

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Daniel Kane

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From left to right: Kenan Azam, Thomas Dadourian, Rajesh Grover and Victor Shiu at the premiere of Risking Aspirations on Oct. 29, 2014 at the Rady School of Management at UC San Diego.

Film Project Highlights Entrepreneurism at UC San Diego and on Torrey Pines Mesa

A breakthrough today was a crazy idea yesterday.

That's a line from a new film project that documents a student-driven effort at UC San Diego and research institutions across the Torrey Pines Mesa to encourage students to turn ideas and breakthroughs into startup companies. The short documentary film was produced and directed by Rajesh Grover, an assistant professor at The Scripps Research Institute and a visiting investigator at the J. Craig Venter Institute in La Jolla, and Kenan Azam, a data scientist in the laboratory of UC San Diego bioengineering professor Shankar Subramaniam. Both are former leaders of the UC San Diego Entrepreneur Challenge for the 2011-12 academic year.

“The documentary conveys the powerful message that entrepreneurial skills can mitigate unemployment and poverty by enabling students with the potential to be self-employed, and help create job opportunities in the community,” said Azam.

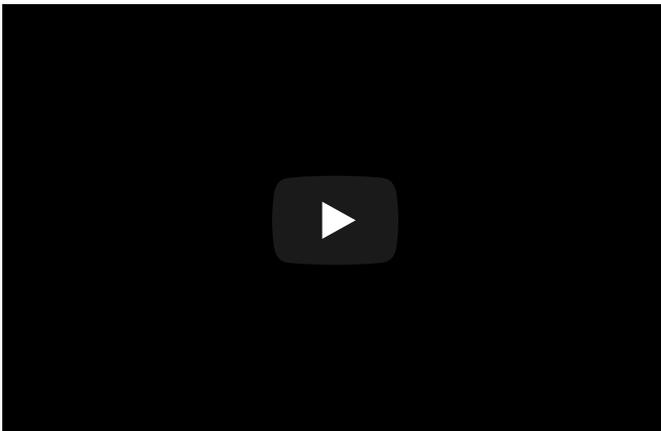
If one has an idea or innovation, diving into entrepreneurship can appear confusing and intimidating, as there are many unknowns. To better communicate these risks to young students and innovators, the documentary, “Risking Aspirations,” explores the passions that drive people to face the challenges of entrepreneurship and to succeed.

“I believe that the science and technology exist. The ideas exist. But the entrepreneurship is the bridge that is needed to take those technologies and turn them into business ideas and bring them to the public,” says Grover in an interview included in the film.

Now, both Grover and Kenan are members of the executive board for the UC San Diego Entrepreneur Challenge and help current organizers with raising sponsorship money for the competition and mentoring.

The 29-minute short film weaves together conversations with 12 individuals from San Diego’s entrepreneurial community who have been involved in the Entrepreneur Challenge and in building and supporting entrepreneurship in San Diego. By interweaving the viewpoints and perspectives of people with a wide range of experiences, the team hopes any viewer will relate to at least a few characters featured in the documentary.

One of the voices in the film is Raj Krishnan (PhD ‘08, UC San Diego bioengineering), co-founder and CEO of Biological Dynamics and one of Forbes’ 30 under 30 innovator for the year 2011.



You can watch “Risking Aspirations” here on Youtube, The first showing was held at the Rady School of Management at UC San Diego to an audience of about 350 people in Oct. 29. The filmmakers plan to host a second showing.

“As an entrepreneur, what drives me is the hope that I can construct something that will save a lot of lives and make a positive impact in this world,” said Krishnan, whose company is focused on early diagnosis of cancer and other diseases by monitoring DNA particles in the blood. Krishnan won the Entrepreneur Challenge in 2009. Prior to winning, he worked with the von Liebig Entrepreneurism Center at the UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering.



Raj Krishnan (PhD ‘08, UC San Diego bioengineering)

Another key player is Philip Low (Ph.D. '07, UCSD), founder, chairman and CEO of Neurovigil. He inspired numerous students to build start-ups on campus and on the Torrey Pines Mesa and emphasized the importance of the Entrepreneur Challenge in his own development as an entrepreneur. Low shared how his startup is building a probe, algorithms and the wireless infrastructure that enables researchers to easily record brain data from patients suffering from brain disease and disorders, from autistic children to soldiers who have served in Afghanistan. Low won the Entrepreneur Challenge in 2008. His work has been highlighted in The New York Times and Time magazine.

UC San Diego Team Effort

The film project written and directed by Grover and Azam took two years of work to complete. It was made possible by the cinematographic and editing contributions of two UC San Diego alumni, Thomas Dadourian ('12, Theater) and Victor Shiu ('12 Visual Arts Media, Psychology), co-founders of the digital marketing agency The **Label Creative Inc.**, a San Diego based company.

This general public film is listed with [International Movie Data Base \(IMDB\)](#) and has been submitted to various film festivals.

Risking Aspirations: More than a Title

The film's title, "Risking Aspirations" derives from a phrase used by UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla during his interview for the film.

People new to the world of entrepreneurship often focus on the kinds of perceived risks that are frequently discussed: Will my startup fail? Will my traditional career get sidetracked?

But Chancellor Khosla took a different approach. He flipped the risk question on its head, and asked about the price of not trying to bring your breakthrough to the marketplace.

What is the price of losing your dream? That's a key question that the video asks viewers to consider.

Grassroots-level culture of entrepreneurship

Each year, the students and researchers who run the public program of the Entrepreneur Challenge on a volunteer basis raise hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and services from corporate sponsorships, foundations and individual entrepreneurs. These prizes and resources are awarded to the winners of the year's competitions, which culminate in a pair of business-plan competitions.

2015 will be an exciting year for the UC San Diego Entrepreneur Challenge, now led by Michael Hayden, an MBA student at the Rady School of Management at UC San Diego. Events are packed into the next few months in the lead up to the two big business plan competitions in May and June that will

each award more than \$100,000 in cash and services. All the events are open to the general public free of cost.

Some of the upcoming highlights are outlined below.

- **January** Elevator Pitch Competition
- **February** Startup Career Fair
- **March** Women in Business Series
- **April** Hackathon
- **May** High Tech \$100K Business Plan Competition
- **June** Bio/Med Tech \$100K Business Plan Competition

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