

*Panel to forward
suggestions today*

Tech looks to boost businesses

A 23-member committee is expected to suggest ways Virginia Tech can contribute more to economic development.

By JEFF STURGEON
THE ROANOKE TIMES

When a panel of state business and government representatives meets at Virginia Tech today, university leaders are likely to hear two things: that the school's support of economic development is good, and that it can get better.

Last October, university President Paul Torgersen announced

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LARRY HINCKER
TECH SPOKESMAN

the formation of a 19-person panel to advise administrators on ways to improve Tech's already-extensive economic development efforts, which revolve around training, research and technology licensing. The advisory panel, which now has 23 members, took almost a year to meet because of the panelists' busy schedules, university spokesman Larry Hincker said.

But today, they will gather to begin a day and a half of meetings with Tech officials on campus. The meeting will be closed to the public.

University officials are quick to point out the school's mission is education. "Economic development is a relatively recent evolution," Hincker said. But the administrators say that they believe Virginia Tech can become an even bigger stimulant to Virginia's economy.

One subject that could get attention is how readily the university shares its research breakthroughs with industry.

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Tech

"The conventional wisdom and intuitive feeling is that more can be done," said panelist William Stafford, economic development manager at Virginia Power.

Panelist Jill Barr, an economic developer for Caroline County, said she hopes to discuss sweetening incentives for faculty members' economic development work.

To panelist Charles Yates, an economic developer in Virginia's coal country, the most important thing the university could do in his region is help bolster its growing "teleservice" industry, which consists of five centers where workers provide phone-based services. The facilities house directory assistance operators, phone-survey takers and personnel who relay typed messages for the hearing impaired, among others.

Virginia Tech describes its economic development work as diverse. It supports a business park next to the campus, the Corporate Research Center; trains government officials in economic development; conducts research for companies for a fee; helps entrepreneurs start companies; advises companies on foreign trade; and offers professional training for non-students, including management development courses through the Pamplin College of Business.

A university-affiliated organization manages 90 license agreements, and 35 percent of the license holders used the technology they are renting from Tech to start companies.

The college has 25,000 students, nearly 1,500 faculty members, 900 laboratories and 21 research centers.

John Phillips, hired in February as the university's economic

development officer, said university administrators themselves will ask for tips to better market the services available to industry.

Criticism that Tech left company representatives, government

officials and others to find the help they need from the university on their own contributed to the decision to hire Phillips in February.

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