Overview

The Digital Education Incubator (Incubator) funds and co-manages pilot projects that are authored by BU leadership, faculty, and/or staff and have the potential to positively change the way in which one or more of BU’s Schools and Colleges deliver value to students, both inside and outside the classroom. Our aspiration is to incubate projects that have lasting impact on how we do things at BU and position our university in the forefront of educational innovation.

The structure of our funded projects and related activities can take many forms. We are deliberately flexible in our approach, valuing bold initiative, collaboration and the transformative potential of thoughtful ideation.

We have identified key areas that are currently impacted by rapid transformation and bold visions for the future of learning. We are also always interested in discussing any ideas that seek to align Boston University with emergent trends in educational innovation to improve the student experience.

For upcoming deadlines and information sessions, please see our calendar and project pitch submission form.
CURRENT FOCUS AREAS

Project-Based and Work-Integrated Learning

Our students expect BU to prepare them for gainful employment through meaningful learning experiences and skill-development. To align with these expectations, emerging learner-centered pedagogical approaches focus on interaction, groupwork and solutions to real-life challenges. Technology plays a key role in the implementation of these approaches through cloud-based services, apps, and other digital tools that promote persistent connectivity enabling students, educators and other project collaborators to access and contribute to shared workspaces anytime, anywhere.

We are particularly interested in supporting creative uses of technology that facilitate connections between faculty/student teams and outside organizations (corporations, public agencies, etc.) for the purposes of project-based, experiential and work-integrated learning embedded in courses and programs of study.

Video Spotlight

Learn more about the Incubator-supported Collaborate.Health project through this proof of concept video.
Mentoring and Advising

In a complex world, effective student mentoring and advising are emerging as an increasingly important component of the University student experience. Developmental models of advising focus not only on student learning and educational experiences but seek to connect students’ academic interests and skills with their personal and career ambitions.

The Interprofessional Leadership in Healthcare Certificate Using an Alumni Mentoring Approach project is a collaboration between the College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College (Sargent College) and the School of Social Work (SSW) and designed to create a non-credit online certificate in Interprofessional Leadership in Health Care using an alumni mentoring approach.

In the spirit of improving the quality of academic, career and life mentoring/advising we offer to our students, the Incubator seeks to support the innovative use of digital tools or digitally-enabled processes in the context of advising. Examples of such tools include (but are not limited to) self-assessments and goal-setting exercises, predictive analytics, academic alert and nudge systems, digital guided pathways, flipped advising models and more.
Lifelong Learning & The Future of Work

The growing cost of education. Rapidly changing job markets. The emergence of "academic boot camps," coding camps and nano-degrees. Stackable certificates and digital badging.

Lifelong learning is education for the knowledge economy. Agile learners aim for continuous personal and professional development throughout their lifetime, pragmatically connecting learning to practice, and embracing the evolving nature of the skills required to succeed in the workforce. We know that many students want to accelerate their degree programs and be reassured that the skills they've obtained ensure a competitive advantage for career success.

We seek to support innovative approaches to developing capabilities for serving lifelong learners, including (but not limited to) ideas for lifelong learning portals, and developing new/better ways to keep our alumni connected to BU. We are also interested in receiving proposals for pilot projects involving alternative credentials, such as digital badges; new credit pathways; and experiments with shorter, more agile programs and credentials to meet the demands of the contemporary learners.

“I encourage others throughout BU to get in touch with the Incubator even if their ideas are still in very nascent stages. They can get you from vague ideas to an operating program.”

— Eileen Daily
BU School of Theology
Emerging Educational Technologies

We provide supplemental support for strategic efforts led by BU Departments/Schools, aimed at the use or exploration of new and emerging technologies that are not currently in use at BU or that could lend themselves to cutting-edge applications and/or further alignment with BU’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Projects in this area could range from virtual and augmented reality, uses of artificial intelligence and gameful learning to novel uses of wearable technologies, robotics and complex digital visualizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged BU to rethink our established practices as we continue to deliver the highest possible educational value to our students in a physically distanced world. We are interested in fostering efforts that respond to that challenge by leveraging novel technologies to transform student experiences. Ideas may include support for creative course transformation aimed at fostering active learning in novel ways; remote student engagement and collaboration; virtual career and/or student activities fairs; and other approaches that prepare students for the increasingly virtual workspace.

