



# :insideview

## profile feature

# UC San Diego

**Paul Roben**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Commercialization for the University of California, San Diego.

Research at the University of California, San Diego (UC San Diego) is responsible for billions of dollars of economic benefits per year to the economy of California and the nation. The university has as its mission to put its discoveries and inventions to work for the benefit of humankind. It is aggressively building a new spirit of entrepreneurial achievement, encouraging both faculty members and students to apply their energy and imaginations to our most pressing challenges.

In support of this objective, the university hired Paul Roben as its first associate vice chancellor for innovation and commercialization in the Office of Research Affairs. Roben is a PhD biotechnologist with deep expertise in technology transfer. He gained this proficiency from positions at the Salk Institute and at Innovation Ireland, where he co-authored a national economic development plan for Ireland. He also co-founded and managed his own biotech start-up.

In Roben's view, all UC San Diego academic disciplines — from the arts to the sciences — are constructing an “innovation ecosystem” integrated with the surrounding community. The goal is to systematically turn ideas into products and services that improve people's lives, spark economic growth, and ensure a better future.

### **Q: What was the first thing you wanted when taking on your new role?**

I wanted to facilitate getting our technology into the hands of people who can commercialize it, much faster and much more transparently. Rather than viewing technology transfer as a transactional process aimed at driving revenues for the university, I wanted it recognised as a relationship exercise.

So we restructured all of our licensing agreements so that they wouldn't be barriers to innovation. We've taken a completely different approach, which we call “open flow innovation.” For example, if there is a startup that wants to use UC San Diego technology, we don't charge them anything for a few years. We want startup leaders to take our technology, develop it, and take the time they need to see what they can do with it. If they need more help, we can see where we can assist. The focus has gone from this being a revenue-generation function to being focused on getting our technologies out there.

### **Q: How is technology transfer changing?**

Traditionally, technology transfer was pigeonholed as a way of protecting intellectual property and issuing licenses. But the future of tech transfer is far more integrated into the university's strategic vision and economic and social development. Here at UC San Diego, the response to my office and what we're doing here has been extremely positive, in part because we've tried to get rid of bureaucracy. License agreements, for example, shouldn't slow things up — ever. With our new approach, we do licenses in a matter of days rather than months.

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### **Q: What is an “innovation ecosystem,” and what does it mean for the future of the university?**

Chancellor Pradeep Khosla and Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra Brown have taken a broad, strategic approach to ensure that the university is a key player in driving economic and social development in the region, and we have put processes in place to ensure that the talent and innovations we're developing on campus are put to use in measurable and impactful ways. My job is to implement that strategy.

There are two sides to this. One is developing the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship on campus, and the second is developing the ecosystem. This is about ensuring we are working with all our partners across the region — including industry, city governments, non-profits, and other types of organizations — in a much more efficient way. Our region extends from south of San Diego in Tijuana, Mexico, to north of us in Orange County.

All of these partners have a huge amount to contribute, especially because a lot of future challenges are not going to be solved on the campus. They are going to be solved through partnerships, using the cities themselves as living laboratories. So the question is how can we work better with these allies, all of whom help form the innovation ecosystem.

### **Q: What have you initiated that is designed to foster this ecosystem?**

We've launched several key initiatives, including an Entrepreneurs-in-Residence program featuring mature business experts, investors and innovators who counsel and guide faculty members and students. We also recently kicked off a training series on Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants. These are offered to ventures by the US federal government, to encourage early-stage technology commercialization. Through these kinds of events, we're driving not just the capability but also the formation of the network of startups.

Networking is absolutely critical to my strategy. One way of describing innovation is as a diversity of thought leading to original ideas of value. To succeed in fostering this innovation ecosystem, we have to create opportunities for networking and engagement, where people who might not normally come together can do so in a productive way.

### **Q: How are you fostering the innovation ecosystem among faculty?**

The university's business is not creating products and services. But it is one link in the chain. The billion dollars each year that we spend on research at UC San Diego is public money, and this needs to get translated to public benefit. So the message to faculty is that the university is very supportive of their efforts to engage with others to ensure that their research, at some point, becomes products or services or social innovations for the betterment of society. The university will support any efforts in that direction and any new models for them to engage with new partners, and we will try to make that process as easy, transparent, and beneficial to their labs as possible.

UC San Diego

# Evolving the Innovation Ecosystem

The innovation ecosystem at the **University of California, San Diego** speeds discoveries and inventions to the marketplaces of the world.

Pioneering faculty and bold, inquisitive students are solving problems in medicine, science, energy, the arts, communications, and other areas just now emerging.

Tap into UC San Diego's ingenuity at the Office of Innovation and Commercialization, where technology transfer, intellectual property, innovation design, and industry partnering work together to better the world.

Find an idea, solve a problem, and spark potent economic growth.

[invent.ucsd.edu](http://invent.ucsd.edu)

