

# Profs want research findings patented

NEW YORK — Not so long ago "patent" was a dirty word to most American university professors.

They argued that scientific discoveries by university scientists all should go directly into the public domain and be available to everyone.

Many also were imbued with the classic notion that university scientists should engage only in "pure research," science for its own sake, leaving to the business world and commercial laboratories applied research which leads to inventions.

The agricultural and engineering school faculties were the first to abandon this notion. Now virtually all professors believe either they personally or the university should patent everything useful that is discovered on campus. The University of Wisconsin's rich harvest from the discovery in its laboratories several decades ago of how to fortify milk with Vitamin D was the eye opener. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois, Stanford University and Cornell University have been in the forefront recognizing how important patents can be to a university, both financially and as an incentive to the scientific faculty to be innovative on a practical scale.

Stanford recently revealed that since 1970, its office of technology and licensing has distributed more than \$750,000 to faculty members from the proceeds of patent licenses.

Theodore Wood, manager of Cornell's department of patents and licensing, said Cornell has received more than \$1 million in patent licensing fees over the past nine years. Of this, \$768,000 went to faculty members or departments and the rest to operate Wood's office.

Since 1976, Cornell has handled its own patent monies. Before that they were handled by Research Corp. in New York City which represents 300 universities and similar institutions on patent matters. The fact that this corporation has so many clients show how extensive the change is in the university faculty attitude toward patents.

It was not just the money that changed the professors' minds. They discovered that letting their research findings go directly into the public domain appeared the surest way to stifle them instead of encouraging their development into

useful and marketable products.

Cornell's Wood said the biggest spur to this discovery was testimony by officials of the federal labor and commerce departments and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which pointed out that very few firms are willing to try to develop products without strong patent protection. They consider it much too difficult to make sustained profits out of something anyone can pick up and duplicate.

These federal officials argued that American technology has fallen behind European and Japanese technology in some respects in re-

cent years not for lack of innovation but because so many good ideas are not immediately put on the market.

Cornell's graduate business school has moved into the patent act to spur development of marketable products from patents originating in the university. A group of students obtained \$500,000 capital from David Abbott, an Ithaca business man, to develop and market a superior solar energy cell discovered by Gregory Williams, a Cornell research assistant, after several big companies had turned down the idea.

Curiously, the action of the Cor-

nell group came out of a class assignment by Professor David Ahlers, a banker turned teacher, who directed his class to come up with a complete plan to develop and market an invention.

The students not only came up with the plan, they put the show on the road.



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693-1987 MARY PIAZZA, DIRECTOR

## Gas price rising with new rules

WASHINGTON — Federal energy officials have started drafting new natural gas pricing rules that will lead to a rapid price hike and an extension of federal regulation to intrastate gas sales soon after Dec. 1.

Chairman Charles Curtis of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, calling his agency's task "the toughest job in town," abandoned regular procedures in the interest of speed. He said the new rules would be completed by the end of November.

Curtis told reporters Wednesday he expects the bitter controversy that marked congressional gas pricing debate to spill over into his agency's effort to put the natural gas section of the energy bill into effect.

President Carter is expected to sign the energy bill soon. Under the bill, new gas pricing rules must take effect on the first day of the month after the bill is signed — probably Dec. 1.

As soon as the bill takes effect, the government must start removing the lid that has held gas prices down since 1938. Controls will be extended temporarily to intrastate sales, but they will be eliminated nationwide by 1985.

Curtis said one of the first steps will be authorization of a one-time increase in the wholesale price of 11 trillion feet of gas now in interstate pipelines — virtually all of the gas in the pipelines — to cover the effect of inflation since April 1977, the date on which the bill's price levels are based.

Another step will be to publish maximum allowable prices for premium-priced gas, he said.

After that, Curtis said, most such prices will increase slowly at the rate of inflation.



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