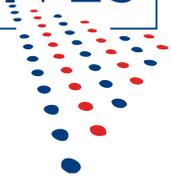


# PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



A HIGHER EDUCATION  
PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP  
SERIES

*2014-2015 Series:*

**Inspirational Innovation**

CHAPTER

**3**

**The Center for Innovation and  
Growth at Baldwin Wallace  
University**



## PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

# The Center for Innovation Growth at Baldwin Wallace University

### **Dr. Robert C. Helmer, President, Baldwin Wallace University**

Baldwin Wallace University, founded in 1845, has for most of its history relied on tuition revenue, the earnings from its modest endowment, and the generosity of its donors to fund the operations of this comprehensive university. This funding scenario is not unlike the vast majority of colleges and universities that make up the country's incredible system of private higher education. Today, however, all three revenue streams are susceptible to being on shaky ground for a variety of reasons, many outside the control of the universities themselves. Schools that will thrive in the future are those that promote innovation and the growth of alternative revenue streams.

This funding crisis is occurring at the same time that the very premise and promise of higher education are being discussed (and doubted) on nearly a daily basis, from the halls of Congress to the pages of venerable news publications. Simply put, in the current climate, the value of a college degree is being called into question from virtually every corner of American society.

In the fall of 2009, with funding assistance from generous donors and major foundations including the Burton D. Morgan Foundation, Baldwin Wallace developed, built, and opened the Center for Innovation and Growth (CIG) in part to help address the funding challenges that became so vivid in the country's financial difficulties of 2008. This new Center on the Baldwin Wallace campus is non-discipline specific and is not associated with any one academic area or division of the University. By design it is intentionally not affiliated with the University's School of Business, even though the School of Business has faculty and majors/minors associated with the field of entrepreneurial studies. The strategic thought behind this decision was made to ensure that CIG would serve all members of the BW community, from conservatory of music majors to history majors to chemistry majors, and not just the business majors who might perhaps have a natural affinity for such a center.

***“ In a climate where assisting students with successfully making the transition from backpack to briefcase is not only desired but expected, the work of the staff of CIG is invaluable in this effort.”***



## PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

Since its early years, CIG has had a strong external focus. This early premise of CIG was to identify several area corporations to serve as “growth partner” clients. In return for a fairly substantial fee, these growth partners would have access to the services that CIG could provide to these corporations. Primarily, these services would include a “growth project” that would be staffed by BW students and overseen by a member of the CIG staff.

Over these past years, dozens of Baldwin Wallace students have served as CIG interns and have gained important and valuable experience working on the growth projects for these area corporations. Following the researching of issues of importance to the clients and doing “voice of the customer” interviews, CIG interns present to the leadership of the growth partners the results of their work. In every case, the client received critical business information that far exceeded in value the fee paid by the corporation to be a growth partner.

As an alternative source of revenue for the University, the fees paid by these growth partners have proven sufficient to cover the operating costs of the center. These operating costs include the salaries of all professional staff as well as the stipends paid to the CIG interns. In addition to the actual revenue, Baldwin Wallace has benefitted from the exposure the work of CIG has brought to the business community of the region. New relationships have been formed and new partnerships have been developed.

In addition to the external horizon of CIG as it pertains to growth partners and the local region, CIG also has a more recent internal focus of instilling in all BW students regardless of major an entrepreneurial mindset. This entrepreneurial culture which is being engendered on the campus of Baldwin Wallace by CIG provides at least a partial answer to those who question the value of a college degree today. In a climate where assisting students with successfully making the transition from backpack to briefcase is not only desired but expected, the work of the staff of CIG is invaluable in this effort.

Working with faculty fellows who are both affiliated with academic departments and associated with CIG, the CIG staff has been in conversations on revisions to curriculum to incorporate this entrepreneurial mindset in various and diverse courses and majors. This work is very intentional and the focus on innovation and entrepreneurship is clear. For example, the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music has recently added a course on “Entrepreneurship and Advocacy.” The course description is as follows:

An examination of practical skills and knowledge required for a contemporary professional musician. Includes an introduction to relevant aspects of finance, marketing, contracting, and intellectual property. Additional topics include career exploration & development, audience building, and arts advocacy.

Work will continue throughout the various academic departments of the University to seek opportunities for a curricular impact through the efforts of the CIG staff as well as other interested faculty and staff. Again, the goal for CIG is to reach each and every student.



## PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

As Baldwin Wallace strives to foster in all students such a mindset and to provide to all students the skills needed to thrive in the competitive workforce of today, the work of CIG has been complemented recently by the addition and incorporation of Blackstone LaunchPad into its activities. Founded at the University of Miami, Blackstone LaunchPad (BLP) provides to students a place where ideas can be discussed, nurtured, and perhaps even a business plan developed with a goal of seeking out venture capital and ultimately bringing the idea to fruition.

In addition, therefore, to the curricular work being done throughout campus, CIG and BLP are also providing co-curricular programming over the course of the academic year. With BLP just completing its second year at Baldwin Wallace, already more than 100 students this past academic year scheduled and participated in venture meetings with BLP staff. In addition, CIG and BLP have brought practicing entrepreneurs to campus and several hundred students attended these workshops and presentations. Meanwhile, the staffs of CIG and BLP have visited more than 500 students in classroom settings to discuss the potential, both personal and professional, of participating in the important work of innovation and entrepreneurship.

For Baldwin Wallace University, CIG with the addition of BLP have become important components in the recruitment and retention of students to the University. Recruitment materials now include highlighted references to these two entities and to the entrepreneurial spirit that is taking shape on campus. New student orientations now include student sessions with the directors of CIG and BLP. Likewise, parents are provided an overview of CIG and BLP and are encouraged to stress with their sons and daughters the value of including CIG and BLP participation among their college experiences. Throughout campus, the students who have been active participants in the work of CIG and BLP are more often than not the student leaders in various aspects of university life. Their points of connection to the University are many and their allegiance to the University is strong.

Since its conception, the Center for Innovation and Growth at Baldwin Wallace and its associated programming has provided new revenue streams to the BW operational budget, has been instrumental in the marketing of the University to prospective students, and has served as a dynamic force for retention of our undergraduate students. By also assisting in the preparation of our graduates for meaningful careers, the Center has also served as one of many answers to the question of the value of an undergraduate degree in our country today. The combination of the critical thinking skills nurtured by a liberal arts education and the entrepreneurial mindset and spirit engendered by CIG is helping countless graduating seniors make the transition to the workforce in personally satisfying and professionally significant ways.

The presence and important work of the Center for Innovation and Growth contribute to the strength and vitality of the experience of the students of Baldwin Wallace University.



## PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



**Dr. Robert C. Helmer, J.D., Ph.D.**, began his tenure in July 2012 as the ninth president of Baldwin Wallace University, after serving nine years as president of Lourdes University in Sylvania, Ohio.

Dr. Helmer currently serves on the boards of several local, regional, and national organizations, including the Southwest General Health System, the United Way of Greater Cleveland, the Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges, the Association of Independent Colleges, and Universities of Ohio, the Higher Learning Commission, and the Council of Independent Colleges.

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and The Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, Dr. Helmer received his Ph.D. from Marquette University and his J.D. from the University of Toledo. His scholarly interests are in early Christian origins and apocalyptic literature.