Assessing Entrepreneurship Education Program Outcomes: The Diving Board

As entrepreneurship educators:

- What do we know
- What do we want to know
- What impacts of e-ship education are measurable?
- What are the impacts that we see?
- What types of measurements?

Some guiding comparisons:

- Entrepreneurship education is much like the Eurail system – because a Eurail pass is selling the means for a journey and not any specific destination, evaluation of the system might best be considered in terms of the arteries explored and connections made.
- Aesop’s *The Lion and the Statue*: A man and a Lion were discussing the relative strengths of men and lions. The man claimed that his kind were stronger for their intelligence. To prove it, he showed the lion a beautiful sculpture portraying a man defeating a lion in combat. The lion wryly pointed out that it was a man who created that statue.

To begin, the group took a look at “our questions about assessment” Suggestions from the panel included:

- What skills are we trying to improve in our students?
- What are the main objectives of the program?
- External Rankings and their place in entrepreneurship education
  - They come at definite intervals, and assess known criterion
  - Like them or not, they have implications with administrators, other faculty, student and outsider perceptions alike
  - They seem to be becoming more important methods of evaluating specialized collegiate educational program
- Which skills do they enter the program with, and which skills are they lacking?
  - Whose responsibility is it to teach these skills?
  - How do we require the acquisition of unpopular skills/courses while keeping our programs popular?
- How attractive/popular has our program become?
  - The efficacy and practicality of long-term studies?
- How important is it that we are teaching what employers want?
- Can entrepreneurship be taught?
- Can entrepreneurship skills even be measured?
Now, what are the important skills to evaluate in our students? The group’s answers are summarized below:

- Leadership skills
- Ethics and Honesty
- Critical/Integrative Thinking
- Risk-Taking
- Salesmanship
- Opportunity Evaluation Skills
- Comfort and understanding of a global economy
- Student’s understanding of what it [entrepreneurship] is really like (the entrepreneurial habitat/ecosystem)

And what are the methods we are or should be using to evaluate our students and assess the development of these skills:

- **Reflective Essays**
  Leaders of the program ask students to write essays detailing their thoughts, impressions, and understanding of both entrepreneurship and their role as entrepreneurs at the beginning of the program. Toward the end of the program, students are asked to revisit their first essays, compare their development, and produce a reflective essay that demonstrates their growth and change in understanding.

- **Longitudinal Studies/Surveys**
  Program leaders can develop a battery of their own questions and surveys that can explore the career choices, progress, development, and satisfaction of the program’s participants a few years after finishing the program. This requires both that program leaders wait a length of time to sample while developing and maintaining close ties to participants many years after their graduation.

- **Outcomes: Jobs and Companies**
  Educators can make an effort to keep tabs on the progress of recent graduates, in terms of the type of employment entered upon graduation as well as the number and success of any entrepreneurial ventures that may have been borne of the program.

- **Assessment-Based Classroom Activity**
  Educators can take advantage of the unique material and skills that comprise entrepreneurship education by designing classroom activities and assignments which are similarly creative. Team projects, group presentations, student-led sessions, discussion of cases, and active review at multiple points through the program can give the instructor an active and evolving assessment of student’s learning and progress.

It is important to remember that assessment, while not easy, is so very important to our role as entrepreneurship educators. While some aspects and methods can prove more valuable than others, we should take varied forms of input and consider the 80/20 rule to help produce valuable recommendations from the multitude of datums that are available to us.