It’s Thursday night in New York City, and you and your classmates are heading out to a product evaluation session at Quirky, a New York City startup that helps inventors get promising new widgets produced, to market, and on the shelves. You’ll hear inventors pitch their products to the Quirky team, listen to the ensuing discussion, and since it’s open mike, you just might raise a few points yourself. Think of it as “American Idol” for inventions.

Tomorrow, your mind filled with ideas investigated and appraised during three-week, intensive courses in big data and digital marketing, you and your teammates — who include master’s students in computer science and connective media — will meet with executive staff at a New York media company to learn about how they are struggling with these issues. Are they using big data to change the way they’re delivering messages to customers? What digital marketing strategies have taken off and what’s not working for them?

Between classes and company visits and team projects work, you grab every hour you can to refine your pitch for your own business concept, working to improve the concept and sharpen your message so that when you present it again next week, it will be clear you’ve learned how to respond to and incorporate feedback — and not just from classmates, but from the potential users, too.

This is just a glimpse of what life will be like for students enrolled in Johnson’s new One-year MBA at Cornell Tech — an MBA immersed in New York City’s vibrant tech ecosystem that fuses business, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship in a fast-paced, hands-on learning environment. It is designed for those with solid experience and proven success within tech companies or in tech initiatives in traditional companies who aim to become leaders in the digital economy.

“In order to transform businesses and enable them to compete in this digital age, we need business professionals who have deep knowledge of technology and who are comfortable working with technology specialists,” says Soumitra Dutta, Anne and Elmer Lindseth Dean at Johnson. “We also need technology specialists who have a better sense of business. That’s why the MBA at Cornell Tech focuses on integrating the computer science and engineering programs and the business curriculum in a very deep manner.”

Johnson’s MBA at Cornell Tech reflects the school’s recognition of the relentless evolution of technology in the digital economy and its commitment to global perspectives, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The program incorporates and combines the strength of Cornell’s top-ranked programs in business, computing, and engineering to produce leaders who have a deep understanding of how technology is changing the way business works, leaders who are ready to start innovative businesses and transform organizations.

“A CAMPUS FOCUSED ON TECHNOLOGY + ECONOMIC IMPACT

While fully aware that offering an MBA on a tech campus was unprecedented, the founders of Cornell Tech viewed a focus on business as being integral to its very fabric and purpose. “As we envisioned Cornell Tech right from the beginning, it wasn’t just about technology; it was about technology and business and economic impact,” says Daniel Huttenlocher, founding dean and vice provost of Cornell Tech. “The role of the MBA is to complement the technical programs.”

The structure and curriculum for this unique MBA was born of interviews with hundreds of leaders who are successfully navigating the digital economy. “We went out and talked to alumni, to recruiters, to people involved in the digital economy, and asked them: ‘Where are the holes? What skills do you need in new employees that aren’t being provided today?’” says Doug Stayman, associate dean for MBA programs. “We wanted to design the curriculum to meet those needs. We were given this wonderful opportunity to really reimagine business education, and we set out to create something new and different and innovative, and be deliberate about it.”

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In many ways, Cornell Tech itself is a startup — and its culture reflects that.

Johnson’s role and purpose at Cornell Tech is not solely to develop MBAs who understand technology at a deep level and who can work more effectively with technology people, notes Stayman. It’s also to develop technical people who understand business better and know how to work with MBAs better. “In the digital economy, increasingly, the interactivity of technology and business brings about change faster.

Leaders need to master both the technology and the business sides in a deeper way.

“You can’t be an engineer who doesn’t have enough business knowledge to know what to test,” he continues. “You can’t be a business person who doesn’t have enough technical knowledge to go out and do it. They’re more integrated. And that’s what this entire campus is
about: Technical people who understand business and business people who understand technology.”

/// AN INTEGRATED, MODULAR STRUCTURE
In reimagining business education for the MBA at Cornell Tech, Dutta, Stayman, and other Johnson faculty members involved in developing the curriculum believed that the best way to prepare leaders for the real world of digital transformation would be to replicate the multidisciplinary culture of that world, and they had an ideal opportunity to do just that given the disciplinary diversity of Cornell Tech engineering and business students — both in the classroom and in projects teams.

“The successful transformation of a business requires people from different disciplines to come together to think about implications in a holistic manner in order to implement change,” says Dutta. “We want to provide the same kind of environment for students; that’s why our program includes courses in which computer science, engineering, and business school students work together. We’re trying to prepare them for this real-life challenge by experiencing it in the program itself.”

In addition to the curriculum specific to students’ distinct disciplines, 30 to 40 percent of the Cornell Tech curriculum will be shared by students across programs: MBAs and graduate students in computer science will take courses and engage as teams in company and startup projects requiring both technology and business solutions and expertise.

