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UNITED STATES

Universities ‘over-estimate’ role in commercial applications

The Hechinger Report 24 January 2020

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At a time when they would seem to be searching for new sources of revenue, United States colleges and universities are producing a surprisingly small proportion of the nation’s patents and start-ups and making so little money from licensing inventions that, at many institutions, it doesn’t even cover the cost of managing them, writes Jon Marcus for *The Hechinger Report*.

Most of the more than US\$75 billion a year from the federal government and other sources that the National Science Foundation calculates is spent by academia on research is not intended to immediately result in commercial applications. It’s about fundamental knowledge. The basic research performed in university laboratories underpins discoveries that may take years to end up in the market, if they ever do.

In fact, academic institutions accounted for only 6,639 of the 304,126 patents granted in 2016, the last year for which the figure is available, according to the National Science Board. “When you look at university PR offices, they always talk about how there’s this new research coming out of some department, and it’s going to revolutionise the economy,” said Lee Vinsel, an assistant professor of science, technology and society at Virginia Tech who is a co-author of a forthcoming book, *The Innovator’s Delusion*. But, he said, “we’ve been overestimating the role we’re playing.”

Full report on The Washington Post site

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