

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

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Alumnus Taner Halicioglu Kicks off Campaign for UC San Diego with \$75 Million Gift

Facebook pioneer will establish the Halicioglu Institute for Data Science at UC San Diego



Alumnus Taner Halicioglu kicked off the Campaign for UC San Diego with a \$75 million gift to establish a data science institute at UC San Diego. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

As a child, Taner Halicioglu discovered how things worked by dissecting electronic equipment—it could be a radio or walkie talkie, and even a TV at one point. At UC San Diego, the self-described nerd didn't mind that the campus lacked a football team—access to the Supercomputer Center was just as exciting. And today, he is a visionary: with a \$75 million gift, Halicioglu will ensure that his alma mater represents the future of data science.

“This is one of my first times giving big money,” the 42-year-old said. “I’m giving something up, but getting something back. I want to do something transformative.”

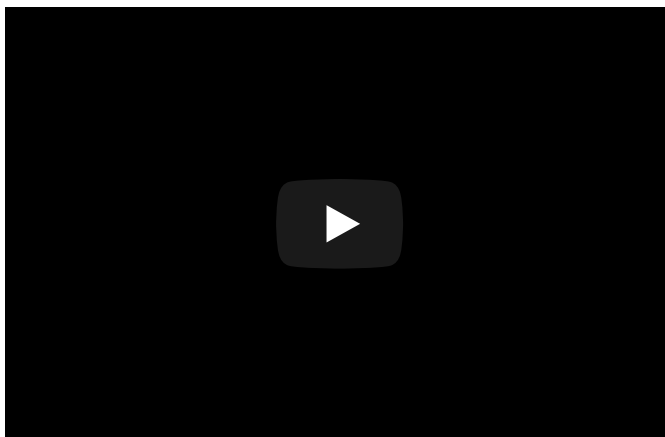
As an undergraduate studying computer science, Halicioglu remembers feeling a strong sense of camaraderie with other students and faculty. That camaraderie, combined with access to excellent resources, is what turned him on to the field of computer operations. His undergraduate experience, along with a desire to help students while also promoting the field of data science, is what led him to make the largest alumni gift the campus has ever received to establish the Halicioglu Institute for Data Science at UC San Diego.



With a goal of raising \$2 billion, the Campaign for UC San Diego is the most ambitious fundraising effort in the university's history.

“This generous gift will transform our institution and forever change the way we educate the next generation of scholars, which is what the Campaign for UC San Diego is about,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “What we accomplish together in this campaign will lead to a future that is smarter, and brighter, than ever.”

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A self-described tinkerer, alumnus Taner Halicioglu was always interested in how things work.

“Private support will help us enhance the student experience, enrich our campus community and spark research and innovation, impacting lives here and across the globe,” added Khosla.

Halicioglu's gift will go a long way towards accomplishing these goals. The computer science alumnus hopes that the new institute will promote a cross-disciplinary field that is considered the backbone of many other disciplines.

medicine as an example of what could be accomplished with data science. By examining an

“Data science touches so many areas—biology, physics, chemistry, medicine, computer science, math,” said Halicioglu. He cites personalized

individual's genetic makeup and other factors, a course of treatment could be developed targeted specifically for that individual. If a drug works on one person with an illness, will it work on another person with the same illness? It may depend on factors such as a person's metabolism or other traits.

"This is all a data problem, ultimately. Gathering and storing all this information, analyzing it, finding correlations and causes to determine how things are related and what that reveals, this is what data science can do," he said.

Halicioglu's gift will be used to provide the institute with lecturers, innovation grants, outreach and networking events, as well as operations and infrastructure. Funding will also help support faculty fellowships, postdoctoral fellowships, graduate student fellowships and scholarships for undergraduate students.



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Halicioglu graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science in 1996. He went on to work for such companies as Loudcloud and eBay before landing at Facebook in October 2004, less than a year after the company was founded. Halicioglu was Facebook's first fulltime hire. As a software and operations engineer, he was instrumental in developing hardware infrastructure that enabled the social network's explosive growth. The company now has about 1.8 billion active users worldwide.



Guests at the Campaign for UC San Diego launch celebration were awed by a dynamic multimedia experience showcasing campus innovation and experimentation.

He left Facebook in 2009 and served as a reliability engineer at Blizzard Entertainment before returning to UC San Diego's Jacobs School of Engineering in 2013 as a lecturer in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering. Halicioglu remains active in industry sectors as an advisor and investor in San Diego area start-ups.

As a lecturer, Halicioglu teaches an undergraduate seminar in computer operations and production engineering, sharing the importance of having analytical skills and technical operations knowledge. Inspired by the innovation and entrepreneurial spirit he sees in many students, in 2015 he made a \$2 million gift to support

Computer Science and Engineering professors and lecturers whose primary mission is to teach and mentor students.

“I actually thought about doing this anonymously,” he said about his gift to establish the institute. “I had to come to terms with this gift, and the publicity it would bring. I’ve always been under the radar. What are my students going to think? Maybe it will be inspirational.”



On March 25, more than 600 guests celebrated the public launch of the Campaign for UC San Diego.

Or maybe his students will just continue thinking of him as the cool dude in shorts, a t-shirt and sunglasses who has a passion for systems and data science.

The Campaign for UC San Diego began with a silent phase in July, 2012. Since then more than \$1.3 billion has been raised toward the campaign goal. Honorary chairs include Joan and Irwin Jacobs, Ernest Rady and Denny Sanford. Chair of the Campaign’s international leadership committee is alumnus Ken Kroner. Learn more at campaign.ucsd.edu.

MEDIA CONTACT

Judy Piercey, 858-534-6128, jpiercey@ucsd.edu

Laura Margoni, 858-822-2485, lmargoni@ucsd.edu

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