

You are an academic entrepreneur.

Using Eric Ries's Lean Startup Method, you, too, can be an **academic entrepreneur**: *someone who innovates by managing ideas; validating them through frequent experimentation; building products (e.g., lessons, assignments, programs, texts, and creative performances); measuring their effectiveness; learning to persevere or pivot; and gauging progress, setting up milestones, and prioritizing tasks.*

1. As an **academic entrepreneur**, you think broadly about your scholarship as a teacher, researcher, writer, mentor, colleague, committee member, administrator, advisor, and public intellectual, among other academic **roles**. You can be an entrepreneur in any of these roles.
2. As an **academic entrepreneur**, you manage **ideas**, which are either your original inspiration or taken collegially from friends, family, fellow scholars, students, etc. In addition, **assumptions** – that are often unacknowledged – underlie these **ideas**.
3. As an **academic entrepreneur**, you use experimentation to validate the effectiveness of these **ideas** in academic **spaces** (the classroom, the stage, in scholarly discourse, the conference room, etc.) in the form of **products**. You identify and manage the development of the interrelationship between **ideas**, **products**, and **assumptions**.
4. As an **academic entrepreneur**, your experiments take the form of the **Build-Measure-Learn** iterative process:
 - As an **academic entrepreneur**, you build **products** (e.g., lessons, assignments, programs, texts, creative performances, etc.) from **ideas** based on certain **assumptions**. You begin with a **Minimum Viable Product** (MVP): a manifestation of your idea(s) that has only those features necessary for it to be deployed and tested.
 - As an **academic entrepreneur**, you measure the effectiveness of (i.e., assess) your **product** and the **ideas** behind the **product** as well as the truthfulness of the **assumptions** that support the **ideas**.
 - As an **academic entrepreneur**, you learn from this experimentation through assessment and apply these lessons to a revised **product**, which is the subject of the next experiment. You learn whether to **persevere** in developing this particular product or to **pivot** by changing **ideas**, **assumptions**, or **products**.
 - As an **academic entrepreneur**, you cycle through iterations of the **Build-Measure-Learn** process. Your **product** becomes less minimally viable – that is, more sophisticated, more reliant upon diverse **assumptions** and **ideas**, and with more features not directly linked to your **ideas** than the first iteration (the MVP).

- As an **academic entrepreneur**, you take advantage of higher education’s unique concept of time and use the following cycles for the **Build-Measure-Learn** process:



- 6-7 years (the time between sabbaticals)
- 5 years (the time before applying for tenure)
- 4-5 years (the length of an undergraduate education)
- 2-4 semesters (the length of a defined sequence of courses)
- 1 calendar year (the length of the Service to Hope form)
- 1 academic year (the length of time covered by a Department Report)
- 1 summer (the time when you actually get work done)
- 1 semester (the length of a course)
- 1-6 weeks (the length of a unit in a course)
- 1 day (the length of a class meeting)
- 10-15 minutes (the length of a class activity)

5. As an **academic entrepreneur**, you use the results of the **Build-Measure-Learn** process to gauge overall progress in the development of your **ideas** and **products** and the refinement of your **assumptions**. These results help you set milestones and prioritize tasks.

Glossary of Terms

- **Assumptions:** Underneath every idea for a classroom activity or a line of research lie unspoken assumptions. For example, the idea that “I’ll have my students make group presentations.” assumes:
 - Students know how to work effectively together to prepare the presentations.
 - Students understand the components of a good presentation.
 - You know how to grade and give feedback on group presentations.
- **Build-Measure-Learn:** The iterative process, or feedback loop, by which you build something, measure its effectiveness, learn from this assessment, and build a revised product for another round of measurement and learning.
- **Idea:** Something along the lines of: “Students could...,” “I could...,” “What if my department...,” and “Someone should...”
- **Minimum Viable Product:** The “bare bones” and simplest manifestation of your idea that nevertheless allows you to test its effectiveness, its assumptions, and whether or not it is worthwhile to continue developing the idea and/or product.
- **Persevere or Pivot:** As an academic entrepreneur, you scoff at the old-fashioned lament: “publish or perish.” Instead, you are concerned with learning whether you should “persevere or pivot.” That is, are your ideas and products effective enough to merit continued development or should you shift your efforts – perhaps slightly, perhaps in a major way – in a different direction?
- **Product:** The manifestation of your idea(s) – the actual lesson plan, paper, or proposal.
- **Role:** One of the many hats you wear as a scholar (and an entrepreneur), such as a teacher, researcher, writer, mentor, colleague, committee member, administrator, advisor, and public intellectual.
- **Space:** One of the many places you inhabit as a scholar, such as the classroom, the stage, scholarly discourse, the lab, and the conference room. This is where your entrepreneurship takes place.
- **You:** An Academic Entrepreneur