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Effective Operation Strategies for Small Tech Transfer Offices

Rodney Ridley, Sr., Ph.D.
Executive Director & Distinguished Professor
Allan P. Kirby Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship
Wilkes University

Chase Kasper
Assistant Vice President for Research,
Technology Transfer & Corporate Relations
The University of Southern Mississippi


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The following presentation reflects the personal views and thoughts of Rodney Ridley and Chase Kasper, and is not to be construed as representing in any way the corporate views or advice of the Wilkes University or The University of Southern Mississippi and their Affiliates, Subsidiaries or Divisions, nor the views or advice of the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM). The content is solely for purposes of discussion and illustration, and is not to be considered legal advice.

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Panel of Experts



Chase Kasper
Assistant Vice President for Research,
Technology Transfer & Corporate Relations
Office of Technology Development
University of Southern Mississippi
AUTM Cabinet – Membership Portfolio Chair

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Allan P. Kirby Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship
Wilkes University
AUTM Committee – Small Technology Transfer Office Co-Chair
Formerly:
Chair/Director & Associate Professor
Engineering and Physics Division
Wilkes University

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Overview of The University of Southern Mississippi

Founded:	1910	
Enrollment in Fall 2016:	14,554	
Student-Faculty Ratio:	17-1	
Research Funding 2014-2015:	\$73M	
Research thrust areas:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polymer Science Ocean Science & Engineering Education & Psychology Sports Venue Safety & Security 	

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Overview of Wilkes University

Founded:	1933	
Enrollment in Fall 2016:	5,552	
Student-Faculty Ratio:	16-1	
Research Funding 2014-2015:	\$2M	
Research thrust areas:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biology & Health Sciences Engineering & Physics Pharmacy & Nursing Chemistry Education 	



ALLAN P. KIRBY CENTER
FOR FREE ENTERPRISE
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WILKES UNIVERSITY

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Understanding Your “Soil”

Small Public University

- Public \$\$ vs. Public Bureaucracy
- Guiding Policies - Role of the State
- Other Critical Factors



Small Private University

- Private \$\$ vs. Private Bureaucracy
- Guiding Policies - Role of the Board of Trustees
- Other Critical factors

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Understanding Your “Soil”

International Perspectives


USA/Europe/Canada/Asia/Africa/Middle East/Australia/ South America/etc.

Small Office - Special *International* Factors

- The Rule of Law
- Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Guiding Policies
- Bayh-Dole-style reporting

- Patenting System
- University Operations (Funding, Faculty, Students and Culture)
- Regional networks and organizations
- Relationship to Funding & Regional Economic Development

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Benefits of a Smaller Innovation Environment

- What is “Small?” – How do you define it?
- Opportunity for a more personalized TTO/Faculty relationships
- Speed and flexibility
- Networking with funding sources
- Role of local business community
- Small versus large company interactions
- Other



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Strategic Considerations to Achieve Desired Goals

- Internal stakeholders
- Managing expectations
- Is the model aligned with the culture?
 - Mission
 - Vision
 - Values

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Proven Tactical Methods for Success

- Identify and use the inherent strengths of your University (e.g.: B-School, Library, Law, etc.)
- Positioning to be a “trusted advisor” to both faculty and upper administration
- Proven methods of low/no cost methods of extending your office’s capabilities

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Sources and Programs

- Volunteers/Mentors
- Interns
- Alumni
- Outsourcing
- Professional Networking (e.g. AUTM)

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Contributing to the Economic Development Goals of the University

- Get to know and understand your University's Strategic Plan and its stated goals around Economic Development and its relationship to the community
- Get to know and understand your University's Development / Advancement department
- Get to know and understand your University's CFO/VP of Research (or equivalent)
- You must be able to definitively answer one critical question: HOW does your activity add "VALUE" to the University?
(NOTE: VALUE does not necessarily equal MONEY)

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Maximizing Local and Regional Economic Impact

- Knowing your external audience
- Get to know and understand the Economic Development drivers of your region.
- All University's are regional economic drivers, how intentional is your university in this activity
- Get to know your region's Economic Development / Political leaders – are there untapped resources available



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Building your network

- Build your network of small TTO professionals and companies to make your small team feel grand
- Partner with small to medium size companies who are often ignored by larger offices
- Creative resource management can help maximize efficiency
- Outsource to licensing professionals to ensure quick wins and success stories, especially for newly established offices
- Don't "re-invent the wheel" for every license




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Building Your Network (cont.)

- Keep your contracting skills honed, and ensure that your deal-making feels just as smooth to industry partners as their experience with bigger offices.
- Select appropriate and budget-conscious legal counsel that is tailored to you needs. Many legal firms and patent agents are willing to work with small budgets, it just takes a bit of negotiation and "firm dating" to find the team that is right for your organization.
- Not having your own patent agents can prove advantageous as you have the option to hand-pick the optimal attorney for each case; in effect you have a greater freedom than larger, more established offices, budget negotiations permitting.

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Working Effectively with Faculty

- Use protocols, procedures, other offices, and governance structure to your advantage
- Use faculty champions to your benefit. Once you discover and build faculty partnerships with positive results, use the “winners” to your advantage
- Provide your faculty champions the opportunity to further their CV
 - present at one of your events
 - use them as one of your good-news stories
 - write up an article about them
- Build a reputation of strong relationships, quick turn-arounds, successful practices and respected and well-liked staff – it takes time, but is worth it.

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Use the Patent Strategy That’s Right for You

- Some offices file EVERYTHING, and try to kill it within a year
- Some offices use triage and only patent “winners”
- Some offices use a Committee to help ease faculty and build credibility
- Some offices file everything because they are trying to build a culture or promote a new office



The best thing you can do is figure out the best strategy for YOUR OFFICE. Just because you’ve always done things one way, doesn’t mean you should continue on that path. Take risks and try new things. It’s possible you aren’t doing what’s best for your office.

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Leveraging speed and flexibility as a competitive advantage

- Prove yourself as “small but mighty”
- Do one thing that puts your office on the map
- Work faster and more efficiently than larger offices
- Learn what your office does well and get as many “quick wins” as possible
- Prove your office’s abilities to circumvent the standard operative procedures and protocols
- Use your flexibility to your advantage

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Tracking Actionable Metrics

- Develop a framework that better suits your office
- Do your metrics seem low because you are only asked to track number of patents, number of licenses, and dollars earned?
 - *Change the conversation and start to track impact.*
- Track the metrics that are appropriate for your office — events, faculty feedback, industry connections, research partnerships, student feedback, number of presentations, community engagement, number of registered copyright and trademark applications, social media presence, etc. etc.
- Hire a media student to put together a presentation that shows your impact, and start showcasing your strengths, instead of the unfortunate numbers used to rank large offices



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Lessons Learned

- Don't compare your institution to others – it simply isn't fair.
 - *Each institution is unique*
- Choose metrics that are true barometers of your value and the activity you do
- We have little or no control over many of the disclosures, innovations, and IP that crosses our desk
- Negotiate set pricing for legal and other fees (preferred supplier lists)
- In small offices hiring is rare - focus on versatility “Best Athlete in the Draft”
- We encourage our faculty, students and clients to think big, be innovative and change their landscape; we might be more successful if we took our own advice.


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Future Forecast

- The older model of “Disclose-Protect-Market-License” will decline over time
- Non-patentable IP will become even more prevalent...and more difficult to manage
- While technical and legal skill sets will still be necessary, broader skills will be required for the smaller offices if “growth” is desired
- Network to stay current with ever evolving trends – Borrow and modify best practices to suit your needs



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Thank you for Your Attention!



Material in this Presentation is from the Following References

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