

Remarks on University-Industry Alliances

Constance Lee Menefee/1999

UNIVERSITIES COULD BECOME MORE PROACTIVE

U.S. industry is reducing long-term research in favor of short-term, more immediate return R&D, and relying more and more on cooperative arrangements to develop, monitor and acquire technology. Universities, which traditionally receive 80 percent of their R&D funding from the federal government and industry, are well-placed to assume a leadership role in designing an improved, fast-paced technological innovation mechanism for meshing education with science discovery, technology development and transfer.

Existing relationships and technology transfer entities could serve as the basis for crafting alliances within each university community that identify common goals. Cataloging expert resources within the business, academic and public sectors, and making this information available through a dynamic website allows interested parties transparent access to available talent.

The key to success is formalizing a process that allows coordination of money and people throughout the technology development and transfer activities.

CHECKLIST: WHEN INDUSTRIES AND UNIVERSITIES LOOK AT EACH OTHER

The most frequent cause of problems in an industry-university relationship arises from companies not clearly understanding and articulating their own priorities. Objectives can range from contractual research, partnerships, recruiting, or even corporate philanthropy. Within each kind of relationship, different priorities arise.

Universities likewise struggle with their real objectives. In the less-profit driven academic environment, the role of money and licensing issues can be underplayed or not readily acknowledged.

Due diligence on the part of both companies and universities can prevent many misunderstandings.

A few of the questions that companies might want answered:

- Is there a knowledgeable project/relationship solicitation group prepared to talk specifics and genuinely interested in developing relationships with private sector organizations or companies?

- Does the university have an intellectual property rights policy that is clear and administered smoothly and consistently?
- Does this policy have a realistic appreciation for industry requirements; are overhead charges reasonable?
- Is the decision-making process prompt?
- What is the quality of the principal investigator, the graduate students and other support personnel?
- Are the university's interests truly aligned with those of the company?

A few of the questions that universities might want answered:

- How much time and effort does the company have to invest in defining and refining the project?
- How responsive is the company to the needs of graduate students involved in the research?
- How strong is the existing relationship with the company and individual faculty members?
- How would authorship of papers and studies, and royalties and licensing agreements be handled?
- How often will the firm call or visit or interact with the university?
- Would firm turnover or major changes in corporate policy impact the project? How?

SOURCES:

University-Based Virtual Alliances Could Spur Technological Innovation. John P. Dismukes and Ruzica A. Petkovic. *Research-Technology Management*, November-December 1997.

Evaluating Industry/University Research Linkages, James B. Burnham. *Research-Technology Management*. January-February 1997.