Let's not forget engineering

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By Steve Garmhausen

It may be possible to teach entrepreneurship. But should business schools—which are geared to teaching management—automatically get the nod to house such programs? After all, for every founder and CEO with an advanced degree in business, there are three with advanced degrees in engineering, according to research firm Identified, which based its conclusions on a study of 36 million Facebook profiles.

Columbia University's engineering school is proof that business schools aren't the only ones that can teach entrepreneurship. The school boasts more than 225 students in its entrepreneurship classes, and the field is its second-most-popular undergraduate minor. It has its own thriving business-plan competition and mentorship program, and recently announced a “living and learning center” for 30 engineering undergrads who are passionate about entrepreneurship.

“We've identified entrepreneurship as one of our key strategic areas,” said Feniosky Peña-Mora, dean of the school. “Over the past three years, it's gained a lot of traction and support, and we've dedicated a lot more resources to it.”

At universities around the nation, entrepreneurship programs are siloed within academic departments, noted Roger Ehrenberg, founder of IA Ventures. But Columbia and other schools have been working to integrate the programs, he adds.

“I think there should be better cross-pollination,” he said. “And I'm seeing that more and more.”