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New UC Berkeley program aims to fast-track path to Silicon Valley C-Suites

Students earn both engineering and business degrees in just four years.

By EMILY DERUY | ederuy@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group



UC Berkeley students take part in an entrepreneurial leadership class, part of a new management, entrepreneurship and technology program at Cal that will give students dual engineering and business degrees in just four years. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

BERKELEY — Even as a kid, Louie McConnell knew he wanted to come up with ideas — a device that can detect and visualize sirens for deaf people, for instance — and put them out into the world. But as the Los Altos Hills native made his way through Bellarmine College Preparatory in San Jose, the question loomed: How?

Through a combination of talent, smarts and sheer luck, McConnell, now 18, thinks he's found his answer in Management, Entrepreneurship and Technology (MET), a new program at UC Berkeley that lets a select group of students earn dual engineering and business degrees in just four years. Had he been even a year older, McConnell would have had to look further afield, toward the University of Pennsylvania, for a similar experience.

But over the last few years, officials at Cal's top-ranked College of Engineering and Haas School of Business, along with alumni based in Silicon Valley, began looking for a way to help students who didn't want to be pigeonholed into just technology or just business gain experience in both without having to spend eight or nine years in school.

"It's pretty revolutionary for Berkeley," said Marjorie DeGraca, MET's director. "We're giving them all the tools to fast-track their career."

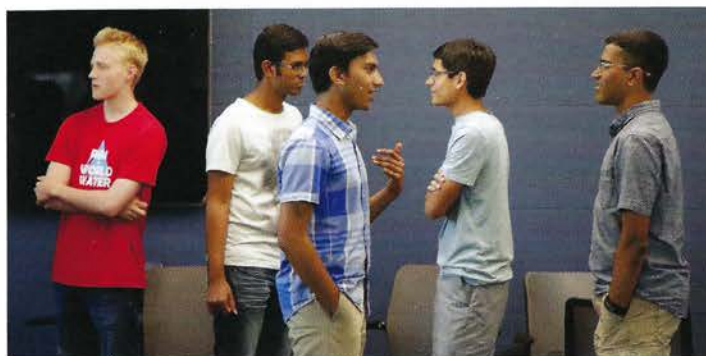
The idea appears to be resonating. In its first year, the program received some 2,500 applications for just 40 spots. Alumni and entrepreneurs have contributed more than \$15 million to support MET, meaning the program's entire budget is not school funded. Exclusive venture firm Kleiner Perkins has already promised an interview to any MET student interested in its prestigious fellows program.

"It's pretty straightforward," said Andy Chen, who leads the fellows program, when asked why his firm jumped in so quickly. "These are really high-potential individuals."

Take Arvind Sridhar, an 18-year-old MET freshman from Sunnyvale who turned down Princeton and Columbia to go to Berkeley. While he was still in high school, Sridhar created and ran an education nonprofit, founded an app development club, conducted research at Stanford University and picked up a laundry list of awards and scholarships.

Or Elliot Lu, an 18-year-old graphic design whiz from San Jose who runs an online business selling her artwork.

Engineering wasn't something the business-oriented Lu originally envisioned majoring in, but when she saw the option to do both pop up on the UC application, she thought it would



Students take part in a new management, entrepreneurship, and technology, class at the University of California, Berkeley, on Thursday, Aug. 31, 2017, in Berkeley, Calif. The class is part of a new program this fall that will give students dual engineering and business degrees in just four years. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

be an opportunity to pick up an array of practical technical skills and a chance to have the broader college experience she imagined. "It's about exploring," she said. "It's about doing new things you've never done before."

That reaction is not uncommon. A number of students in the inaugural class who didn't want to be tracked into one discipline have said they feel like the program was created just for them, said Michael Grimes, a 1987 graduate of Cal's engineering school who now heads up technology investment banking at Morgan Stanley and worked with the school to start the MET program.

In today's economy, the executives who are the most successful are always dual skilled, he said, rattling off names like General Motors' Mary Barra, who has both an electrical engineering degree and an M.B.A. But with technology evolving so quickly and permeating nearly every industry, young people need to acquire those skills faster than ever.

"It resonates immediately," Grimes said of conversations he's had with people in industry, such as Kleiner Perkins' Chen, about the program.

DeGraca, the director, agrees. "My phone rings off the hook from recruiters," she said.

"I think you're going to begin to see more engineering and business schools become closer and closer," Chen said.



Lecturer Marymoore Patterson, right, leads a new management, entrepreneurship, and technology, class at the University of California, Berkeley, on Thursday, Aug. 31, 2017, in Berkeley, Calif. The class is part of a new program this fall that will give students dual engineering and business degrees in just four years. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)



Lecturer Marymoore Patterson leads a new management, entrepreneurship, and technology, class at the University of California, Berkeley, on Thursday, Aug. 31, 2017, in Berkeley, Calif. The class is part of a new program this fall that will give students dual engineering and business degrees in just four years. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

Grimes, who has been deeply involved in the development of the MET program, hopes more schools look at Berkeley as a model and create their own versions of the concept. "The more the better," he said.

The coursework involved in completing the MET program is no picnic. Students are taking 150 units over four years, where the average student takes closer to 120. And while the college wants students to take advantage of all Berkeley has to offer, it would be difficult for students to fit in a long study abroad experience or, say, a demanding varsity sport.

Still, for the 40 members of the inaugural class, any potential sacrifice is worth it.

"I know I'm around a really smart group of people," said Adi Ganapathi, an 18-year-old from Palo Alto participating in the program. "I love it. It's tough."

UC Berkeley's newest program

Management, Entrepreneurship and Technology
B.S. in business + B.S. in engineering = 4 years total
Launched: Fall 2017

Students: 40 inaugural freshmen (Applicant pool: 2,500)



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