

Innovation and Interdisciplinary Research Excel Under the Leadership of UC San Diego's Chancellor

Collaboratories Funded for UCSD Student/Faculty Projects

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A new innovative program promoting and maximizing interdisciplinary opportunities is being developed to support small groups of students and faculty members who seek to undertake cooperative/collaborative research at the University of California, San Diego. Termed "collaboratories," the concept was developed by UCSD Chancellor Marye Anne Fox as a combination of collaboration and laboratory work and involves funding for the multi-disciplinary group effort rather than the more traditional individual research.

According to Fox, collaboratories will provide scholarship support for groups of students who will work jointly under the supervision of faculty members from more than one or two traditional disciplines - and disciplines that may be far a field from each other, such as psychology, chemistry, and English.

"It's easy to collaborate between chemistry and chemical engineering, or between physics and electrical engineering," Fox says. "Some collaboration is more difficult to achieve. The idea is to provide support that encourages the extra effort it takes to make these multi-faceted collaborations work." With problems being increasingly found at the intersections between disciplines, Fox says, "the extra effort of generating a team and working with students whose majors may not be in the researcher's own area of expertise is a new and innovative way of thinking about education."

The funding to seed these collaboratories will focus on providing tuition and fee support for talented students, both domestic and foreign. A funding goal is that when a collaboratory is being established, there will be no financial barriers to including people from different backgrounds.

With seed money in hand from a private funding source, a goal of the program will be to attract federal funding.

Fox says the new program benefits faculty in that it "provides a financially risk-free environment forming groups of multi-skilled students to develop the preliminary results needed for successful federal or foundation funding." Meanwhile, it "provides an incentive for graduate students to think beyond their disciplines."

In addition to their problem-solving goal, the collaboratories will be designed both to facilitate the intellectual exchange among faculty and among faculty and students and to develop enhanced teamwork among all participants.

The idea of collaboratories was devised by William A. Wulf, president of the National Academy of Engineering, envisaging collaborating across physical science, engineering, and computation.

"Our program at UCSD is broader," Fox says, "in that it supports collaborations among many different disciplines, as long as there are three to five areas of expertise brought together to solve a particular problem."

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