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Illinois schools more innovative, but still trail powerhouses





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 By [John Pletz](#) August 22, 2012

(Crain's) — Researchers at Illinois universities are stepping up their patents and commercializing more of the technology developed on campus, but they still lag the nation's powerhouses and some neighbors.

The number of patents licensed by the state's universities rose to 142 from 130 between 2007 and 2010, according to the most recent data from the Deerfield-based Association of University Technology Managers. That's faster than California, which grew at 7 percent, but slower than Florida's 33 percent growth. However, Illinois lags far behind California in the amount of technology it licenses. California licensed 461 patents. Michigan universities licensed 148, up 3 percent from 2007.

The patent data is included in a look at technology transfer at the state's universities as part of the Illinois Innovation Index, which was released by the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, World Business Chicago, Illinois Science and Technology Coalition and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

The most encouraging bit of data is the number of startups formed from technology created at the state's universities, which grew to 27, a record, from 17 in 2010, said Mark Harris, CEO of the tech coalition.

"It shows there is concerted effort to move innovation through the pipeline," he said. "What we're seeing is the state's universities are really tying together multiple programs — linking business schools and research programs, tapping into all their resources, forming incubators and technology

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parks."

Ideally, state leaders would like to see more companies such as AuraSense Therapeutics LLC, a biomedical startup from Northwestern University professor Chad Mirkin, who is on his **third spinoff**.

The state's universities are cranking up **technology output**, too. Researchers at Illinois universities produced 11.4 patents per 1,000 doctorate holders in science and engineering between 1997 and 2008, according to the most recent data available from the National Science Foundation. That's a 54 percent increase in output.

However, Illinois has a long way to go to catch up. California leads at 17.3 patents per researcher. Wisconsin is fourth at 15.5 patents per researcher, a 42 percent increase. Michigan was sixth at 13.6. Illinois was eighth.

The University of Illinois sharply stepped up its patent production last year, according to data from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. U of I received 83 patents last year, up from 75 a year earlier. It won 301 patents between 2007 and 2011, the most of any university in the state. Northwestern University was second with 193, including 59 last year, compared with 55 in 2010.