

Mandate of new U of T bio-tech program causes debate

Business and science are a lethal combination, critics of new position say

BY JESSE CLARKE

TORONTO (CUP) — University of Toronto faculty members are expressing mixed reactions to the announcement of a new graduate program that will focus on a combination of bio-technology and business.

The proposed Master's program, expected to open in the year 2000, will offer courses in Management, Accounting, Marketing and practical knowledge of bio-technological research. Students in the program will be offered work placements in the pharmaceutical industry.

"We've listened to what industry has been saying as we have designed this program," said Ulrich Krull, the new Astra chair of bio-technology, whose position became available due to a recent \$2.3-million donation from Astra Pharma Inc.

The donation will be divided between the Bio-technology chair and an Organic Synthesis chair.

After being matched by both the university and Ontario government, a total of a \$6.9-million is going toward the development of these

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disciplines.

Bio-technology deals with manipulating living organisms to serve human needs, including everything from genetic engineering and altering agricultural crop characteristics to gene splicing and human cloning.

Only one course on ethics will be included in the program, which administrators liken to an Executive Master's of Business Administration for the pharmaceutical industry.

Critics charge that by combining the fields of business and science, the ethical treatment of bio-technology studies will be

compromised.

While researchers rely on the financial support of industry, corporate gifts like Astra's are a mixed blessing for universities, says pharmacy Prof. Dennis Osmond.

"The devil is in the details of agreements like this," he said. "While it is hard to argue with the benefits to the students... suddenly there's a name of a company attached to a chair, and although all the official workings will say that there's no control, there will be a certain amount of kow-towing to the one who pays the piper. And then the question is, how much is too much?"

Osmond points to the current controversy over U of T researcher Dr. Nancy Olivieri as an example of the kinds of problems that can arise.

The Hospital for Sick

Children researcher was conducting clinical trials of a new drug when she decided to inform patients of possible adverse side effects. In response, the drug's manufacturer pulled its funding of the trials, saying Olivieri had broken her confidentiality agreement with the company.

Krull dismisses such criticisms.

[pharmaceutical] industry were going to give money with strings attached, it would be outside this program."

Adel Sedra, the university's vice-president and provost, agrees that because the Master's in Bio-technology is a professional graduate program, and not a research degree, people shouldn't be so quick to criticize it.

"I don't see any ethical conflict," he said. "This is not a research program."

Diana Berowsky, of the U of T development office, also sees no problem with the program.

"Bio-technology is part of the real world and needs to play by real world rules," she said. "I

don't think there's a clash. There's only a clash if there's an assumption that business and management are unethical, and I don't agree with this."

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"It's important to understand that the program and the training going on within the program are independent from research going on in this field... If the

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