



*Imad Ajjawi ('18, MBA) discusses his product, Globier, at the reception. Photos by Erika Johnson/University Communications*

## **UC San Diego's Veteran Entrepreneur Initiatives Take Flight** **New programs to help veterans launch second career after military service**

When Ryan Ruehl left the Marine Corps after five years of service as an artillery officer with two deployments, he knew he wanted to work in the medical device industry—something he'd been passionate about since high school. He already had a degree in biomedical engineering and his time in the Marines had given him the leadership skills to be successful. But several of his early startups failed. "It's really, really hard to start a business with no support or like-minded people around," he said.

Ruehl wanted to pursue an MBA in order to learn more about marketing, finance, strategy and entrepreneurship and enrolled at UC San Diego's Rady School of Management. In what can only be called kismet, on his first day of school he struck up a friendship with fellow MBA student Dr. Jon Wilensky. That friendship led to the creation of Braykion, a tech startup that seeks to reduce hospital-acquired infections in patients through wearable devices. A year into it, they have secured an investor and expect to launch a pilot program at the Jacobs Medical Center over the summer.

While Ruehl was able to find a pathway to success, his story emphasizes a common struggle among veteran entrepreneurs: they have ideas but no practical knowledge of the business world and no cohort to help them on their journey. This is compounded by acquiring skills in the military that are highly desirable, but difficult to translate into corporate America.

Not all veterans are able to enroll in business school as Ruehl did. In order to better serve the men and women who have served our country, UC San Diego is expanding its already robust line-up of entrepreneur programs to include two specifically geared toward veterans: a Certificate in Entrepreneurship, operated through the Office of Research Affairs; and Veteran Ventures, an accelerator program offered by Rady School of Management. In a truly non-traditional move, veterans are not required to have any affiliation with UC San Diego and tuition is free.

“The genesis for these programs was the belief that our veterans have unique knowledge and experience, and our goal is to help them turn their ideas into reality that benefits society,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “This is our responsibility as a public institution and it’s a way to give back to our veterans who have so bravely protected our citizens and nation.”



From left to right: Robert Smith and Ryan Ruehl discuss Braykion at the reception.



On right: Ron Baldwin discusses his business, MobeWash, at the reception.

Research Affairs’ Office of Innovation and Commercialization is responsible for organizing and developing the certificate program, recruiting instructors, and finding venues for the classes. Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra Brown said she felt it was important that the university not just toe the line when it comes to veteran programming as much as redraw the line.

“At UC San Diego, we wanted to do more—to go deeper, be of better service. We are not just a veteran-friendly campus. We are a veteran-empowering campus,” she said.

The next Certificate in Entrepreneurship course will launch June 7 with the City of Carlsbad. The six-week course is designed to help veterans acquire the necessary business acumen to give their startups the best chance of success. Budding entrepreneurs will learn to turn their inspirations into viable businesses; create dynamic frameworks to test and evolve ideas; and create a scalable, sustainable model. The course will also guide them in telling their story to potential investors, gathering customer feedback and other relevant market data, financing their startups, and recruiting and motivating stellar employees. For more information on the Certificate in Entrepreneurship course , email [pradeep.khosla@ucsd.edu](mailto:pradeep.khosla@ucsd.edu).

Veteran Ventures is geared toward veteran entrepreneurs who are ready to move from business concept to viable operation, and focuses on mentoring and coaching. The Rady School launched their first pilot program at the end of April and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Vish Krishnan, a professor of innovation, technology and operations at Rady, is the current faculty advisor for Veteran Ventures. In his Lab to Market Workshop, he observed veterans struggle as they transitioned from the military to civilian world and thought they could benefit from extra resources. “The goal of the program is to help veterans receive inspiration, insight and seed funding to build and scale these ventures,” he said.



*Michael Hayden speaking at the reception.*

Michael Hayden, a veteran Marine with more than 20 years of service, is himself an entrepreneur and also acts as the program facilitator for Veteran Ventures. He praised the school's efforts, saying, "To have a school as prestigious as UC San Diego create these programs geared specifically toward vets is incredible, especially since the community of veterans in San Diego is so large—around 250,000. I can't thank UC San Diego, Rady School of Management and namely Vish Krishnan enough for what they're doing."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, San Diego County is home to the country's third largest veteran population. Speaking at a recent reception to celebrate UC San Diego's new programs, Congressman Scott Peters, who serves California's 52nd Congressional District, remarked

that "We have a moral obligation to keep our promises to our veterans, who deserve more than our gratitude for the sacrifices they made in service to our country. I want to recognize Chancellor Kholsa and his team at UC San Diego for extending educational opportunities to even more of our veterans. Like so many San Diego initiatives, this program can serve as a model for other universities and communities throughout the country on how to honor our nation's heroes."

As a veteran entrepreneur himself, Congressman Darrell Issa spoke from experience: "As someone who is a veteran and who left the army more mature than I went in, there was no better place to use those skills than as an entrepreneur. But I made a lot of mistakes. I didn't have any way to fill in the blanks of what I didn't know. Now, those resources exist at places like UC San Diego." Issa represents California's 49th Congressional District, which includes Camp Pendleton, the largest Marine Corps training facility in the United States.



*Darrell Issa and Pradeep Khosla at the reception.*

UC San Diego's enhanced focus on military entrepreneurs deepens the already strong bond that exists between the campus and the veteran population. In order to better answer the needs of veteran undergraduates, UC San Diego established the Student Veteran Resource Center in 2013. The center seeks to ensure that military-affiliated students successfully make the transition to campus life and offers resources such as peer-to-peer support, mentoring and social networking.

The campus also has a long-standing relationship with VA San Diego Health Care System. Many of UC San Diego's researchers and physicians have joint appointments with the VA, which directly impacts the clinical treatment of our veteran community. Congresswoman Susan Davis, who represents California's 53rd Congressional District, stated, "UC San Diego and the VA bring together their shared values to support our veterans in building their entrepreneurial skill set, which will translate into new businesses, jobs, and economic development for the region."

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