

A Survey of University High-Tech Inventors

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Studies on the costs and benefits of university patent ownership and enforcement have, to date, focused mostly on life sciences technology. Increasingly, however, many of the most lucrative university-owned patents relate to computing and telecommunications, not genes or pharmaceuticals. In December 2012, Carnegie Mellon University won a billion-dollar jury verdict against Marvell Semiconductors, and so far in 2013 Boston University has filed 29 patent suits against the likes of Amazon.com, Microsoft, Apple, and Sony for allegedly infringing patent rights to LED technology. In an effort to shed light on the pros and cons of university patenting in the high-tech field, I surveyed more than 250 professors at major U.S. universities who teach and research in the areas of electrical engineering and computer science. Among other findings, my survey reveals that:

- Most high-tech faculty inventions are subsidized with government funds
- Most high-tech faculty members believe their universities' patent decisions are made with profit, rather than society's best interest, in mind
- Most high-tech faculty members report that patents do not encourage them to do more or better research
- Most high-tech faculty members patent their research, in part, because they believe it will help them earn tenure
- Substantial percentages of high-tech faculty believe that patenting their research actually harms their ability to work with industry, to collaborate with one another, to disseminate their research to the public, and to commercialize their inventions
- Despite occasional blockbuster patents, major research universities appear to, on net, actually lose money on their high-tech patent portfolios