

Gary Ostrander: University research boosts our economy

*Written by Gary K. Ostrander My View
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As Florida and the rest of the nation emerge from an extended period of economic stress, it is noteworthy that there is an economic engine in Florida that has been quietly chugging along, to the tune of more than \$1.6 billion each year, and is poised to do even more for the state in the future.

The majority of the faculty at Florida's public universities have tripartite job descriptions that include teaching, research and service. For many, the research requirement of their position means competing for and receiving outside research grants to fund their efforts. These funds are used to support student and staff salaries, buy equipment and supplies and, in a very entrepreneurial fashion, provide a portion of their own salaries.

Last year, these faculty researchers generated over \$1.6 billion in research grants and contracts from government and private entities. The vast majority of these funds cycled through the Florida economy in the form of salaries and locally purchased goods and services. The impact of these dollars is significant every single year and has a multiplier effect as the money moves through our economy.

The specific research outcomes of these faculty efforts are also significantly impacting the quality of our lives. For example, brain scientists are developing new methods for treatment of stroke and concussions, agriculture scientists are optimizing methods for enhanced yields of crops vital to our economy, and engineers continue to develop new technologies to allow for the development and use of alternative energy sources. These are but a few of the innovations happening on our campuses every day.

Another way our faculty research activities directly impact the lives of Floridians is through the transformation of research into products for the marketplace. This has included an array of products ranging from the cancer-fighting drug Taxol to the sports drink Gatorade. Florida's public universities routinely secure patents on faculty discoveries such as these. However, the patents themselves confer no benefit to society or added income to the university. The added value occurs only if the discovery they protect can be licensed. True success is measured by the ability of the licensed product to provide benefits to the public (such as lives saved), help companies increase productivity and generate more revenue, and produce a financial return through licensing income. In other words, patents offer the hope of value, while licensing actually provides value in measurable ways.

When it comes to licensing income, as opposed to research grants, Florida's public universities generated more than a billion dollars in revenue over the last two decades (see <http://www.research.fsu.edu/techtransfer/aggregate.html> for a partial listing). This number is impressive by itself, but it becomes even more remarkable when you consider, similar to research grants, that these dollars lead to more jobs and more money circulating through our economy. Add in the fact that each university is actively supporting a multitude of promising research projects that can lead to even more licensing income, and the picture of a strong, sustainable economic contributor becomes even more clear.

The teaching responsibilities of our public universities will always be the top priority. But together, teaching and research are kindred souls that help fuel greatness in one another. After all, our best instructors are those who are creating new knowledge through their research or other creative activity, while teaching the next generation of leaders, innovators and workers.

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