

Duke University Upping Efforts To Convert Research Into Societal Impact

By Administrator
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Duke University will be enhancing the ability of faculty and staff to bring their scientific ideas into the marketplace and create new economic opportunities for the region and the nation.

Effective July 1, the university's Research Translation and Commercialization effort (RTC) will expand the university's capacity to accelerate new discoveries and create new companies, therapies and products.

"The university of the next century doesn't just educate and discover, it helps drive the American economy by bringing new innovations to the marketplace," said Duke University President Vincent E. Price. "We are investing Duke's resources and building new partnerships with donors and investors to raise our research and our commercialization to new levels."

The RTC initiative will complement the recently launched [Duke Science & Technology](#) fundraising campaign, which is focused on recruiting outstanding research faculty to Duke and building fruitful new collaborations with corporate partners.

The university's existing Office of Research, currently led by interim Vice President for Research R. Sanders Williams, will become the Office of Research and Innovation as a national search for a new leader is conducted.

The new Office of Research and Innovation will include Research Administration, led by Associate Vice President for Research Christopher Freel; Scientific Integrity, led by Vice Dean and Associate Vice Provost Geeta Swamy, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology; Translation and Commercialization, led by Robin Rasor, the current executive director of Licensing and Ventures; and External Partnerships, an expansion of the corporate relations office which will be conducting a national search for a leader.

The new structure and added investment has grown out of an intensive study by university leadership and the Board of Trustees and a campus-wide conversation with research leaders about creating a more robust, focused effort to bring the best Duke ideas into licensing agreements or startup companies.

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“I’ve never worked on an initiative where there was as strong a consensus that this ought to be done and that it can be done,” said Williams, who has been in leadership positions at Duke for decades, including Dean of the Medical School and founding Dean of the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore.

“By accelerating our efforts to commercialize Duke’s research ideas, we are simultaneously making this a more attractive place for the best faculty and students to work, and helping North Carolina and the United States compete and thrive in the knowledge economy,” said George Truskey, associate vice president for research and innovation.

“Technology is rapidly changing how we live, how we work and how we take care of our health,” said A. Eugene Washington, chancellor for health affairs and president and CEO of the Duke University Health System. “By harnessing the power of discovery here at Duke and engaging industry and community partners at home and abroad, we have the potential to improve health care worldwide. Guided by our mission of advancing health together, Duke’s influence can help ensure that the latest advances in medicine and technology benefit not just some, but all of us,” Washington said.

Through the expanded office of External Partnerships, Duke is going to increase its efforts to partner with corporations on major research projects and on the recruitment of Duke graduates.

“We’ve never had a clear single point of contact for connecting corporations to faculty with whom they might collaborate on projects of joint interest,” said Provost Sally Kornbluth. “The RTC will provide just such a ‘front door’ to Duke for prospective corporate partners while also providing connections for our graduates who want to build careers here in North Carolina.”

The university will also tap into its global network of alumni to help recruit more C-level leadership talent to the region and to grow the pipeline of investment funding for young companies. Local entrepreneurs often cite shortages of experienced executive talent and investment capital as limiting factors in their growth.

Williams said that RTC will play an important role in raising funds to support endowed

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professorships that reward faculty for their entrepreneurial efforts as well as their research and teaching, and to provide additional flexible research spaces for new and important work. “We need space for research that is still not-for-profit Duke research, but would then become an idea that is competitive in the marketplace,” Williams said. “We need flexibility and speed.”

“Duke’s discoveries and inventions can benefit society best and make the world a better place if they move out of the university and the academic journals and into the wider world, and that usually requires commercialization.” Williams said. “We are going to be engaging more deeply with the private sector to speed up that process.”