

Research

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playgrounds. It's a situation that has some questioning who is running the show.

"Who are the professors working for, the university or the company?" asked Russell Jacoby, author of the "New Intellectuals—American Culture in the Age of Academe."

Companies often invest their money in construction of new research facilities on campuses—investments that can pay dividends when they come calling for future projects based on their relationships with the schools.

For example, Eastman Kodak, General Foods and Union Carbide helped establish a biotechnology institute at Cornell U. in 1983. And Washington U. in St. Louis has signed a 12-year contract with the Monsanto chemical corporation worth about \$100 million. And this is only the tip of the corporate-funding iceberg.

The companies, however, say this is nothing more than the reality of the modern marriage of academia and industry.

"The research universities are a tremendous resource for scientific discovery, and what this funding does is marry the discovery capability to a way to market and commercialize those findings," said Gary Barton, science communication director at Monsanto. "We can help the universities get the benefits out into society."

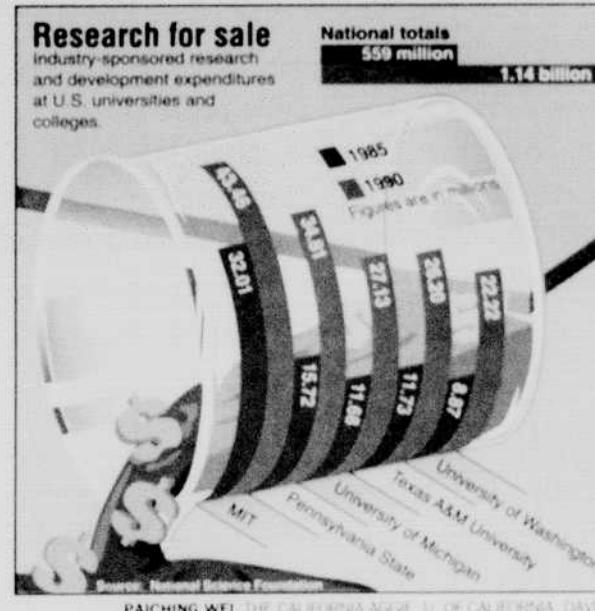
Corporate Conflict

But many in today's research environment fear corporate funding can lead to conflicts of interest. In some cases, it already has. In 1988-89 it was revealed that researchers at various universities reviewing TPA, a heart attack drug, also were stockholders in Genentech, Inc., the company manufacturing it.

Also, when the Allied Chemical Company funded research for plant geneticist Ray Valentine at the U. of California, Davis, they didn't know his study of nitrogen-fixation would leave campus. Later it was discovered the Calgene, a company Valentine founded, was a second site for the research.

Problems stemming from double allegiances range from criminal involvement to educational deterioration.

"When you manipulate the scientific information or decide to buy or sell stock based on information only you know—that puts you on the wrong side of the law," said Bob Roseth, director of the office of news and information at U.



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— Russell Jacoby

of Washington.

But legal offenses aren't the only concern in the corporate research game. Some fear that professors may botch, stall or alter research to further their own financial or business agendas. Research vital to tackling disease, saving the environment or growing better crops could be jeopardized.

"It becomes a very incestuous kind of situation if there's a failure to carry out the academic responsibilities in an open environment," said Norman Scott, vice president of research at Cornell.

But Stanley Wright, director of corporate contributions for Eastman Kodak, said such fears are incidental compared to the benefits of corporate-sponsored research.

"What we're investing in is access to technology; we're actually having them help us," Wright said.

Although the potential for conflict exists when corporations spend millions, Cornell's Scott said the research is critical to the advancement of technology.

"What good is research that doesn't move beyond the scientific bench because of the great fear of conflict of interest?" Scott said. "You have to make some balance between entrepreneurship and conflict of interest."

Capping the Corruption

Fear of unethical behavior in the research lab has led to attempts at regulating the practices of researchers.

In 1989, the National Institute of Health and the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration proposed guidelines to prevent conflicts of interest in technology research.

The NIH guidelines would have required faculty to disclose their investments as well as the financial interests of their spouses and children to university administrators. The policy also would have prohibited faculty from having an interest in any company whose products they were testing.

The proposals were met with mass disapproval from both the Department of Health and Human Services and the scientific community. Many universities claimed the regulations would be counterproductive to their research, and three months later they were withdrawn. The institute currently is revising the restrictions.

Some now think the regulations should be reinstated. As Jacoby said, if government officials have to fill out financial disclosure forms, university faculty should, too.

"If someone is doing medical research and is a major stockholder, it's something we want to know," he said. "Why, at this point, should we trust them? Why not set it out in print?"

But rather than wait for national guidelines, universities nationwide are responding by policing their own professors.

Harvard, for example, requires prior approval for faculty members who want to make clinical referrals to businesses where they or their families have interests. Johns Hopkins U. requires faculty to report all written agreements involving privately sponsored research. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon U. and Cornell also include substantial conflict-of-interest sections in their faculty handbooks.

Sheila Slaughter, U. of Arizona professor and author of "The Higher Learning and High Technology," said regulations such as these are a step in the right direction. But, Slaughter added, they're small steps compared to the scope of the issue.

"All the professions have guidelines, medicine does, law does. They're hallmarks of a profession," Slaughter said. "But we're notoriously bad at policing ourselves."

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