In the fall, for example, students enrolled in the MBA and technical master’s programs at Cornell Tech will start out with a two-week course, Intensive Entrepreneurial Experience (IEE or IE2), developed and led by Professor Wes Sine, faculty director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Institute and professor of management and organizations.

At the same time, small teams of MBA and technical students will embark together on semester-long enterprise projects in which they’ll conceptualize the idea for a startup and be exposed to a variety of relevant applied areas, from design to legal to financing.

In the spring, students will have the option to either work together on a semester-long startup project or do another company project. “Teams of students who are equally passionate and motivated to build a breakthrough technology come together and organically form their own teams to build products,” says Aaron Holiday, MBA ’12, managing entrepreneurial officer at Cornell Tech. “By the end of the semester, those who choose a startup project will become co-founders of software or tech companies.”

“We want every student at Cornell Tech to be involved in how the digital revolution is changing existing companies, experience innovation and entrepreneurial activity within companies — but also be aware of the unique opportunities and challenges that go with it,” says Stayman. The courses themselves are modular in structure, delivered in short, intense bursts: The typical module of two courses will be three to four weeks long. “We’re trying to deliver more focused learning,” says Stayman. “We think it will be effective for students to take two or three connected courses at a time. That way, they can really get to know the faculty and immerse themselves in the material, and the faculty are also immersed and get to know the students.”

The flexibility of the modular structure facilitates students’ engagement in New York City’s tech ecosystem and business climate, says Stayman. “For example, when they’re taking the Digital Marketing course, they can go visit media and advertising companies, talk with marketing executives, and say: ‘This is what we’re learning, how does that play out in what you’re doing? How do you use these concepts?’”

/// LEARN, APPLY, + REFLECT
Projects and practicums that dovetail with course material are also hallmarks of the Cornell Tech MBA. “In a traditional MBA education, classes and projects are separate,” says Steven Gal, visiting associate professor of clinical entrepreneurship at Johnson and chair of the Entrepreneurship@Cornell Advisory Council. “At Cornell Tech, classes and projects are integrated, there’s a constant back-and-forth. Companies are on campus with you, and students are in company offices; it’s fluid, as it is in the digital economy. We can do it because we will be immersed in the New York City tech and entrepreneurial ecosystem.”

“We’re very dedicated to learn, apply, and reflect,” adds Stayman. “So we need that application time in New York. By having a flexible, modular schedule, we can have intense learning but then go and visit companies, or do projects, have symposia — different activities.” Students internalize what they learn because they go out and apply it right away, or visit companies to see how it’s being applied.

It takes careful planning to make sure that the joinery connecting projects, practicums, and company visits is well crafted. So in addition
Jonah Berger, visiting professor of marketing at Johnson and author of Contagious: Why Things Catch On, will teach a course based on his book in Johnson’s One-year MBA at Cornell Tech and in Cornell Executive MBA in Metro NY beginning summer 2014. Students will learn how six basic principles drive products and services to become contagious, from consumer products and policy initiatives to workplace rumors and YouTube videos. The course will feature project-based learning using real-life clients ranging from tech startups, local nonprofits, and major corporations to the corner coffee shop.

The James G. Campbell Associate Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Berger has published dozens of articles in top-tier academic journals, and popular accounts of his work have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Science, Harvard Business Review, Wired, BusinessWeek, and Fast Company. His research has also been featured in The New York Times Magazine’s annual “Year in Ideas” issue. Berger has been recognized with awards for both scholarship and teaching, including being named Wharton’s “Iron Prof.”

**Q.** What made you decide to join the faculty as a visiting professor at Johnson?

**Berger:** The intersection of technology and business is an exciting, emerging area. Big data, social media, wearable devices; these things are changing the way companies operate. There are so many new developments, and Cornell Tech sits right at the intersection of them.

**Q.** If you could name one characteristic of the program that drew you to join the faculty at Cornell Tech, what would it be?

**Berger:** The interdisciplinary nature. The combination of faculty, topics, and insights mean MBAs here are going to learn things that aren’t taught anywhere else.

**Q.** What aspects of teaching in Johnson’s Executive MBA program in Palisades appeal to you?

**Berger:** Executives are fun to teach because they’re so ready to learn. They’ve spent enough time in business to know what they don’t know, and they come to class ready to engage with the material.

**Q.** What can you tell me about how you will be teaching your course, Contagious?

**Berger:** Project-based learning is a big part of my Contagious course. Students will learn why things catch on and then get the chance to apply what they’ve learned to real clients. It’s one thing to hear about a concept; it’s another to get the experience of really making it work. It’s a great way to learn.

