



University of Central Florida Adopts a Campus-Wide Methodology for Commercial Assessment Using **So what? who cares? why you?**

Founded in 1963, The University of Central Florida (UCF) has grown to have the seventh-largest enrollment in the United States with more than 46,000 full time students. Receiving over \$100 million annually in research awards, UCF is also a major hub of innovation and a leader in entrepreneurial activity, averaging 125 new invention disclosures per year.

The success of the university’s entrepreneurship programs can be traced in large part to a unique collaborative relationship between the school’s commercialization and research groups. Its Entrepreneurship Network aligns the efforts of the university’s College of Business Administration, Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI), Technology Transfer Office, Technology Incubator, Venture Lab and Small Business Development Center.

Even with a close working relationship between these entrepreneurial organizations, however, the university found it difficult to establish a cross-campus commercialization outreach program accessible to faculty and students from all colleges and the business community. “We needed a way to integrate our languages and activities to appeal to both academic and business audiences across the university,” notes Dr. Cameron Ford, Founding Director of the school’s Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI). “And we wanted a way to educate the entrepreneurial community on the commercialization process and the essentials involved.”

About the University of Central Florida

- 46,000 students
- 123 buildings
- 2nd largest business school in US
- Earns over \$100 million in annual research awards
- Central Florida Research Park recognized as one of the top ten research parks in the world
- UCF Technology Business Incubator recently earned the National Business Incubator Association (NBIA) #1 Ranking
- UCF home page: <http://www.ucf.edu/>
- CEI website: <http://www.cei.ucf.edu/>
- TTO website: <http://tt.research.ucf.edu/>

UCF also needed to ensure that it fostered projects with the greatest chance of success. “Only a small proportion of research projects ever become commercial products,” explains Joe Giampapa, Associate Director of Technology Transfer. “We wanted a methodology for picking out the winning bets. We can’t say ‘yes’ to every researcher looking to commercialize his or her research, but turning down a faculty member’s idea isn’t easy — we have to have a solid basis for our decisions.”

With these goals in mind, the university purchased the “*So what? who cares? why you?*™: *The Inventor’s Commercialization Toolkit*” workbook and adopted

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the methodology as its standard tool for commercial assessment within its academic and technology transfer organizations.

A Standard Methodology

Since his arrival at UCF, Giampapa had been looking for a resource he could use to help his group judge invention ideas and communicate the commercialization process. “We had a home-grown methodology that had evolved over time, some best-practices based on research literature, and an internal scoring sheet suggested by one of the law firms we use, but none of those really stood out as a great methodology for what we needed to do.”

So, when the So what? who cares? why you? workbook landed on Giampapa’s desk, he took a close look. Its workbook format appealed greatly to Giampapa, along with its simple, three-step methodology. “It’s organized so that you have to focus on what your value proposition really is, who your customers will be, and why you will have a competitive edge. That really reduces the complexity required to assess whether an idea has commercial merit.” Giampapa saw potential in using *So what? who cares? why you?* as the standardized reference source he was looking for to effectively sort through research disclosures at the technology transfer office. He also felt that it could help the Entrepreneurship Network’s overarching goal to educate students and faculty on the commercial assessment process.

So, Giampapa gave a copy of the workbook to Dr. Ford of the CEI. “I saw value in the methodology immediately,” echoes Ford. “*So what? who cares? why you?* is theoretically sophisticated enough to satisfy our academic requirements, street-smart enough to appeal to our coaches and investors, and practical enough to hit the primary concerns of the technology transfer group. It’s also concise and accessible to a very broad audience, so it’s a very flexible tool.”

Campus-Wide Applications

Today, the *So what? who cares? why you?* methodology is being used across the university in academic programs and throughout the technology transfer office. Dr. Ford uses it as a textbook to guide student research in his undergraduate business development courses. He invites guest speakers to address issues

raised by the workbook and has students complete the worksheets as homework assignments. His graduate students also use the workbook, giving presentations on each section of the methodology.

“It helps students ask the right questions and provides direction and a framework for their research,” says Ford. “I also know that *So what? who cares? why you?* is being used in a brand new commercialization course being offered on campus, so it’s making its way into the academic side of the university through a number of venues.”

Elsewhere on campus, Giampapa provides the workbook to faculty who visit the Technology Transfer Office and express interest in commercializing an idea. “In the past, we’ve had a tough time getting our inventors to focus exactly on what problem they are trying to solve. Now, we have a methodology to help them assess their own disclosures to see if there really is commercial value in them.”

So what? who Cares? why You? also helps Giampapa meet his group’s mandate to capture, protect and exploit innovation through commercial licensing or the creation of startup companies. “Having a standard commercialization framework helps us ensure that we’re bringing only the best ideas through to the incubation stage, and increases the chances that those ideas will make it to market.”

By fostering entrepreneurial activity throughout the university, UCF also aims to help its students prepare for the future and contribute to the region’s economic growth. “What we want to do is give people an appreciation that they have alternatives to traditional employment,” says Ford. “We want them to be able to take a look at their research and realize that they might be able to use that research to create their own job and to create high-quality jobs in our region.”

He adds, “The *So what? who cares? why you?* methodology cuts to the core commercialization issues and puts researchers in a position to seriously consider the potential of their ideas. And, by spreading the method across the university, we’re all singing the same tune and providing our students and faculty with a clear, coherent story.”