From applied research funding to new venture creation: the UILO can help

Technology transfer is a process that usually begins with early-stage collaborative research funding agreements and ends with the commercialization of technology. The University/Industry Liaison Office (UILO) offers a full range of services from assistance in obtaining research funding and facilitating university-industry partnerships, through to identification of and investment in commercially-promising technologies, intellectual property protection, and assistance with the commercialization process.

“I think one of the misconceptions about the role of the UILO is that we are focussed primarily on commercializing the results of research,” notes UILO Director Michael Volker. “It’s true that investing in commercially-promising technologies with a view to licensing the technology or creating a new venture is a major function of our office. But lately the national granting councils and other research funding agencies have been identifying and assessing University technologies. Each year, the UILO finances a small number of patent applications for promising technologies. The UILO provides funding to develop or test proof-of-concept inventions or scale-up bench research which may have commercial potential. Suitable industrial organizations are identified and contacted. UILO staff assist in determining the value of a University technology and negotiating commercialization agreements. The UILO will help a researcher determine the feasibility of establishing a new venture based on a University technology. UILO staff provide general business advice, help in preparing a business plan, recommend potential financing options and facilitate contact with sources of seed and venture capital. Office space for new ventures is often available in the Business Development Centre located at SFU’s Discovery Park. Beginning in 2000, incubation space for SFU spin-offs will also be available at The TIME (Technology, Innovation, Management, and Entrepreneurship) Centre at SFU’s Harbour Centre campus.

UILO services for faculty, staff and students

- By visiting researchers or via a disclosure from a faculty member or student, technologies that may have commercial potential are identified. The UILO assists in identifying applications for University technologies and assessing the market.
- UILO staff conduct searches of patent databases and provide advice to researchers on whether intellectual property protection is possible. Each year, the UILO finances a small number of patent applications for promising technologies.
- The UILO provides funding to develop or test proof-of-concept inventions or scale-up bench research which may have commercial potential.
- Suitable industrial organizations are identified and contacted. UILO staff assist in determining the value of a University technology and negotiating commercialization agreements.
- The UILO will help a researcher determine the feasibility of establishing a new venture based on a University technology. UILO staff provide general business advice, help in preparing a business plan, recommend potential financing options and facilitate contact with sources of seed and venture capital. Office space for new ventures is often available in the Business Development Centre located at SFU’s Discovery Park. Beginning in 2000, incubation space for SFU spin-offs will also be available at The TIME (Technology, Innovation, Management, and Entrepreneurship) Centre at SFU’s Harbour Centre campus.

New SFU research shines a light on crime patterns. A new software called CrimePatterns.com is being developed by Crime Prevention Analysis Lab (CPAL) Inc., an SFU spin-off company started by Terry Whin-Yates, Patricia Brantingham, and Paul Brantingham of SFU’s School of Criminology with assistance from the SFU UILO. The new software analyzes criminal data and allows for the secure data warehousing of state, local, municipal, federal and police information. It is unique in representing secure Web enabled client/server geocoded data for crime prevention analysis. From left, Whin-Yates, the Brantinghams and the UILO’s Teri Lydiard. Photo: G. Ehlers, SFU IMC.
Services to promote successful research grant applications

In the last issue of research Links (Volume 8, Number 1, May 1999) we focussed on electronic resources and personal services designed to assist researchers with identifying potential sources of research grant funding.

The Vice-President, Research (VPR) and the Office of Research Services (ORS) are also concerned with helping grant seekers optimize their chances of successfully competing in peer-reviewed competitions. Here are some of the services and resources offered to help you prepare winning applications.

Take advantage of SFU’s research funding application mentoring program

Research funding mentors are senior SFU faculty with strong records of successful application for grant funding from the Canadian national granting councils and/or service on grant selection committees. “The mentors make themselves available to colleagues, especially recently arrived faculty members in order to provide assistance in preparing research grant applications, especially to the major national granting councils: MRC, NSERC and SSHRC,” notes Vice-President, Research Bruce Clayman. “Grant applications that benefit from such expert advice have an increased chance of success in national competition, so I encourage faculty members to draw on the experience the mentors have to offer.”

If you wish to consult with a mentor, please make contact directly on an informal, mutually agreeable basis. The updated Mentors List for 1999/2000 is inserted into this issue of research Links and is also available at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/mentor.html.

