

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

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UC San Diego is the First Aira-Enabled University in the United States

Blind and low vision members of UC San Diego's campus community have access at no charge to pioneering accessibility technology



Jimmy Cong, a vision impaired UC San Diego student, began using Aira last September as a beta-tester for the technology. Photo by Erik Jepsen, UC San Diego Publications.

Aira is pleased to announce that the University of California San Diego is the first Aira-enabled university in the United States. Aira, a San Diego-based startup, leverages wearable technology, artificial intelligence and live, human agents to deliver real-time visual description

for people who are blind or have low vision. UC San Diego is the first university to join the Aira Campus Network, offering free access to the pioneering accessibility technology to vision impaired members of its entire campus community including students, staff and faculty.

The seeds for starting Aira were planted in 2014 when Suman Kanuganti, an MBA student at UC San Diego's Rady School of Management, was inspired by a close friend who lost his vision. Kanuganti worked with his colleague, Yuja Chang, to develop Aira (EYE-rah)—an operating system that enables blind individuals to connect with a network of certified agents via smart glasses and smart phones, allowing the agents to see a blind person's environment in real time.

"We are proud to showcase innovation developed by UC San Diego alumni," said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. "Offering Aira's groundbreaking technology to blind and low vision students, staff and faculty underscores our campus commitment to creating a more inclusive community."

Kanuganti noted, "As an alumnus, UC San Diego has a special place in my heart. We are based here in San Diego, and have received so much support from the university as our company continues to grow. We are quite proud to see UC San Diego become the first university in the Aira Campus Network."



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One tap of a button instantly connects blind and low vision individuals with a professional Aira agent who delivers visual assistance anytime and anywhere. Serving as visual interpreters for the blind, the agents help users accomplish a wide range of daily tasks—from navigating busy streets to recognizing faces to traveling the world. The technology can be accessed through any camera-enabled iOS or Android device using the app, and can be paired with smart glasses provided by Aira as part of a paid

subscription.

UC San Diego is partnering with Aira to enhance the college experience for people who are blind or have low vision. The La Jolla, Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Hillcrest campuses are now Aira Access Locations—offering access to the Aira service at no cost to

campus community members. Campus community members can learn how to access the Aira service at no cost [here](#).

Jimmy Cong, a vision impaired UC San Diego student, began using Aira last September as a beta-tester for the technology. A double major in both music composition and visual arts/digital media, Cong was diagnosed with retina blastoma when he was three months old. He uses the agent-assisted service in traveling around campus, helping to see the touch screen on the microwave or difficulty with an ATM, and with assignments.

“If a professor sends me a document at 4:30 p.m. and the Office for Students with Disabilities is closing soon, what do I do? I can send the PDF to the Aira agent and they can either type it all out, or I just ask them to read it and I take notes on my end,” he said

An added benefit for Cong—Aira assists with his DJ sideline as well. “I go by ‘DJCJ’ and I have DJed for countless events both around campus and off campus. Besides using Aira for traveling, reading inaccessible PDF documents, and navigating software applications, Aira has definitely helped me in using DJ equipment that is not accessible for those with low vision.”

Cong added, “Aira is basically like a friend with you 24-7. Aira makes it possible for me to regularly participate in class with the other students. That's the biggest thing.”



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