

Not your typical tech school: UW, Chinese university partner on Bellevue program

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Rendering of new GIX building at UW. (NBBJ)

A new graduate institute in technology, a partnership with the University of Washington and one of the leading universities in China, will open in September.



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This fall, the University of Washington will launch an ambitious new type of international education when it opens the Global Innovation Exchange, a graduate institute for technology based in Bellevue.

GIX, as it's known, is a partnership between the UW and Tsinghua University, one of China's top tech schools. It represents the first time a Chinese university has ever had a presence on U.S. soil.

Graduates of the institute will be steeped in the culture of entrepreneurship, technology and international cooperation, and their focus will be working in teams to tackle some of the big problems faced by industry and society as a whole.

“This is not a degree in computer science, or in chemical engineering, or in business — it really has a lot of different components,” said UW President Ana Mari Cauce in an interview last week.

Cauce said the degree is designed to break boundaries between academic disciplines, and also involve business and industry partners. [The plan to build GIX was announced in June 2015](#) by Gov. Jay Inslee and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, accompanied by Cauce and Tsinghua President Qiu Yong.

In September, all four will come together again to open the new building housing the program in Bellevue’s Spring District.

Microsoft donated \$40 million toward construction, and no state money is involved. “This really is a partnership that includes industry,” Cauce said.

Forty-four students, half from China, will make up the inaugural class. Students are also coming from other countries around the globe, including Russia, India and Estonia. Faculty members will do teaching exchanges between the two universities, as well.

Earlier this summer, Cauce took her second trip to Beijing to meet with Tsinghua leaders. While she was there, the university presented her with an honorary degree.

When the program was first announced, Cauce expected to add more partner universities in short order, but she said that’s taking more time than expected because the relationships between institutions are complex. “I think we’ll be making some announcements soon,” she said.

GIX will offer two types of degrees: A 15-month master of science in technology innovation (MTSI), and a 21-month dual degree that combines the MTSI degree with a master of engineering in data science and information technology from Tsinghua. The dual degree requires students to spend the last six months studying in Beijing.

During the MTSI program, students will study design thinking, hardware and software development, and entrepreneurship. They’ll do projects in teams, and develop those projects to the point that they could be launched as a new startup venture, or solve a problem for an existing business or a nonprofit.

Students will become the sole owners of any intellectual property they create, and take their ideas with them after graduation.

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