43 inventions and three new companies generated $3.4 million in income in 2005, up from $1.92 million

The University of Oregon booked another year of record returns from inventions and technology spinoffs, boosting revenue by 77 percent last year.

The $3.4 million in income from technology licencing was a substantial jump from the $1.92 million earned in 2004 and marked the 10th year in a row the UO set a record. UO research produced 43 new inventions and three new spinoff companies in 2005.

Don Gerhart, director of technology transfer for the UO, said it wasn't any single invention that pushed the numbers up.

"We're continuing to see growth here in all sectors," he said. "One thing that really stands out for me is just how broad in nature the expansion is."

The big jump came in spite of only a small increase in overall research spending. The UO's research budget was $86 million last year, up from $85.4 million the year before.

Universities earn money by patenting new inventions and licensing the use of the technology to existing private companies or new ones created to take advantage of the research. Most of the money is plowed back into research by distributing it back to faculty inventors and laboratories.

Gerhart said the UO is seeing increased revenue both from technology licensed and developed several years ago that is now beginning to mature and from new inventions just getting off the ground. UO licenses run the gamut from educational software developed by researchers in the College of Education to high-tech bioscience spinoffs such as MitoScience, which produces monoclonal antibodies used to research the cause of diseases.

Although the UO is in the bottom third of major research universities in terms of its research budget, its performance on technology transfer has compared with much larger programs. Between 1996 and 2000, the UO's return of 4 cents per dollar of research investment matched that of Caltech, which had the 13th largest research budget in the nation, Gerhart said.

During that same period, the UO's rate of 1.9 start-up companies for every $100,000 of research spending was ranked 25th out of 117 top research universities.

Oregon State University has not yet posted its technology transfer figures for 2005. In 2004, it had a research budget of $170 million and licensing income of $1.47 million.

Oregon Health and Science University had a 2004 research budget of $235.5 million and licensing income of $787,000, according to figures compiled by the Association of University Technology Managers.

Gerhart said the UO compares favorably against schools with larger budgets despite not having a medical or engineering school, two big generators of new technology. The UO also doesn't have a blockbuster invention like Florida State University, which in 2004 earned $14.3 million in technology returns thanks in large part to a patent on a method to synthesize the cancer-fighting drug taxol, which formerly had to be extracted from the needles of the Pacific yew tree.

But Gerhart said it's probably just a matter of time before UO researchers score their own technology winner. "We don't have a home run like that, but what we do have is an approach of trying to win the game with speed and 50 bunt singles," he said. "I think the day will come when the institution will end up with the proverbial grand slam home run, but that day hasn't arrived yet."
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