

The Southern Paradigm: Communications around the Production of Invention Disclosures

Odd Bres, PhD, Fred Munson, and Garold G. Breit

Odd Bres, PhD, is a technology manager, Fred Munson is the marketing coordinator and Garold G. Breit is the executive director at the Technology Transfer Office of the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Academic technology transfer is generally perceived as the process that conveys useful intellectual properties from academe to the larger community, thereby providing optimal utility to the economy. One key step of technology transfer is the new invention disclosure process, and the successful technology transfer program yields the optimal number of high-quality disclosures. Good disclosures are the beginning of successful patent prosecution, effective marketing, licensing, and dissemination of university innovation.

This article provides a method and organizational plan that has heretofore been informally known by its proponents as the *southern paradigm*. We have used this term to refer to an approach to technology transfer that includes proactive technology disclosure mining and aggressive marketing techniques. We believe that Bob MacWright (University of Virginia Patent Foundation), David Dey (University of Florida), and the University of Texas system have used some of these techniques.

The invention disclosure process has been recognized as an important aspect of the technology transfer process because it represents the key point of contact, the presentation of the germ of the technology, and the initiation of the transfer from idea to commercial product. Quite simply, experienced technology management professionals view new disclosures as the lifeblood of the successful program. Over the past decade, the growth rate of new technology disclosures as a function of research funding has been

marginal (see *AUTM Licensing Surveys*TM, 1995-2005); and there is an opportunity to do better.

To meet the need, a new method of mining, marketing, and managing technologies, known as the *southern paradigm*, has emerged. The methodology has been developed by technology transfer professionals in universities of the Southern tier of the United States over the past fifteen years. It has proven to generate an increased number of new invention disclosures. More important, those disclosures are of better quality and, thus, a better experience for faculty inventors as well as for technology managers.

This chapter presents a detailed methodological description of the new approach as it pertains to mining intellectual assets to garner more and higher quality disclosures. Proven technology transfer manager Patricia Weeks has said that technology transfer is essentially a relationship-building process, but the key to success is to take a planned and disciplined approach. As with all sales and marketing activity, a predictable percentage of the activities will lead to a predictable flow of deals. The southern paradigm approach provides a well-managed, highly interactive flow of information between the faculty inventor and the technology transfer manager.

We present here a scheduled series of interactions over a timeline of days, weeks, and months. The program includes a series of specific tasks, a timeline of interactions between faculty member and technology transfer manager, and anticipated time-labor demands. These assist in effective planning and will allow both the program director and technology transfer manager to measure and report their success. We focus on tactics, but digress at the outset to describe the underlying strategy.