

Should patent and commercialization activities by faculty count toward tenure and promotion?

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Increasingly, institutions of higher learning are including faculty member patents and commercialization activities in their calculus for offering tenure and promotion. However, a report published in Volume 13 Number 3 of [*Technology and Innovation, Proceedings of the National Academy of Inventors*](#) finds that 75 percent of institutions surveyed do not include patent and commercialization considerations in their tenure and promotion criteria.

"Texas A&M University created quite a stir in May 2006 when it added commercialization considerations as a sixth factor to be taken into account when faculty members are evaluated for tenure," said report co-author Dr. Paul R. Sanberg, senior associate vice president for research and innovation at the University of South Florida and president of the [National Academy of Inventors](#) (NAI). "Surprisingly, their lead has not been followed by other major institutions."

According to Sanberg and co-authors Ginger A. Johnson (*Technology and [Innovation](#)*) and Dr. Ashley J. Stevens, former senior research associate at the Boston University School of Management and past president of the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM), there are a number of good arguments for adding faculty member patents and commercialization activities to the tenure and promotion criteria.

"Adding patents and commercialization to the existing tenure and promotion criteria will inspire tenure-track professors to engage in innovative activities earlier in their careers," said Stevens. "Also, encouraging the creative, productive and innovative ideas of young professors will increase their universities' research dollars."

The authors point out that in 2009 universities earned about \$1.8 billion in royalties from academic inventions, an increase over \$1.6 billion in 2008 and \$1.3 billion in 2007.

According to Sanberg and Stevens, their survey revealed a number of striking similarities between universities that do take patenting and commercialization activities into account when offering tenure and promotion and those that do not. The universities that do take patenting and commercialization into account are public institutions, they consider US patents a priority, they have adopted the policy in the last six years, and they publish their tenure and promotion guidelines.

The authors note that even the staunchest supporters of including faculty patenting and commercializing activities into tenure and [promotion](#) decisions agree that these activities should not replace scholarly pursuits, such as teaching, student mentoring and publishing research.

"By investing in the creative innovations of young faculty today, educational institutions may lessen pressure to translate their research endeavors into useful, applicable and timely solutions to today's global problems," concluded Stevens. "The next step in increasing academic [patent](#) and commercialization activities will be to allocate the proper resources to university technology transfer offices in order to more efficiently transfer scientific knowledge from academics to entrepreneurs."

Provided by University of South Florida

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