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I.B.M. and Universities Plan Collaboration

By [STEVE LOHR](#)

[I.B.M.](#) and seven universities have agreed to embark on a series of collaborative software research projects and to make the results of the work in fields like privacy, security and medical decision-making freely available.

The initiative, which I.B.M. is expected to announce today, is a break with the usual pattern of corporate-sponsored research at universities that typically involves lengthy negotiations over intellectual property rights.

The projects are also evidence that American companies and universities are searching for ways to work together more easily and less hampered by legal wrangling about who holds the patents to research. Those negotiations, according to specialists, can take a year or more — slowing the pace of innovation and prompting companies to team with researchers in foreign countries.

The projects announced today are being done under the guidelines of the Open Collaborative Research program, which began last year with several universities and four technology companies, [Hewlett-Packard](#), [Intel](#) and [Cisco](#), as well as I.B.M.

“Universities have made life increasingly difficult to do research with them because of all the contractual issues around intellectual property,” said Stuart Feldman, vice president for computer science at I.B.M.’s research laboratories. “We would like the universities to open up again.”

The current problem, research experts say, is that well-intentioned policies meant to encourage universities to make their research available for commercial uses have swung too far. The shift began with the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which allowed universities to hold the patents on federally funded research and to license that intellectual property. Since then, universities have often viewed themselves as idea factories and, like many corporations, have sought to cash in on their intellectual property.

But there is a sense at both universities and corporations that the pendulum has swung too far,

and adopting less-restrictive intellectual property policies may benefit both sides.

“Universities in the United States want to protect their intellectual property but more and more see the importance of collaboration,” Elisa Bertino, a computer scientist at [Purdue University](#), said.

Purdue and [Carnegie Mellon University](#) have agreed to work with I.B.M. researchers on a long-term project on privacy and security-policy management. The appeal, Ms. Bertino said, is that I.B.M. has a strong research team in security, and that working with a corporation ensures that university researchers get to work on real-world problems rather than academic theory.

In addition to security and privacy, the joint projects will be in software quality, mathematical optimization software and clinical decision support software. Besides Purdue and Carnegie Mellon, the universities are the [University of California](#), Berkeley; University of California, Davis; [Columbia University](#); [Georgia Institute of Technology](#); and [Rutgers University](#).

The projects are long-term efforts, intended to span years, and veer toward fundamental research to create building blocks of technology that will be used in products someday.

While American and Western European companies are increasingly setting up research labs in fast-growing emerging nations like China and India, they still do most of their advanced research in labs in developed economies, often in collaboration with local universities, according to a report published last week in Science magazine.

Nurturing that university-corporate collaboration will be an important ingredient in economic growth and national competitiveness, said Jerry Thursby, an economist at [Emory University](#), and author with his wife, Marie C. Thursby, a professor at the [Georgia Tech](#) College of Management, of the research report in Science.

“This ability to strike reasonable deals for both the corporate and university sides is a big issue,” Mr. Thursby said. “Nobody has really solved this yet but a lot of people are working on it.”

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