The culture of innovation is alive and well at Morgan State University, says its president.

When I became president at Morgan State University over five years ago, I indicated that one of our goals should be to produce the next wave of leaders who are innovators in America, given Morgan's impressive statewide and national standing in not only engineering and science-based disciplines but also in the fine and performing arts, humanities and in what I call liberal learning. Although many of the elements were in place, they seemed to be in silos. Today, I could not be more pleased with what I am seeing springing forth and bubbling up around campus. Academic departments are working together to promote more transdisciplinary studies, students are more involved in laboratory research with their professors, and maker-spaces and lounges that promote students doing "academic socializing" are being configured on campus, thanks to investments like a recent $23 million cooperative agreement from the National Institutes of Health and other important grants from NASA, the National Science Foundation, Department of Defense and the state of Maryland, to name a few.

Two years ago, a group of Morgan students and administrators were selected to attend a special seminar at Stanford to begin to understand how innovation can take root among students on a campus. I, too, made that trip to Silicon Valley under an initiative sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities to look at the same thing. A visit to the Facebook campus and conversation with Sheryl Sandberg, its chief operating officer, revealed a lot to me about establishing an environment that encourages individuals to really think out-of-the box and embrace the importance of risk that can lead to reward. It was quite a learning experience.

A couple of Morgan students were so moved by what they saw that they became National University Innovation Fellows and returned to Morgan hell-bent on infusing some of that Stanford and Silicon-Valley culture into our campus fabric. They organized the Morgan Student Innovation Club and sponsored several hackathons in addition to a very creative symposium titled, "Be the Hustle, Not a Part of It," which, interestingly enough, was spotlighted on Stanford's website.
Our students have embraced a culture of innovation, and their works have begun to impact national and global initiatives. Last month, four of Morgan's students won a Black Enterprise (BE Smart)TechConneXt Summit Hackathon in Silicon Valley, sponsored by Capital One. The summit included student teams from five universities, including Howard University and Spelman College. Morgan's team of four members was composed of computer science, mathematics and engineering majors. The competition involved their being given an assignment to develop a financial app for budgeting, saving or making purchases on a mobile device in real time.

Through their transdisciplinary creativity and education, Morgan students developed a very innovative app, called "Oculus," which is designed to help college students avoid debt. The app has many features, including spending alerts to help students determine if and when one is on track with meeting budgeting goals. These four Morgan students were selected from a large pool of other competitive Morgan students who are equally prepared to be innovators and entrepreneurs. Several of them are being considered for employment in Silicon Valley.

On another front, a Morgan MBA alumna has been appointed by Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg to lead Facebook Africa. Facebook Africa is designed to grow Facebook throughout the African continent. An accomplishment such as this one sends the message to students on campus that they, too, can lead the world through their innovative ideas and willingness to take risks in their quest in becoming innovative entrepreneurs. I often communicate to our students that I do not want them to be satisfied with being consumers, but I want to purchase their products in the marketplace that are made by them. Early indication is that our students are taking this challenge very seriously.

Morgan's administration does not overlook the fact that the newly constructed Center for the Built Environment and Infrastructure Studies (CBEIS), coupled with the recently-completed School of Business building, contributes to the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship on campus. Such visible capital additions to the campus contribute to an atmosphere that promotes positive engagement and the overall spirit of progress.

The culture of innovation is alive and well at Morgan, and our students are embracing these opportunities and challenges by responding well to our mission of growing the future, leading the world.

*David Wilson is president of Morgan State University. His email address is: david.wilson@morgan.edu.*