

This Was Printed From Philadelphia Business Journal

Drexel to increase focus on research, tech transfer

President John Fry says school will undertake a 30-year initiative

Premium content from Philadelphia Business Journal - by Peter Key, Staff Writer

Date: Friday, February 4, 2011, 6:00am EST

Related:

[Education](#)

[Drexel University](#) plans to boost its research and technology-transfer efforts and will look to the east to expand its campus, its president, **John Fry**, said in an interview with the Business Journal.

Fry, who began his tenure as Drexel's 14th president on Aug. 1, said the university's Office of Research will be adding at least eight people to its staff of nearly 50. The additions include four who will join the five at the Technology Commercialization Office, which is part of the Office of Research.

"There will probably be about a half-a-dozen big strategies that are sort of involved in moving the institution forward and I've already articulated this as one — the whole strengthening of the basic research environment here in terms of laboratories and equipment and access to grant-writing support," he said.

In its 2009 fiscal year Drexel had \$104 million in research funded by the federal government and business, according to the most recent licensing survey by the Association of U.S. Technology Managers. That put it ahead of [Temple University](#), which had \$88.8 million funded, but well behind the [University of Pennsylvania](#), which had \$760.8 million in research funded.

In that same year, Drexel executed 19 licenses and options to commercialize its research and had three companies started around its research. Penn, meanwhile, executed 62 licenses and options and had four companies formed.

The University of California System led in all three measures with \$4.69 billion in research funded, 237 licenses and options executed and 47 companies started.

Fry thinks Drexel is well suited to expand its technology commercialization efforts because of its history.

"Drexel has never been a ... theoretical institution. It's always been an applied institution," he said.

Fry was a big proponent of upgrading Penn's tech transfer operations when he was an executive vice president there, said **Louis Berneman**, who headed Penn's tech transfer office for part of that time.

Berneman, who is a partner with Osage University Partners, a Bala Cynwyd venture fund, thinks Fry can increase technology transfer at Drexel, too.

"Certainly in areas that Drexel has a long-time, well-established expertise in, like biomedical engineering for example, I think there's an opportunity there for some real outstanding success," he said.

Fry's intent to boost the amount of research and technology commercialization Drexel does are part of his commitment to the University City Innovation Collaborative, an effort to make greater use of the research institutions in University City as an economic-development tool for the neighborhood, the city of Philadelphia and the area. (See story: Page 1.) They're also part of an effort to formulate a strategic plan for Drexel to follow the current one, which runs through 2012.

At the same time it's looking to the nearly immediate future, Drexel also is looking far ahead. Fry said it will undertake a 30-year master planning initiative for its campus that will run in six five-year cycles out to 2041 when Drexel celebrates its 150th anniversary.

In the first cycle, Fry sees Drexel creating more capacity on its campus to handle the growth it experienced under former president **Constantine Papadakis**, who died in 2009. That capacity, he thinks, can be added east of Drexel's campus, both at 3001 Market St., where Drexel owns a building that used to be a newspaper office and printing plant, and at a parking lot on Chestnut Street between 30th and 31st streets that he said can hold 1 million square feet of development.

"The priority would be to sort of embrace the areas around 30th Street Station, which I think is our natural gateway," he said.

Drexel also recently selected Philadelphia-based [Voith & Mactavish Architects](#) and New York-based Robert AM Stern Architects to design a new building for its LeBow College of Business, which will be funded in part by a \$45 million gift by the college's namesake, **Bennett S. LeBow**.

Fry said Drexel plans to put bids for the project out in the spring or summer, have Matheson Hall, the business school's current home, demolished in June, and have the new building completed by early 2014.

Part of Drexel's growth under Papadakis included the addition of the College of Medicine and the creation of the Earle Mack School of Law and the Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento, Calif.

The next step for the College of Medicine, which became part of Drexel in 2002, is one of the things the university's master plan will address, Fry said.

The next step for the law school is to get fully, rather than provisionally, accredited, which Fry thinks could happen in spring.

As for the Sacramento campus, which has 300 students, Fry said plans for it have been scaled back and its dean, **Tobey Oxholm**, is focused on stabilizing it financially and then trying to grow it.

"He's done a wonderful job of creating all this from nothing," Fry said.

California's economic problems could slow Sacramento's growth, but Fry said other than reducing the value of its endowment, the economy hasn't hurt Drexel much.

Companies are still willing to be part of Drexel's co-op program, which placed 98 percent of its students in jobs during its current cycle.

That has helped the university maintain a high placement rate for its graduates — 86 percent of the students from the most recent graduating class surveyed by Drexel said they were employed, in graduate school, volunteering or involved in some other activity of their choice.

"Co-operative education remains our greatest competitive advantage as a university," Fry said.

pkey@bizjournals.com | 215-238-5141