Contact your faculty research liaison officer

In each of the five Faculties at SFU, there are one or more persons who serve as research liaison officers. Their titles vary from Faculty to Faculty, but their functions are very similar. Their main mission is the encouragement and facilitation of research in general and funded research in particular by faculty members and students. A list of current FRLOs is available at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/frlo.html.

Visit ORS’s updated funding application preparation web site

A rich collection of grantsmanship tips, guidelines and courses has been compiled by ORS and is archived at www.sfu.ca/ors/Articles/a_int.html. “We recently revised our Web site to make it easier to access helpful advice and examples of tactics employed by successful applicants,” notes Ellen Loosley, ORS Director. “I encourage applicants to visit the new site and to let us know about additional useful resources we might include there.”

Attend a grantsmanship workshop

Throughout the year, ORS organizes workshops designed to bring experts from funding agencies to campus. For example, in July, ORS and the Centre for Systems Science (CSS) held a Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) Grant Application Workshop. Lead by Dr. Sara Swenson, CSS, the workshop participants were offered tips and advice on how to write a successful CFI application. In addition to discussion of CFI application strategy, Kathy Kirby and Fred Fischer of the B.C. Knowledge Development Fund (BCKDF) were on hand to discuss the provincial CFI matching program and offer advice to applicants.

On September 16th and 17th, ORS will hold grant-writing workshops focussing on writing successful NSERC and SSHRC applications. Please see the insert in this issue of research Links for more information.

Request the services of a grant facilitator

The Faculty of Applied Sciences has appointed, with support from VPR, two grant facilitators who assist in the preparation of major grant proposals (e.g. NCE, CFI) and are especially helpful in bringing together the pieces of a large, multi-player application. The VPR is encouraging all Deans to staff similar positions in their respective Faculties.

COMING SOON: GRANT READERS

“We are enhancing the services that ORS provides to external grant applicants,” says Dr. Bruce Clayman, Vice-President, Research. “In addition to our workshops, FRLO advice, and mentorship program, I am developing a reviewing service wherein applicants will have the opportunity to have their applications read and commented on by expert readers—persons who have served on grant selection committees and/or have themselves a strong record of success. Similar programs of “grant readers” elsewhere have increased success rates and, although we do well in national comparisons, we can always do better.”

The service is in place for this fall’s major granting Council competitions. Applicants will need to have their applications at complete first-draft stage well in advance of the Council deadlines. Full information on the service and deadlines will be circulated by email in mid-September.
Research ethics policy revision task force invites input from SFU community

As you may be aware, SFU is in the process of revising its research ethics policy to bring it into compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Involving Human Subjects. The Research Ethics Policy Revision Task Force has invited input on the draft of its proposed “Policy and Practices for Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Subjects”, which is available at www.sfu.ca/pres/ethicsjune28.htm.

A public forum at which the Task Force can receive the community’s comments on the draft will be scheduled for the latter part of September; watch for the announcement. Written comments in advance or instead of presentation at the forum should be sent to the Chair of the Task Force Ellen Gee, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, or to ethics-taskforce@sfu.ca.

New ORS Research Contracts Officer in September

ORS is pleased to announce that Mr. Adrian Sheppard has been hired as Research Contracts Officer. Adrian succeeds David Foord, who left SFU after six years for a position at the University of New Brunswick as their Intellectual Property Manager.

Adrian holds a law degree from the University of Victoria and has worked for three years as a licensing agent for the provincial government. He can be reached by e-mail to adrian_sheppard@sfu.ca or telephone 5717.

New form aids signature process

By Ellen Loosley

“Where can I have the Dean sign my application? There’s only a place for one or two signatures on the agency’s application form!” This dilemma is common for many grant applicants. With letters of intent, contract proposals and many foreign funding applications, questions arise and sometimes incorrect conclusions are made by applicants concerning the SFU internal approval process. Chairs and Deans, when they are asked to sign an impromptu “cover sheet”, often are not provided with enough information to focus clearly on the implications of their signature for that proposal.

So, in response to the need to assist applicants for research funding in obtaining full institutional approvals for their proposals in a straightforward and simplified manner, ORS has developed a “signature sheet” to accompany research funding applications. The form focuses the user’s attention on questions significant to the application process, such as whether overhead charges are applicable or Ethics approval is required.

Finally, for those who are asked to sign the form, there is clarification given of what it is they are agreeing to in terms of space and facilities required should the project be funded.

