Collaborate to create innovative program options

By Joan Hope, Editor

It's possible to argue that universities haven't fully adapted to the 21st century, said Soumitra Dutta, dean of the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell University. Students seek learning experiences that take advantage of new technology and communications methods.

Cornell Tech offers experiences that integrate engineering, computer science and business, Dutta said. The innovative institution is a partnership between Cornell University, Technion University of Israel, and New York City.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg realized the economy was not as stable as he would like, Dutta said. The city held a contest to find a university to develop a graduate institution in the city that would transform the economy.

Public/private partnerships are the answer to driving economic transformation, Dutta said. In the case of Cornell Tech, a top-tier university combines with a dynamic city environment and a dynamic city government, he said. And Technion has enjoyed great success in supporting entrepreneurs. The Jacobs Technion-Cornell Institute was founded to address economic needs through nontraditional academic approaches. Cornell Tech is designed to "be part of the economic transformation of a very dynamic city," Dutta said.

New York City gave Cornell half of Roosevelt Island to create a campus for Cornell Tech. Programs were launched at Google's offices in Chelsea and will move to the new campus in 2017.

Innovative strategies being used at Cornell Tech include:

- **Nontraditional faculty.** Faculty offices are designed to echo the type of open learning environment found in high-tech companies like those in Silicon Valley, Dutta said. "The faculty members are based in cubicles with no offices. A computer science professor might sit next to a business professor and an engineering professor. That physical proximity is meant to allow cross-fertilization of ideas and help faculty members from different disciplines understand each other."

- The make-up of the faculty is also different from that of a traditional institution. At traditional institutions, about 80 to 90 percent of teaching is done by research faculty and the rest by working faculty. But to provide students at Cornell Tech with close industry contact, the goal is to have 50 percent of classes taught by practitioners.

> **Innovative scheduling.** Cornell's MBA program in Ithaca is arranged into semesters. But at Cornell Tech, students learn in smaller modules, Dutta said. They might last one, two or three weeks. Some include intense lectures. Others involve learning treks to Israel or China or visits to companies. It's a "Lego brick" approach, Dutta said.

> **Co-created learning design.** Students work with faculty members to create the learning environment and determine what they need to learn.

> **Space for start-ups.** The campus will have space for companies. The goal is to encourage start-ups, with business owners interacting with students and professors.

> **Engagement with the local community.** Engagement between the campus and the community is vital. Faculty members are required to teach at a local middle school, and guest lectures bring speakers on campus to inspire students.

Cornell has a strong MBA program in Ithaca, and faculty continuously improve the program, Dutta said. But Cornell Tech gives officials the chance to design a program from scratch and to "test some radical, difficult ideas." The campuses will work together by offering joint classes and activities, with faculty teaching at both places. Successful innovations from Cornell Tech will be implemented in Ithaca, Dutta said.

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**Support risk-taking as a leader**

The biggest challenge to a project like Cornell Tech is that the institution's leadership needs to be supportive of taking risks, said Soumitra Dutta, dean of the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell University. The leaders must be open to experimentation and new projects and encourage others to also take risks.

"People have to be able to think differently and not be constrained by the traditional," Dutta said. "That's easier said than done, but that's the role of leadership."

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