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## HIGHER EDUCATION

### Universities seek to capitalize on research

**Florida's research universities gathered to figure out how to turn today's promising research into tomorrow's financial blockbuster.**

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In her booth at the Florida Tech Transfer Conference, Lindsay Newell of the University of Central Florida talks with CEO John W. Furry of Masscal Scientific Instruments.

Proteins that counteract deadly nerve gas. Memory cubes that store data in three dimensions. Antibiotics that don't spawn drug-resistant strains of bacteria and viruses.

These are some of the ideas trapped in Florida's research universities. Whether they emerge as commercial blockbusters depends as much on universities' marketing savvy as their researchers' brain power.

How Florida might be more effective at spinning lab work into money-making products was at the core of the Fourth Annual Florida Tech Transfer Conference, held at the Doral Golf Resort and Spa this week.

While Florida has top-notch research, state schools are competing against more than 150 institutions nationwide, said Gary Margules, the assistant provost at the University of Miami's Office of Technology Transfer.

A major pharmaceutical company, for example, might be swamped with "10,000 ideas a year" for new drugs from university labs, he said. ``The supply-demand ratio is out of balance."

The fact that Florida's schools are relatively young and spread across the state -- rather than clustered amid high-tech companies as they are in California and Massachusetts -- also stymies investors' ability to scout out promising leads, officials said. As a result, while Florida is the fourth most-populous state, it ranks 15th in capturing venture capital funding.

Even so, demand for Florida's ideas is on the rise. In 2006 the state's 13 top research universities made \$47 million off 337 licensed products -- up from 321 licenses worth \$43 million in 2005, says a survey coordinated by the technology transfer office at Florida State University. Considering there are some 30,000 such licenses active nationwide, Florida's take is relatively small.

Lawmakers have some ideas of their own. Florida's Legislature recently passed a bill to set aside \$35 million for seed and investment capital for high-tech businesses and to build the Institute for the Commercialization of Public Research.

The institute, which would be based in South Florida, would showcase the best research from all over the state, said Rep. Gayle Harrel, R-Stuart, who spoke at the conference.

Susan Webster, executive director of intellectual property management and resource development at Florida International University, said such a center would go a long way to giving FIU's research more exposure. FIU faculty have been working on stroke medication and a 3-D Magnetic Memory Device, which can store 100 terabytes of data per square inch.

But what the university needs is "gap funding" that would help get these ideas ready for market, she said.

"We have innovative faculty members and lots of good ideas, but we need the monetary piece to take it to the next level," she said. "Getting that capital is the biggest challenge -- and everybody wants that capital."

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