

Connecting UD and the Marketplace

BY KATIE GRASSO

The University of Delaware's latest effort to build partnerships between business and higher education opened its doors on July 1. The new Office of Economic Innovation and Partnerships is directed by Dr. David Weir, former head of the Delaware Biotechnology Institute. According to the University of Delaware, the new Office of Economic Innovation and Partnerships "will work to encourage and enable innovation and entrepreneurship; grow, utilize and leverage the University's knowledge-based assets; and create and capture new economic and community benefits." *Delaware Business* asked Weir about the Office and his new role.

Where do you see the most opportunity?

One important area of opportunity is to create a portal so that the outside world can access the University, and the University can access the marketplace. It's very difficult for those on the outside to get in and navigate the academic environment. This portal will function as a two-way highway, allowing partnerships to be developed and opportunities and knowledge-based assets such as research expertise, intellectual property, etc. to be shared. By building partnerships, the portal will also help companies develop long-term relationships with the University in areas such as research, economic development and even education, where they could play an important role in the design of curriculum to help students prepare and plan for their lives beyond the University.

Another important opportunity is to promote and develop an environment that values innovation and entrepreneurship. It encompasses creativity, innovation, new venture creation and the construction of new opportunities and it applies to all fields from the physical sciences to the arts to the humanities. It is our intention to enrich the undergraduate experience and further the University's reputation by creating a campus-wide environment where students can experience and come to know the art of entrepreneurialism through direct engagement with the real world of the entrepreneur. The program, which will be guided from the Office of Economic Innovation and Partnerships, is still being developed, but will contain elements that include, for example, a series of presentations by interna-

tionally acclaimed entrepreneurs with the opportunity for direct student interaction and eventually a "laboratory" where students can practice innovation and entrepreneurship.

Also, we have the opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the technology transfer and commercialization process. We have moved technology transfer from the Research Office into the Office of Economic Innovation and Partnerships

where we plan to place greater emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship while strengthening our business, marketing and licensing skills. As part of this initiative, we are establishing an Intellectual Property Center within the Office that will be responsible for developing partnerships and patents and market and license the University's intellectual property.



Say I've got a new business or an idea for a new business, how can the Office help me?

Most small businesses or start-ups lack the resources such as facilities, expertise in legal matters, marketing and business, etc. to allow them

to grow and be successful. The Office can help these small businesses access these skills and resources by developing a network of capabilities, including individuals and companies, who are willing to help satisfy these needs. As the Office develops, it can become a hub for this sort of activity; not as a service provider, but as a broker of these services.

What kind of partnerships currently exist and will they change?

A number of partnerships are already underway driven by both University inventions and outside needs. An inventory of the University's knowledge-based assets and a functioning portal will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of partnering.

By catalyzing these various initiatives, I think the Office can help the University faculty, staff and students become much more involved in the creation and capture of new economic and social benefit. By extending the academic experience beyond the classroom, I believe we will create new value and an extra buzz of excitement. ■