

APLU task force supports tech transfer for tenure and promotion in academia

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Building on the results of a survey circulated to U.S. and Canadian universities to understand current approaches for defining technology transfer activities and recognizing them as part of faculty performance assessments, a task force of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) has made recommendations for just how universities might go about taking into account the value of technology transfer and concomitant social benefits as part of tenure and promotion considerations.

A paper outlining their recommendations is published in the current issue of *Technology and Innovation*, Journal of the [National Academy of Inventors](#).

"The engagement of universities with their communities and with private sector businesses to lead innovation, create new processes, and generate beneficial economic activity from university research is now deemed an important dimension of a university's mission," said the authors.

"However, weighing the value of technology transfer under the rubrics of research or service does not adequately recognize the unique character of technology transfer work."

The [task force](#) recommended that technology transfer activities be considered in tenure and promotion processes when present but should not constitute a requirement for all faculty.

"Technology transfer is one of the hallmark impacts of U.S. university

research," said outgoing APLU Vice President R. Michael Tanner, who helped coordinate the task force, "and it should be duly recognized as one aspect of the proper work of a university faculty member."

The APLU survey was sent to chief academic officers at 204 U.S. and Canadian universities in November and December of 2014. Responses were received from 51 university officials at 45 institutions. Building on the results of that survey and other research, the task force produced a set of recommendations for the consideration of technology transfer in tenure and promotion decisions.

Recommendations made by the APLU Task Force on Tenure, Promotion and Technology Transfer include:

- Technology transfer activities should be explicitly included among the criteria for promotion and tenure
- Technology transfer activities should be an optional component of the review process, rewarded when present, but not a requirement for everyone
- Recognizing the unique character of technology transfer, the criteria should be flexible enough to include high quality work in many forms of expression
- Technology transfer activities should be evaluated without reliance on "artificial metrics"

The survey results suggest that "there is a gradually increasing recognition of technology transfer as a valued form of faculty work," said the authors. "At roughly one-third of the responding research institutions, consideration of technology transfer is limited to some areas or units, whereas the majority allow it to be considered in any area

where it is appropriate."

According to the authors, technology transfer can take many forms, but commercialization success and sustained relationships with industry are among the most frequent. Samples of technology transfer evidence, the authors said, include patent disclosures and filings; licenses executed and license income received; awards for impact; industry grants; internships; graduate placements; faculty-founded start-up companies; and widely adopted software.

The task force report notes that, as with other forms of work, it is essential that those who are evaluating technology transfer activities "weigh the likely impact of the work, its quality, and its foreseeable societal benefit."

Because not all technology transfer activities may be considered a contribution to the university's mission, it is important in considering technology transfer value that the faculty review process rely on experts in the respective fields so that their backgrounds can lend credibility to projections of potential societal value in the work under consideration.

Technology transfer activities cannot be simply counted; for example, the value of work may not be necessarily judged by the number of patents issued to a faculty member, said the task force. Additionally, the criteria of U.S. Patent Trademark Office reviewers may be different from those the university looks at in a tenure file.

"When it is successful, [technology transfer](#) can invigorate the university and establish relationships with other private and public sectors that affirm the value of a research university," the task force members concluded.

Provided by University of South Florida

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