Real Doctors. Real Social Workers. Virtual Patients.

MED, SSW interdisciplinary pilot study of effect of social conditions on health

Read about the Incubator-supported Using VR to Address Social Determinants of Health project in BU Today

Find out more: digital.bu.edu/Incubator
Incubator Project Flow

The image below highlights the Incubator project development process and outlines the six stages in our project life cycle. In the Inspiration phase, we explore new ideas and assess their feasibility according to our selection criteria. If the initial project pitch meets selection criteria, we Initiate a kickoff meeting, team formation, and high-level project planning. More details emerge as we Plan & Prototype, investigate potential solutions, check our assumptions, and make necessary adjustments towards pilot Development. Project implementation continues after pilot Launch, when our focus shifts to monitoring and data collection. At its conclusion, we Evaluate the pilot against pre-determined metrics of success and reflect on its sustainability. This is not always a linear process; we remain flexible to revisit goals, assumptions, plans, and timelines at any point as new information emerges.
Proposal Review & Development Process

Generation of Concepts

Throughout the academic year, the Incubator will hold information sessions designed to walk interested participants through key elements of the project proposal and answer any questions about project development process. Please see calendar and RSVP form.

Those who are interested but unable to attend an information session can direct questions to dei@bu.edu.

Submission Guidelines

“We truly enjoy the close partnership unfolding in our work with DL&I’s Digital Education Incubator—it’s a true collaboration from the early stages of concept development to implementation.”

— Bronwyn Keefe
BU School of Social Work

Concept proposals can be submitted via our site at any time. Initial concept pages should aim to be about 2 pages in length and address the selection criteria below in as much as possible. A proposal template and related guide is available here. Proposals selected to move to further discussion and potential development will be notified within six weeks of submission date.
Selection Criteria

**Scope:** The proposed project is responsive to one of the current focus areas outlined above or otherwise seeks to align BU with emergent trends in educational innovation to improve the student experience. It describes a proposed experiment/idea, including a problem statement and a possible high-level project vision.

**Significance:** The proposed project has significant value for our students. Ideally, there is evidence of support for the proposed idea, such as market demand or availability gap.

**Strategic Value:** The proposed project has the potential of creating a strategic advantage for BU and/or enhance the distinctive value of a BU education.

**Sustainability:** The proposed project has a) a plan for measuring its success, b) a plan for project evaluation and sustainability, and c) the potential to scale beyond a pilot phase to other classrooms, units, departments and/or schools, either directly or through providing a compelling example for adoption.

**Support:** The proposed project is strongly endorsed by participating academic unit(s), and all requisite technical and administrative support have been identified and deemed feasible; academic units commit to supporting the project past its incubation phase if deemed successful. If project proposals are responsive to the Emerging Educational Technologies focus area, the Incubator will consider requests for additional/matching funding to supplement existing commitments from the participating academic unit and/or from beyond BU sources.
Development

1. For proposals meeting the Selection Criteria, appropriate staff/support personnel will collaborate with the proposing individual/team to assess project feasibility and to identify possible resources needed for implementation (such as investigation of possible software or platform needs, infrastructure and support staff requirements, budget for seed funding, and timeline to implementation).

2. Following the above step, select concept proposals will be co-developed into project development plans, including implementation and evaluation milestones, for funding and incubation. If initial discussions regarding the feasibility of the project reveal that the concept proposal is missing significant key elements, such as an assessment of market demand or sustainability plan, we will encourage the concept's continued development for consideration at a later date.

3. Proposals for additions and modifications to Boston University’s academic programs are subject to eCAP review.

“Without the DL&I initial financial and strong technical support Project Accelerate would simply be an idea that never saw the light of day. We owe a great deal to the creative license the DL&I internal grant provided during the critical initial phases.”

– Mark Greenman
BU College of Arts & Sciences

The Digital Education Incubator reserves the right to discontinue the development of any Project, at any time in its sole discretion and without further obligation.
Funding & Implementation

Both the funding and timing of project implementation depends on the scale and requirement of the proposed idea.

Ideally, a proposed project will launch within 6 months of the proposal date, with a review of outcomes within a year of launch.

Funding for our previous projects has ranged from $5K for a single small-scale project to $200K for a multi-year, large scale implementation effort.

We also encourage initial consideration of beyond BU funding sources (more details are available in our curated list of beyond BU funding opportunities).

Contact Info

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