Many of us higher education observers have been talking up the need for innovation for quite some time. President Obama reiterated the need for colleges and universities to keep costs down in the State of the Union address while many experts have long urged campus leadership to develop a plan to graduate more students while dealing with shrinking budgets. All around the world, there are examples of how innovation can be a solution by doing more with less, and several universities are answering the call by implementing creative practices to increase access.

As much as this born-and-bred Seminole fan hates to admit it, the University of Florida (UF) is one of those institutions, as highlighted in a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article [2]. Like most states, appropriations for Florida colleges and universities have suffered a toll, and the campus was at capacity during the fall semester—resulting in the need for a decreased undergraduate enrollment. UF provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, Joseph Glover, looked at enrollment numbers and realized the campus saw a drop of more than 2,000 students in the spring. The combination of students who graduate early or study abroad during the spring contributes to this shortfall, and the university saw the potential to fill these open spots with fresh faces.
Like any new program, UF faced challenges implementing this alternative. Students who participate in the Spring-Summer year are not able to enroll in fall classes throughout their matriculation—classes were added to the summer curriculum to accommodate them but not for all programs traditionally offered in the fall. For these students, the fall presents a perfect time to get an internship, work experience, or enroll in online classes. What really makes this program a standout is participation in the Innovation Academy [3] (IA)—a series of required courses that focus on entrepreneurship, creativity, and ethics.

IA encourages students to be practitioners of learning and could potentially result in students graduating at an advantage with greater preparation for what lies ahead in the workforce. By presenting opportunities for students to learn about growing businesses, develop critical thinking skills, and adapt ethical behaviors, IA enhances the undergraduate experience at what is already a quality research university.

Bravo, UF—something I never thought I would say.

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