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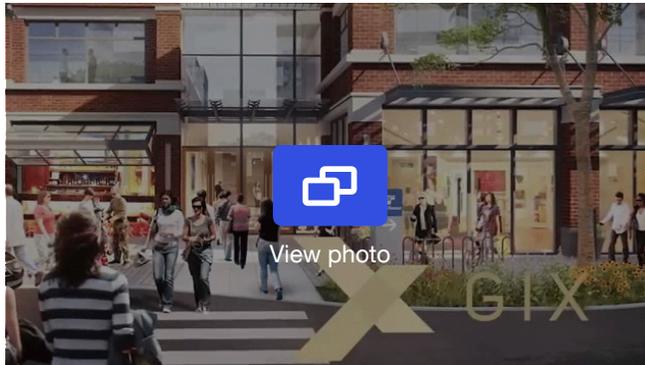


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Global Innovation Exchange: A new kind of investment in higher ed

YAHOO! FINANCE By **Emma Peters**
June 29, 2015 11:32 AM



Rendering of new GIX campus in Bellevue, Wash. (Image: GIX)

Last week, Microsoft (**MSFT**) announced its \$40 million contribution to the Global Innovation Exchange (GIX), “a new model of learning” that partners the tech behemoth with the University of Washington and the “MIT of China,” Tsinghua University.

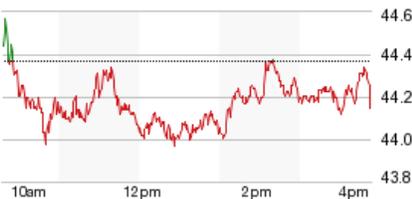
GIX, set to open next year, will be a graduate school with an aim to train students to solve real-world technology, design and

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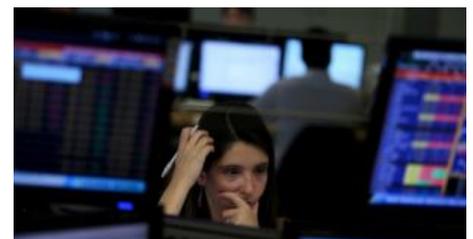


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entrepreneurship
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through “project-based learning.”

Students who finish the program will get a master’s degree in technology innovation and, it’s hoped, a crash course in startup culture. The goal is to help students learn how to navigate the tech world better than traditional academia does now.

The institute will be based in Bellevue, Wash., just east of Seattle and only 10 miles from the University of Washington’s campus.

Ann Kirschner, the dean of the Macaulay Honors College at CUNY and a [proponent of academic innovation](#), praised GIX as a “a giant step forward” in the largely static realm of higher education, explaining that it is the first institution of its kind in more than one way.

It’s the first time a Chinese academic institution has put down roots on U.S. soil. The inverse relationship, with American universities expanding their physical presence abroad— like NYU Abu Dhabi or Georgetown’s Qatar campus — is more common, says Vikram Jandhyala, vice provost for innovation at the University of Washington.

GIX is a good opportunity for American students to learn about the Chinese mindset, he said. While Americans are known for bold and risky choices in the tech industry, the Chinese have a reputation for taking a slower, more cautious approach, thinking more about the long term.

The Microsoft connection

The other innovative aspect of the GIX partnership is its corporate connection. Microsoft, based in Redmond, Wash., hopes to bolster the tech economy in the Pacific Northwest with its financial contribution. The greater Seattle area is also home to web retail giant Amazon.com ([AMZN](#)).

The ultimate goal is to create the same sort of symbiotic relationship that [Stanford has with Silicon Valley](#).

“Everybody has Stanford-envy, everybody says I want this to be just like Stanford and Silicon Valley,” Kirschner said.

Don’t expect to see this type of feeder program in Seattle anytime soon though. The inaugural 2016 GIX class is expected to have just 30 students. Though they hope to expand to a class of 3,000 by 2025, Kirschner said that pace is more on par with the academic rate of change than that of the tech world.

The GIX model is fairly similar to that of Cornell Tech, an applied sciences graduate institute in New York City that partners



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Cornell University and the Technion–Israel Institute of Technology. Bloomberg Philanthropies [announced this month](#) that it's giving \$100 million to build a new campus for the institute (which is currently housed in Google's New York office). Jandhyala said that Cornell Tech and GIX have a lot to learn from each other.

Potential challenges

Any new model for higher education has its own set of challenges, of course. The GIX program will put University of Washington and Tsinghua University students in the same classrooms to collaborate on the same projects that have real-world applications. As shown time and again, whose-idea-was-it lawsuits have plagued Silicon Valley and the tech scene for a while. [Facebook](#) (more famously) and [Snapchat](#) (more recently) – both created by college students at the time of their founding – have been entangled in major lawsuits disputing intellectual property.

Jandhyala said that GIX is discussing ways to prepare for these sort of intellectual property conflicts, though it's still unclear what exactly the school's strategy will be on this front.

To some, the choice of a Chinese partner for a technology endeavor may be troubling, especially in light of the recent federal employee data breach, for which [China has been accused](#) of carrying out.

Kirschner acknowledged this, saying, “You’re going to have people who call it un-American, asking, ‘why are we selling out to the people who hack our most precious databases?’”

Finally, there’s the complication of melding three institutions into one:

“You have two universities with very different ideas about governance, intellectual property, academic freedom,” said Kirschner. “Now you throw in a corporate partnership, again, with very different ideas, and it gets challenging.”

According to Jandhyala, in order to succeed, GIX will have to practice just what they preach—innovation.

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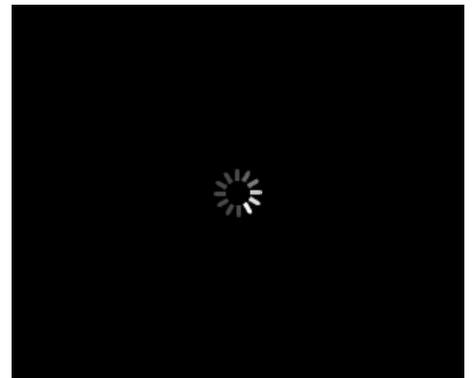


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