



FEATURE

Harvard Cranks Up the Volume

Isaac Kohlberg revamps the university's technology transfer operation.

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Harvard University and its medical school have significant prestige in bioscience. In fact, in a 2006 Milken Institute, Harvard came in first for generating the most published biotech research from 1990 to 2005. But when it comes to getting those discoveries out of the laboratory and into the marketplace to help patients and also to earn money for the university-Harvard has been a bit of a laggard. According to the Association of University Technology Managers, Harvard earned \$21 million from licensing its IP in 2006. Not bad, but not the top ten either; 12 other U.S. universities had more licensing revenue that year, including the University of California System, which pulled in more than \$40 million, and the University of California system nearly \$200 million.

"Well, that's what we're working on," says Isaac Kohlberg, chief officer of Harvard's three-year-old Technology Development (OTD), a recent consolidation of Harvard's undergraduate, graduate, and school tech transfer operations. Since his arrival in 2005, Kohlberg has doubled the pace of Harvard dealmaking with the help of a new in-house transaction team, and in early 2007 the OTD established a Technology Accelerator Fund with \$6 million from individual donors. The Accelerator provides funding for early stage Harvard research projects with promising commercial value; its goal is to close a much-bemoaned "development gap" by advancing nascent technologies to a stage where they become attractive to Big Pharma, biotech companies, and venture capitalists. Although the Accelerator focuses on supporting research, it also supports research in the applied sciences, such as engineering.

Born and raised in Israel, Kohlberg, in his mid-fifties, has worked in university technology transfer his entire career. Prior to his arrival at Harvard, he was CEO of the Tel Aviv University Economic Corporation, which serves as a technology transfer office for Tel Aviv University. Kohlberg's undergraduate alma mater, Bar Ilan University, also received a law degree. (He earned an MBA from INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France.) For most of his career, Kohlberg was CEO of the YEDA Research and Development Company, the technology transfer corporation for the Weizmann Institute of Science, based in Rehovot, Israel. But he is no newcomer to the United States. In the 1990s he held a number of positions at New York University, including vice president for industrial relations at the NYU Medical Center.

Kohlberg plans on adding another IP attorney to the OTD's ranks this summer to aid Anne Craig, who manages Harvard's IP portfolio and patent prosecution budget. Craig and the OTD's directors of business development, most of whom have a Ph.D. in the life or physical sciences, depend heavily on outside counsel, mostly from Boston law firms, including Wolf, Greenfield & Sacks, Choate Hall & Stewart, Foley, Hoag & Elliot, and Cockfield.

The new group of three transactional lawyers works exclusively on Harvard's licensing agreements of the day, the products of this program are strong patents and solid agreements," says Kohlberg. transfer offices around the country do not have a strong legal team that works on the [licensing] : I didn't want my directors of business development to handle this-they are not the right people to agreements." All three transactional lawyers have experience working for pharmaceutical companies might have sat on the other side of the table from academic researchers. For example, prior to joining in 2006, transactional lawyer Cris Rothfuss served for four-and-a-half years as director of IP and counsel for Watertown, Massachusetts-based Control Delivery Systems, Inc., a drug delivery R&D company that was acquired in 2005.

Kohlberg says the OTD has processed roughly 30-40 licensing agreements each year for the last 2 years, which represents a doubling of volume since 2005. The Accelerator often provides funding specific to concept and validation studies, which much academic research lacks, and which for-profit drug companies increasingly require before investing. In its first year, the Accelerator received 26 applications and invested \$1.3 million to six projects. One early success: Research from the Harvard Medical School laboratory of Jose Halperin and Gerhard Wagner—both supported by money from the Accelerator—was licensed in 2006 to Egenix, Inc., a privately held biotech company working on innovative cancer therapies and based in New York.

For-profit drug developers complain that universities tend to ask for more than their discoveries are worth in a quest to replenish their pipelines and harness new technologies, both biotech companies and universities are looking harder than ever at early-stage research from universities. Kohlberg says it takes eight to ten years of university-licensed technology to start generating income for the school. "Results will take time," he cautions, "but in four or five years I think we will [start to] see the fruits of our efforts. And it's no money"-Harvard scientists want to see their discoveries saving lives.

Could Harvard ever top the list of academic revenue makers? Kohlberg declined to say, demurring comment that "there are too many assumptions and contingencies." But as drug companies know, it's one blockbuster to go from middle rank to first place in record time.

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