**Q.** In what ways will your course, Contagious, help graduates to become leaders in the digital economy?

**Berger:** Being a leader in the digital economy requires understanding two often disparate areas: business and technology. Contagious will address both: how technology works, and how to help new technologies succeed by understanding consumer behavior.

**AIMING FOR DEEP, STRATEGIC UNDERSTANDING**

The ideal graduate of the MBA at Cornell Tech will be prepared to understand the technological landscape, understand how to work with technologists, and understand how to use what they know about how technology functions to solve business problems. “Not just minor business problems,” notes Stayman. “Technological issues are becoming strategic in business; it’s not just about IT. Investment banks and retail companies are making huge investments in technology, and its importance to company strategy is increasing. So the ability to really understand the business issues, understand the technology deeply enough, work with sophisticated technologists to figure out solutions and strategies moving forward — that’s where we want our graduates to be.”

To Pass, whose responsibilities as chief entrepreneurial officer include campus-wide, cross-program projects and activities, the MBA program will have a team of faculty and staff who will serve as “journey guides” (because students are on a one-year journey) who makes sure students’ experiences are all linked together.

“New York City is such a great environment; the number of companies and broad range of industries to draw on is just fantastic,” says Stayman. “The journey team will work with faculty and students and companies to match coursework with the right people and the right companies, whether those companies come to campus to talk with the students or students go out to visit and work with companies on their turf. They will meet with students and faculty regularly to discuss where we are in the curriculum, where we’ve been, and where we’re going.”
ENRICHING JOHNSON’S RESIDENTIAL + EXECUTIVE PROGRAMS

Johnson’s intense focus on the digital economy for the MBA at Cornell Tech will enrich and cross-pollinate the school’s MBA programs in Ithaca as well as both Executive MBA programs. New faculty with new areas of expertise, faculty who will teach not only at Cornell Tech but also in other Johnson programs, are adding to the intellectual breadth and depth of the faculty. For example, Jonah Berger, who is joining Johnson as a visiting professor of marketing, will teach the course based on his book, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, both at Cornell Tech and in Palisades to Executive MBAs.

New courses developed for Cornell Tech, including Using Big Data and Business Models for the Digital Economy, are on the docket to bring back to Ithaca and may well influence curriculum for executive programs, too. During their first semester over the summer in Ithaca, students enrolled in the One-year MBA at Cornell Tech will take the core side-by-side with students enrolled in the One-year MBA at Ithaca. After Cornell Tech students move to New York in the fall, Johnson’s home and strong footing in the city will only work to all students’ advantage. Students in Ithaca, for example, will have opportunities to go to Cornell Tech to interact with students in New York City.

“The MBA at Cornell Tech is additive for Cornell in Ithaca,” says Rhett Weiss, executive director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Institute, who has been teaching graduate engineering students at Cornell Tech since the first week of classes there in January 2013. “It connects greater Cornell University to a global city, with a vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystem, in ways we otherwise physically cannot do from Ithaca. There’s so much density of activity in New York City, it’s such an interesting and diverse hub of activity, having Cornell Tech gives us a meaningful presence in a place that is shaping where the world is headed with the digital economy and what happens when tech and business collide.”

MEET V1

The inaugural class for the One-year MBA at Cornell Tech includes 41 students. Their average age is 28, thirteen are women, and they hail from eight countries, including the U.S., Italy, Mexico, Ecuador, Greece, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

But as Admissions Director Christine Sneva is quick to point out, these statistics do not come close to telling the full story. Instead, she speaks of them as hybrids.

In recruiting this class, Sneva and her team set out to find people who were not only tech-savvy and entrepreneurial, but who also showed a creative streak, who had interesting backgrounds in a variety of areas, including art and fashion, and who looked at innovation in a different way. And to her delight, candidates who were passionate and knowledgeable about this new MBA came forward — people who knew they had unique qualities to bring to the program and who wanted to be a part of it – to be v1.

“We met very bright and interesting people who have always done things a little differently,” says Sneva. “We have been inspired by their stories and as a result, we created a new measure for this program. Instead of numbers, we have grouped this new cohort into pods of artists, pioneers, builders, founders, visionaries, connectors, and innovators. As a group, they represent great diversity in their backgrounds, experience, and intellectual strengths.”

They’re also ahead of the curve in terms of what’s new and different on the Web. “These students understand how to navigate the digital world and find entrepreneurial spaces that keep them deeply connected to tech in a sophisticated way,” says Sneva.

LINK TO VIDEO IN CORNELL ENTERPRISE ONLINE
www2.johnson.cornell.edu/alumni/enterprise
Meet the Johnson MBA at Cornell NYC Tech Inaugural Class

The inaugural class for the One-year MBA at Cornell Tech