would address, and connected their idea to both the five traits outlined in the innovation program and the university strategic plan. To maximize interest in the evening and increase audience participation, at the conclusion of the eight WIT presentations the audience was invited to vote, via their smart phones, on the idea they would most like to see funded. Regardless of whether the president ultimately picked this crowd-winning idea, the phase II proposal that received the most votes received a \$1,500 Audience Choice Award.



Dusty Breeding (University Church of Christ staff) and Laura Kalinkewicz (Seaver College Admission staff) present their talk at the 2015 WIT event. Theirs was an example of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary collaboration that the WI Committee liked to see as it made its selection of phase I proposals to move on to phase II and the Waves of Innovation Talks.

Winning 2015 Waves of Innovation Talk: Establish a Financial Literacy Program



Pepperdine senior Derek Stoutland gives a winning WIT presentation to establish a financial literacy program for students that entails an undergraduate course. His WIT presentation was also given a \$1,500 Audience Choice Award. Following graduation, Derek was hired in the Office of Financial Planning in Pepperdine University's Finance Division. See video: <http://youtu.be/4GNX6D5ij6Y>

At the first WIT event, with eight finalists from which to choose, we expected to select three for funding. After careful review of the Talks and written proposal applications and budgets, the president chose to fund six Waves of Innovation Grants and awarded approximately \$440,000 that evening. The excitement was palpable.

A method of providing the funding in stages was established, as most of the proposals are being implemented over a two-to three-year period. Plans for accountability were clarified as well, so as to keep the university community informed on the projects' implementation.

In early 2014, a new round of competition — Waves of Innovation II — was announced. Similar to the inaugural process, a committee was formed, applications were received and, in February 2015, the WIT event was staged. This time six finalists were chosen and three were awarded Waves of Innovation Grant funding. Once again, the evening was a community highlight and a spirit of entrepreneurship was honored and rewarded.



Waves of Innovation II winners pose with President Benton and Vice Provost Kats in February 2015 following their Waves of Innovation Talks. From left to right between the administrators: Mr. Derek Stoutland, Dr. Bernice Ledbetter, and Dr. Mark Chun each received full funding for their two- to three-year proposals totaling over \$408,000.

Outcomes

In our view the Waves of Innovation competitions provided a community spark and marked a return of university-community confidence about the future. Along the way a new Masters of Analytics program was envisioned, an exciting program in student financial literacy was created, a Gameful Design Lab was established, research into an environmentally friendly biodegradable plastic was funded, and a new Center for Women in Leadership was inaugurated. These programs will return value on the investment for the foreseeable future, and each proposal demonstrates that Pepperdine will reward good ideas and take calculated risks in collaboration with our students, staff and faculty.

Perhaps most interesting is that the entire process culminated in the funding of proposals and innovations that mirror the milieu of issues in need of attention by both higher education and society in general. An environmental scan of topics on the forefront of those needing attention would include, for example, any modern university's emphasis on sustainability. Likewise, a cross-disciplinary team of faculty, students and staff received funding to jump start the university's first-ever dormitory entirely focused on sustainability. In the future, students with interests in the environment will be able to request housing in this new facility, where they will have access to data ranging from their own water usage to the entire building's energy consumption. The hope is that students will begin to compare their environmentally-friendly living to those of their friends and fellow students in other dormitories. This project brought together faculty and students from the Humanities, Religion, and Natural Sciences. And from the administrative side of the university, the Center for Sustainability quickly embraced the students and faculty members as partners.

Given Pepperdine's relatively small size we do not have an extensive track record of faculty and students creating new products in the areas of technology or science. However, year one of the initiative saw one of our chemistry professors and his laboratory of undergraduates receive phase II funding for further development of an environmentally friendly, biodegradable plastic. Already this project has attracted the interest of our business school, where faculty and students frequently work with entrepreneurs to explore business possibilities, as well as interest from a local investment bank that makes financial investments in business start-ups.



Ms. Rhiannon Bailard, Associate Vice-President of Governmental and Regulatory Affairs and Director of the Center for Sustainability presents her proposal, "The Eden Project," which seeks to transition an existing residence hall into a sustainable or "green" residence hall through building retrofits and a comprehensive educational campaign wherein students learn by example and through peer-to-peer modeling.

Almost every current discussion about the future of higher education also includes a thoughtful conversation about how the underprivileged will continue to access colleges and universities as costs continue to rise. The WI Committee was moved by two first-year students who submitted a proposal to assist inner-city Los Angeles high school students with the college application process. These two young women had seen the frustration of younger friends and peers who seemed lost and discouraged at the mounds of paperwork and online forms required to apply to colleges, and proposed a relationship-building process where Pepperdine undergraduates would work with inner city schools and provide the support, encouragement and guidance necessary for students to submit college applications. The phase II funding for the idea piqued the interest of others on our campus and soon the proposal authors were invited to form a partnership with the Pepperdine Volunteer Center. The idea fit nicely within the mission of the Volunteer Center and provided the additional students necessary to mount new partnerships with local high schools.

