Can universities truly be entrepreneurial? If so, what are the criteria that allow for the development and evaluation of their entrepreneurial capacity (Hindle 2007)? Scholarly attempts to define the entrepreneurial university within the extant literature are often one dimensional. Few studies seek to map the many diverse facets of which these institutions are composed (Clark, 1998, Etzkowitz, 1999, Shane, 2004). This is most likely explained by the difficulty involved with determining what universities do, how they are organized and whether to evaluate the functional aspects in a segmented or synergistic framework. Yet, there is a practical need to discover, test and operationalize a grounded theoretical model for guiding, creating and measuring the social and economic impacts of ‘entrepreneurial universities’ to whatever goals they seek to achieve. The authors believe that by using a conceptual framework for practicing entrepreneurship in “challenged” environments, the classification of what makes a university ‘entrepreneurial’ will better enable the creation of more reliable and valid tools for studying the phenomenon.

Explanations for the fragmented literature on entrepreneurial universities stems partly from the nascent field of entrepreneurship itself. Several schools of thought present diverse and sometimes polarized perspectives with respect to entrepreneurship research. Of these, one view suggests entrepreneurship should be focused broadly upon its role in creating economic growth through new ventures (Low and MacMillan, 1988). The emergence view seeks to limit the definition and research focus of entrepreneurship to the act of organizing. This places entrepreneurship into a definitional status that benefits the study of new firm creation, emphasizing strategy and growth (Garner, 2001, Daviddson, 2003). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) relate entrepreneurship with entrepreneurial opportunity and the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities by various human agents and through various modes (not limited to just the firm). When applying the various concepts of entrepreneurship to the context of the modern university, which one applies, or do all?

Depending on the actual elements observed within a university (teaching, research, commercialization or community development), its organizational structure, philosophical alignment, individual capacity and internal and external configurations, almost any of the above theories may be applied. Thus classifying exactly what a university does and correlating it with representative themes within the entrepreneurship literature bears directly on the ability to build a comprehensive framework for entrepreneurship at university.

Advanced work in this area is extremely important for three main reasons: 1) universities are knowledge creation hubs in a society where economic growth is heavily influenced by comparative advantages derived from innovation and technology (Ropke, 2000), 2) universities are constrained by fewer resources and greater demands placed upon them by society and must seek new evolutionary configurations to both survive and provide new functions: both economic and pedagogical, (Clark, 1998) and 3) conflicting goals and internal philosophies tend to de-harmonize performance incentives so that they are mis-aligned with pure market incentives (profit), making the university an environment that is specifically challenging for entrepreneurs.

Based on anecdotal evidence and first review of the extant literature, we take an a priori approach to the problem and suggest that there are four dimensions that apply to the concept of ‘entrepreneurial universities’. These four dimensions are:

1) Innovation of teaching and research, 2) Teaching entrepreneurship as a subject (including research and pedagogical innovations) and the impact this function generates for the university/economy, 3) Commercialization of IP that is generated from the university and the treatment of that IP in how value is created (in
dollars), 4) Governance methods and policies that create an impetus for operational focus upon opportunity
discovery and evaluation (emphasis on strategic marketing and running the university as a business).

Methodology/Key Propositions
We seek to test our model against the extant literature to see if our dimensional constructs hold. The paper
will entail a cross sectional study of the many academic fields that are interested in the university as exhibiting
entrepreneurial traits as well as a thorough investigation of what functions may be defined as ‘entrepreneurial’.

Results and Implications
Our dimensional analysis, once synthesized to the most current research in the study of entrepreneurship, will
present a beginning idealized model for the study of entrepreneurship at universities. It is the beginning of a
process that will lead to the examination of possible research frameworks with which to test the phenomenon
and will lead towards the eventual operationalization of a rigorously distilled conceptual platform.
As this research considers the diverse and important theoretical concepts of entrepreneurship, innovation and
economic growth through the lens of the modern university it will open many new pathways for research
as well as provide practical tools and evaluation techniques for an extremely important component of the
knowledge economy that is yet to be fully understood, or measured.

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