Those in the Faculty of Applied Sciences are familiar with the use of a signature sheet, as they have been using one for several years. However, this procedure will be new to those in other Faculties. We are anticipating a period of adjustment, but we are confident that funding applicants and signatories alike will see the benefits of a common and simplified approval process.

The signature sheet is available at www.sfu.ca/ors/Forms.html or by paper copy from ors@sfu.ca. The advantages of obtaining an electronic version of the signature sheet are that you can keep it as a template on your hard drive for easy access; and, since the form is in MS Excel, the columns are self-adding.

Note to researchers in Applied Sciences; the new form supersedes the yellow FAS coversheet. Please use the new form from now on.

Parallel paths: more than one way to access research links electronically

We’ve made it easier for the SFU community to find and read research links on-line.

BOOKMARK THE WEB site
The research Links Web site has been redesigned to make viewing and navigation easier. Visit www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/Researchlinks/index.html where you’ll find the html versions of the articles and a downloadable pdf version of the entire newsletter.

CHOOSE VP RESEARCH AS A NEWS PROVIDER ON YOUR CUSTOMIZED MY.SFU.CA PAGE
Recently, SFU’s Academic Computing Services introduced a service called “my.sfu.ca” which is a customizable Web page through which SFU community members can selectively view news, at their convenience. To read researchLinks (and other news from the Office of the Vice-President, Research) in this format, access my.sfu.ca from SFU’s home page. After you’ve logged in, choose the “customize” option located beside the “University News” section. Here, select “VP Research” (and any other news you wish to view regularly).

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emphasizing collaboration with industry and the identification of industrial applications for proposed research, and this has impacted on our role in the SFU community.”

“We start by sitting down with a researcher to discuss their research program and explore possible business applications,” says Mr. Volker. “If there seems to be a business opportunity, we provide assistance in accessing industrially-oriented government moneys ranging all the way from NSERC funds to National Research Council’s Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP) to funds provided by the B.C. Government through the Science Council of B.C. and the B.C. Advanced Systems Institute. Many of these funds require an industrial partner at an early stage, so the UILO staff can help here, too.”

There are real long-term benefits to be realized from such early-stage collaboration. “One of the best examples of collaboration with industry via research contracts resulting in successful commercialization is the case of Dr. Thor Borgford of the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry,” says Mr. Volker. “The UILO has worked with Dr. Borgford from the research contract stage through to the early financing of his spin-off company, De Novo Enzyme Corporation, a biopharmaceutical company that specializes in recombinant DNA therapeutics for the treatment of diverse human diseases, including cancer and AIDS.”

In the three years prior to incorporating, Dr. Borgford’s lab conducted $1.7M worth of contract research for Canadian pharmaceutical companies. At that point, the UILO was mainly involved in the contract negotiations. Over the next several years, Dr. Borgford successfully attracted NRC IRAP and Science Council of B.C. Tech-BC funding for research and development. When he was ready to form a company to exploit the expertise developed through the university-industry interaction, UILO staff helped him to make arrangements for space for the new company.

The UILO next helped De Novo by introducing Dr. Borgford to Dr. Ken Spencer, a co-founder of local high technology success story Creo Products Inc. Dr. Spencer took on the role of company mentor to De Novo, providing both business advice and expertise. He was one of the earliest investors in the company and now chairs the Board of Directors. “Ken Spencer’s guidance and mentorship have been extremely important to the success of De Novo. His involvement was particularly valuable when it came to attracting venture capital financing for the company,” notes Dr. Borgford. “Those funds are now being used to further the development and testing of De Novo’s lead molecules for the treatment of colon, bone and ovarian cancers.” Studies of these molecules are currently underway in collaboration with the B.C. Cancer Agency. Two other technologies are being developed in partnership with two Canadian pharmaceutical companies who will ultimately be responsible for the marketing and distribution of the respective products. In recognition of the services provided to Dr. Borgford over time, the UILO secured an equity position for SFU in De Novo Enzyme Corporation.

“I encourage researchers who are looking for additional sources of research funding or who have a commercially viable innovation to give one of our Technology Managers a call,” says Mr. Volker. “They are available to provide individual advice and offer their business expertise.”

Contact: Daphne Gelbart, telephone 6568, email: dgelbart@sfu.ca or Teri Lydiard, telephone: 5844, email: lydiard@sfu.ca.