Starting Your Wave

Based on Pepperdine University's experience with two rounds of the Waves of Innovation initiative, we suggest that you keep in mind the following points when planning your own innovation program:

1. Engage the entire community, across all schools, and all students, faculty and staff
2. Encourage a wide ranges of ideas, focused on institutional aims and synched with its strategic plan
3. Stage a public celebratory event to vet finalists and announce winners
4. Pepperdine's Budget for Waves of Innovation:
 - Up to \$4,000 each for development grants
 - \$2,000 for marketing, trophy, and production costs for the celebratory event
 - \$1,500 for an Audience Choice Award at the celebratory event
 - \$500 each for runners-up awards
 - Innovation grants up to \$150,000 each to implement the winning proposals within 2-3 years (to become self-sustaining thereafter)



Ms. SueJie Oh, a first-year student at Seaver College, presents "College Connection," which seeks to provide inner-city students with undergraduate mentors who provide support and advice during the college application process to educate and inspire high school students about the various opportunities that are within their reach and to, hopefully, have them enroll in four-year universities.

An unforeseen benefit of the Waves of Innovation initiative is the fact that even though only those projects deemed to be the very best were given full funding, dozens of other projects were of enough interest to the committee that they were forwarded to the appropriate dean or supervisor. Many of these ideas stimulated considerable new discussion across campus, and some deans and supervisors decided to implement the innovations independent of the WI initiative. Still other ideas that rose to the level of Phase I funding and were highlighted at the WIT event generated enough "buzz" to warrant deep discussions. The first year of the innovation program, faculty from our Graduate School of Education and Psychology proposed a new Ph.D. program in global leadership and change. While the president did not provide phase II funding for the idea, it gained momentum with both the school administration and the faculty, and will soon be implemented as a new option for fully-employed graduate students.

Conclusion

With just two cycles of funding behind us we are both encouraged and grateful to the Pepperdine community for their enthusiastic and energetic participation in the Waves of Innovation initiative. The initiative has been embraced by the community beyond what we could have imagined or hoped for. More than 250 ideas have been submitted in the past two years, from the broadest imaginable cross section of the university. The funded proposals cut right to the heart of both the university's mission and its strategic plan. The new ideas have generated new partnerships within the university, between the university and the local community, and between the university and other nearby universities. These new connections likely would not have happened without the supporting framework of the Waves of Innovation initiative. Moreover, the WIT events have brought our community together unlike any other initiative has in the last decade. There is a "new spring" in the steps of those who want to stimulate change, efficiency and creativity on our campus, and planning for the next call for proposals is already underway. To ensure that we have an adequate mix of those eligible to submit proposals, we will build in an 18-24 month gap between the last round of funding and the next call for proposals. This will bring about a mix of new students, new staff, and faculty. The word has gotten out about the initiative and we are confident that future rounds of funding will be equally targeted at the issues that matter most to the university and to society at large. The initiative has lived up to its name and we eagerly await the next wave of enthusiasm and creativity.

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About the Authors

Andrew K. Benton **President**

Andy Benton has served in higher education for 41 years, 31 of which at Pepperdine University. He became the seventh president of Pepperdine in 2000. Benton is an attorney by training, but virtually his entire career has been spent working on behalf of young people. In addition to administrative duties, he teaches regularly, including an undergraduate course entitled *Jurisprudence and the Judicial Process*. He is the former chair of the American Council on Education (ACE). Today he serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), and serves as immediate past chair of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU). Benton considers himself most fortunate to have married his wife and best friend, Debby, more than 40 years ago.

Lee B. Kats **Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives**

Dr. Lee Kats received his B.A. from Calvin College in Michigan and his Ph.D. in biology from the University of Kentucky. From 2001 until 2011 he served as Associate Dean for Research at Pepperdine University and since 2011 has served as Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives. Dr. Kats began teaching at Pepperdine in 1990. In 2000, he was named as the Frank R. Seaver Chair in Natural Science at Pepperdine University. He conducts research in the areas of animal ecology, tropical ecology and conservation biology. As Vice Provost, Dr. Kats works closely with Pepperdine's Information Technology department, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and Research and Sponsored Programs. Dr. Kats is also involved in the university's strategic planning process and implementation and oversees the university's Waves of Innovation initiative. For questions about Waves of Innovation, please email innovation@pepperdine.edu.