

A&T signs product-testing agreement

The pact is part of a plan by the university to increase its revenue and find jobs for graduates.

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GREENSBORO -- N.C. A&T has signed a contract with a local engineering firm to test software and products, Doug Speight, the head of the Office of Technology Transfer, said Thursday.

Sensory Analytics makes custom software and technology that mea-

sures the thickness of coatings and controls color applications for products across a wide range of manufacturing industries.

Sensory and the school will pursue contracts with NASA for work on its flight vehicles and with the Department of Defense to test things, including corrosion on airplanes. A&T works with NASA on other projects.

The agreement is part of a push by A&T to partner with business to bolster its revenue, commercialize its inventions and find job paths for students after graduation.

"The more successful Sensory Analytics is, the more opportunities there will be for our students," Speight said.

The firm hired an A&T physics doctoral student -- a practice that Speight would like to see replicated as the school increases its research partnerships.

Professors will not be pulled away from current responsibilities because the work fits with projects that they already are studying, he said.

The CEO of Greensboro-based Sen-

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sory, Greg Frisby, said A&T's "track record in related research in combination with our contacts will help both organizations drive new business."

Frisby started the firm in late 2004 with two other regional entrepreneurs, Doug Young and Joseph Price. The firm employs six people full time, Frisby said.

Formed from the acquisition of two regional companies, the firm is not making money yet, he said.

In the past year, Speight said, the school has doubled the amount of revenue from contracts such as those with Sensory from the year earlier. He would not provide figures, however, nor say how much the school would receive from its contract with Sensory.

A&T has recently signed similar agreements with Safety Systems, a High Point firm that makes retention walls for motor sports. It has also signed a research and testing deal with Transportation Systems Solutions, a High Point firm that makes plastic panels for trucks and storage units.

The firm recently received about \$248,000 in business incentives from the state and local governments to expand in High Point.

Nationally, academia has seen a big increase in technology transfer activity.

Before 1980, universities patented fewer than 250 inventions per year and turned practically none of the ideas into products or businesses.

By comparison, between 1991 and 2002, annual inventions disclosures increased nearly 250 percent to 15,573; the number of patents filed rose 310 percent to 7,741; and

the number of university licenses to businesses increased more than 365 percent to 4,673, according to a survey from the trade group Association of University Technology Managers.

This all came about as a result of the Bayh-Dole Act, passed in 1980, experts say. The act allows federally funded groups the right to own patents they receive from the sponsored research. It also says those patents should be commercialized as products or businesses.

A&T has repeatedly said it would like to commercialize a large portion of its research, much of which focuses on engineered materials that can be turned into everything from "smart" textiles to wear-resistant or heat-resistant coatings for planes and weapons.

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