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University research blooming at Florida schools, study says

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FORT PIERCE — The business of university research in Florida is growing, according to figures from a new survey by Florida State University.

Florida universities are getting more money to spend on research and licensing more inventions to public and private companies, especially biotech and pharmaceutical firms.

Research spending increased about 50 percent from 2000 to 2005, to \$1.5 billion, according to figures released at the Third Annual Technology Transfer Conference in Sarasota this week. The schools received a total of \$427 million in licensing fees for their inventions over that time period.

Florida Atlantic University and University of Florida, which has research facilities in Vero Beach and Fort Pierce, were among the 12 universities in the annual survey done by FSU's technology transfer office.

The number of licenses a university secures in a year is a good indicator of research growth, said John Fraser, director of technology transfer at FSU. Florida universities signed more than 500 licenses with private companies in the last six years, 162 of which were with Florida companies.

In addition, 110 companies have been created based on Florida university technologies since 2000.

"It indicates that Florida is part of the knowledge economy," and research is one way the universities contribute, Fraser said.

"Inventions are no good if they are just sitting on a bench in a lab," said Eric McNair, FSU's research programs coordinator.

"The important things is getting inventions out there to the public," he said.

The University of Florida showcases about 275 new inventions every year, and out of the 123 licenses and options executed in 2005, 64 came from the university, said David Day, director of the University of Florida's biotech incubator.

"You can spit out numbers all day, but it's the bottom line that matters — how many projects actually make it into the market and can be used for the public good," said Jeanie McGuire, assistant vice president for research at FAU.

FAU averages about two licenses a year and that number, like most on the survey, is directly proportional to how much money universities get to do research, according to McGuire.

There is more intellectual property for companies to exploit and greater interest in Florida's research investment market, said Erick Larson, contracts and grants manager for Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Fort Pierce.

The survey numbers show that Florida is moving up in the research ranks, Larson said. "We're getting better at getting money from it."

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