Piano di formazione
Progetto "Encouraging University Entrepreneurship: the role of proactive policies"

Research Project (Progetto di ricerca)

The research position (assegno di ricerca) is part of a project entitled “Encouraging Entrepreneurship by Graduate Students: the role of proactive policies”, funded by NESTA, an Innovation Foundation of the United Kingdom, through the Innovation Growth Lab Program.

The objectives of the research project undertaken by the researcher (assegnista di ricerca) can be summarized as it follows:

1. Analyze the optimal design and implementation of a set of proactive policies promoted by University Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) on the engagement of graduate students in an array of activities linked to entrepreneurship and commercialisation. Such policies include scouting activities, proof-of-concept programs, acceleration programs, the activation of fab-labs. The objective is to identify best practices in the design and implementation of such policies, and understand their impact on entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors of graduate students.

2. Assess of the impact of scouting activities implemented by the Knowledge Transfer Office of the University of Bologna on a set of graduate students (including Master and PhD students) of the University, using the Randomised Controlled Trial methodology. Master and PhD Students of the University of Bologna will be randomly assigned into two groups: a group receiving direct (face-to-face) scouting visits and advise on commercialisation by the university TTO staff; a control group not receiving any kind of treatment. The Randomised Controlled Trial will assess the impact of receiving proactive and direct support by the University TTO staff on entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors, and subsequent actual involvement in entrepreneurship-related activities, such as participation in acceleration programs, disclosure of new inventions, patenting activity and spinoff formation.

Activity plan (piano di attività)

The research program for the researcher will be structured in the following phases:

1. Literature review on effective policies in support of entrepreneurship by graduate students and on the implementation of the Randomised Controlled Trial approach for impact assessment — In this phase the researcher will perform a critical review of the existing literature on the effective policies, implemented by Universities and their TTOs, in support of entrepreneurship activity by graduate students, in order to highlight major lessons learnt so far and identify existing research gaps. He/she will also analyze the literature on the implementation of Randomised Controlled Trials, in order to identify the key elements to implement such approach.

2. RC Trial Preparation. In this phase, the researchers will collect details about the individuals potentially to be included in the study (e.g., demographics, contact details) and specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring that they are feasible given the available population. The researcher, in collaboration with the research team, will develop the trial protocol, and plan the implementation and share it with the implementation partner (KTO of Unibo). The
data regarding the outcomes of the study will be collected in two rounds. The baseline measures of the outcomes will be collected in occasion of the trial preparation in occasion of the selection of the eligible sample. The final outcome measurement will be collected after the implementation of the treatment (scouting activity). The outcome measures will be based on subjective and objective data. Subjective data will be collected through individual questionnaires administered to students through on-line tools (e.g., Qualtrics). Subjective measures refer to entrepreneurial intentions and their cognitive antecedents (i.e., entrepreneurial attitudes and feasibility) and to entrepreneurial behaviors. Objective measures refer to the actual participation in entrepreneurial and innovation activities, such as the participation to incubation/acceleration programs, the creation of spinoffs or start-ups, or patenting. Additional data collection from secondary sources will be implemented in order to construct a set of variables at the level of Departments of the University of Bologna, in which graduate students operate (such as the share of Faculty actually engaging in entrepreneurial activities, or the number of spinoff/startups created by Faculty and students of the Department). This will be important in order to assess the influence of contextual factors in affecting the effectiveness of scouting activities.

3. **RC Trial Implementation.** In this phase, a the selection and collection of informed consent of participant individuals will be carried out. Participants will fill out a questionnaire aimed at collecting relevant information about (a) outcome; (b) eligibility criteria; and (c) other variables deemed important as controls.

4. **Supervision of the Implementation of treatment.** The researcher will interact with the KTO of the University of Bologna, that will be responsible for the implementation of the treatment (scouting activities towards graduate students attending courses at the University of Bologna).

5. **Outcome data collection:** The researchers will implement the administration of the final survey to the participants and the collection of outcome measures.

6. **Analysis.** During this phase of the training program, the post-doc researcher will be involved in analyzing and elaborating the data collected in the previous phases.

7. **Reporting and Dissemination.** In this phase, the researcher will complete, in collaboration with the research team, on policy-oriented report and at least one working paper, presenting the main scientific findings of the project. He/she will also collaborate in the organization of a final dissemination workshop for the IGL Project.