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From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

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Focus

CMU's commercialization initiatives garner attention

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Like the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University has seen an uptick in tech transfer in recent years.

The school had 10 direct startups in fiscal 2017 that included companies begun with intellectual property owned by the university and usually launched by faculty.

The school also had 248 invention disclosures — reports used to determine if an invention should seek patent protection — in fiscal year 2017, a number that has been trending steadily upward for the past several years with the exception of 2015

when it spiked to 473, a blip Reed McManigle, mentor-in-residence at the Center for Technology Transfer and Enterprise Creation at CMU, attributes to Uber Technologies Inc.'s move to Pittsburgh.

"When Uber came into town, they wanted to license basically everything that had ever been done at the National Robotics Engineering Center on a non-exclusive basis," he said. "We said 'OK, well we need to know what that is, so we're going to need some invention disclosures.' Not quite did they back up the truck with invention disclosures and dump them on us, but figuratively, yeah."

McManigle said another driver of CMU's success with spinouts has been in convincing its faculty that software is an invention deserving of the same attention as other inventions emanating from the university's work.

All 10 of the direct startups launched in 2017 were software-based, including four education software startups, two in biometrics, one in facilities management, one focused on smart city management, one artificial intelligence software company and a robotics company that created software to serve



Carnegie Mellon University

as a “vision system” for machines designed to pick apples.

“We’re getting the message out that software is an invention, as well,” McManigle said. “Back in the day, people thought that if their stuff wasn’t patentable, they didn’t need to deal with tech transfer and there wasn’t a reason to do an invention disclosure, but more and more we’re doing lots of licenses for software where we haven’t patented the software.”

CMU has devoted an increasing focus on tech transfer with events like its Connects workshops, an annual series of educational seminars geared toward startups, and programs like the Innovation Fellows program, which awards a \$50,000 grant to a Ph.D. student and faculty team to help launch the student into the commercial space.

CMU also has a National Science Foundation Innovation Corps program, and the university’s focus on turning ideas into products, inventions and services is attracting attention, McManigle said. Since 2011, CMU startups have raised more than \$1 billion in venture capital funding, and roughly 70 percent of that funding has gone to companies based in Pittsburgh.

“We’ve been contacted by more venture capitalists this year than ever,” he said. “CMU’s on the map; Pittsburgh’s on the map. I’ve talked to dozens of venture capitalists in the past five months from Silicon Valley, Boston, China, D.C., Chicago, all of them reaching out to us, and saying, ‘we’re hearing cool things about CMU. Tell me about your projects.’”

Lydia Nuzum

Reporter

Pittsburgh Business Times

