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## Kettering University and the New Economy

By S. R. Liberty



You probably know that Kettering University in Flint has long been a top-tier supplier of engineering and scientific talent to established companies, now spanning a diverse array of more than 600 companies nationwide. Why? Because, unlike any other institution of higher education in the United States, Kettering blends up to two and one-half years of learning in a professional work environment with two full years of academic learning in every one of its baccalaureate programs. Additionally every Kettering undergraduate is required to write a thesis about how they solved a real-world problem or developed a new product or process for their co-op employer.

You may also know that many graduates of Kettering have achieved outstanding professional success. Ultimately this is the litmus test for any institution – the success of its graduates – and Kettering’s alumni are a most impressive lot. Any institution in the United States would love to be able to claim Kettering alumni as theirs. You probably aren’t surprised that an unusually high percentage of Kettering alumni have become successful business leaders – many as executives of major corporations. This has been our core history and it will continue in the new economy. You may be somewhat surprised to learn that many Kettering alumni have become successful entrepreneurs despite the fact that historically Kettering didn’t offer entrepreneurship programming.

However, Kettering is becoming much more than that now. Kettering has crafted a new mission and vision that embrace a collaborative role in regional socio-economic development, and it is developing the ability to be a key contributor to science and technology based entrepreneurship in the region. In July of 2007 Kettering became the new home of the Region 6 (Genesee and Lapeer Counties) Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center. So far, that Center has assisted more than 450 clients, has helped create 174 jobs, and has helped stimulate \$3.4 million in capital investment.



With financial support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the C. S. Mott Foundation, Kettering will soon be constructing a multi-tenant laboratory incubator, which will be open for business in 2009. Kettering faculty, students, and facilities will be available to augment the limited R&D capabilities of these startup companies. Also, you may have recently heard that Kettering is the academic anchor of the new Flint Center of Energy Excellence and that Swedish Bio-Gas International will be an incubator tenant at Kettering.

Some of the start-ups to be incubated at Kettering will be the product of the entrepreneurial endeavor of Kettering faculty, students, and alumni. This is because Kettering is more aggressively encouraging generation and protection of intellectual property, encouraging the creation of spin-out companies, and exposing its science, engineering and business students to entrepreneurship in both curricular and co-curricular experiences. However, we plan to do even more.



With annual financial support from the Kern Foundation, Kettering intends to integrate entrepreneurship “across the curricula” rather than just in isolated coursework or co-curricular organizations. In this way every student at Kettering will be introduced to entrepreneurship and at a level compatible with their academic maturity and accumulated knowledge. Kettering graduates have always had three distinguishing characteristics – they all know how things are made; they have been exposed to nearly all aspects of the companies that they work for – so they know how the dots are connected and have a good conceptual grasp of the entire business system; and their co-op experiences have provided fantastic opportunities to build valuable professional relationships that they will utilize throughout their careers. When augmented with “across the curricular” entrepreneurial programming, many more of Kettering’s alumni will be intrapreneurs within their employing companies and many more will become entrepreneurs – hopefully within this region.

There’s more to be done, but [Kettering](#) is on its way and it will be a collaborative partner in building the new economy of the region..

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