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"Chempreneurs" program produces bond between FSU chemistry and business students

BY WILL BROWN • DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER • APRIL 23, 2009

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Adam Kramer never thought he would attend a biotech conference, but that is what happened this spring through his experience in a pilot program between two vastly different programs at Florida State University.

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Kramer was one of eight students who participated in the inaugural "chempreneurs" program designed to develop a commercialization plan for technology created within the chemistry department and coupled doctoral candidates in chemistry with undergraduates who are in the university's Jim Moran Institute.

Thursday, the pairings presented their plans before a panel of peers, professors and faculty from the Jim Moran Institute, College of Business and Office of Research.

Kramer worked with Doug Engel to develop Florida Custom Synthesis Inc., a company that provides premium chemical and pharmaceutical synthesis solutions to larger companies. The pair even highlighted Tallahassee's perceived lack of incubator space for biotech companies like theirs compared to Tampa, Orlando and Gainesville.

"We feel the talent is here and the potential is here," Kramer said. "We feel if we state here we can create local jobs and grow the biotech industry in Northwest Florida."

On a day when college presidents from across the state asked the Legislature not to drastically reduce funding for higher education in the state, Caryn Beck-Dudley, dean of the FSU College of Business said partnerships like the chempreneurs program not only provide students with a unique opportunity to collaborate but potentially create economic prosperity for the state.

"When you cross disciplines, really good things can happen as long as you don't put up barriers on what (students) do," Beck-Dudley said.

The presentations focused on commercializing technologies that may not be known beyond the scientific community, but may have a wide-ranging impact on science, and the type of research conducted at the university.

Conrad Gleber and Bob Demont devised a plan for commercializing the combination of two drugs that already exist — neither mentioned which drugs were used, citing proprietary concerns— to make antibiotics more



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effective without raising toxicity.

Ricardo Guerra and Dru Roycik presented a plan that would remove albumin — but not other proteins — from blood, therefore allowing scientists to detect diseases faster and treat them more effectively.

Meanwhile, Zaki Estephan and Travis Engebretsen discussed a technology that would remove polishes and other compounds through chemical slurry.

University officials, stressed the chempreneurs program did not cost the business or chemistry departments any money — except postage to mail patent applications — because the program was funded by a grant from the Jim Moran Foundation.

Joe Schlenoff, chairman of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, said working with smart students like those that participated "make education worthwhile." However, he warned partnerships like the one incubated this spring do not happen accidently, and education infrastructure has been developed for years to make opportunities like Thursday's possible.

Contact business reporter Will Brown at (850) 599-2312 or wbrown@Tallahassee.com.

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