Dr. Jocelyn Turner-Musa of Morgan State University discusses the ASCEND Center for Biomedical Research, an innovative student training program designed to increase diversity in the biomedical research workforce.
“This was really an opportunity for us to showcase the research prowess of our faculty, staff, and students,” said Dr. Victor McCrary, vice president for research and economic development at Morgan State University.

The annual Innovation Day was the brain child of Morgan State President Dr. David Wilson, says McCrary, who wanted to make sure the state’s lawmakers were aware of the innovations being produced at Morgan and the economic potential of those innovations for the state.

For example, the university’s environmental laboratory on the Patuxent River, the Patuxent Environmental and Aquatic Research Laboratory, is developing sustainable ways for the area’s oyster farmers to grow oysters. “In the past, they dredged the oysters,” said McCrary, “and what happens is, that’s not a sustainable method, versus, we can teach them how to actually grow and harvest their oysters in shallow water.”

The university is also conducting research in conjunction with the U.S. Navy to develop a new way to ignite airplane ejector seats using an electronic-based charge rather than the current chemical-based charge. This could help save crucial moments for an ejecting pilot and lead to even more lives saved than the current method.

Morgan has also partnered with the Maryland Innovation Initiative, which seeks to make academic research commercially viable, and is genetically modifying algae, which normally grows in fresh water, in order to allow it to grow in salt water. Because most of the water on Earth is salt water, this innovation could allow scientists or companies to grow algae in our vast salt water oceans, which can then be used to create oil and biofuels.

“We're not doing research for the sake of research,” said McCrary. “We’re doing research that will have impact and lead to greater health, wellness, and economic development not only for Baltimore but for the state of Maryland and the nation as a whole.”

Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford attended the event and praised Morgan for its involvement with the Maryland Innovation Initiative, and for pursuing research that can also serve as an engine for economic development said McCrary.

“We are very active in taking our research to the point where start-up companies will be formed,” said McCrary, who added that Morgan produced its first start-up in the last month.

Nationwide, says McCrary, universities are changing their patent and intellectual property policies to make it easier for their researchers to take ideas developed under the auspices of the university to the marketplace. Morgan is also in the process of aligning its policies with best practices in order to incentivize its researchers to turn their projects into companies.

“Morgan is looking forward to continuing to be Maryland’s premier urban research university,” says McCrary, “and part of that is creating the ecosystem so that folks will come to Morgan not only for our academic curriculum but for the opportunity to start their own company.”

ralejandro@afro.com