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## Q&A with Sandra Brown



*As the new Vice Chancellor for Research, Sandra Brown oversees an office responsible for many of the university's key functions, including Organized Research Units, contracts & grants, technology transfer, animal care and welfare, research ethics and postdoctoral scholars, among others. A professor and researcher herself, she knows firsthand both the rewards and challenges of UC San Diego's research enterprise. She was appointed to her position in December 2010, just after the university surpassed \$1 billion in research funding for the first time, a milestone that included bringing in more federal stimulus dollars than any other UC campus. In this interview, she talks about why research is an integral part of UC San Diego's mission and 50-year history, and what's next for the Office of Research Affairs.*

### **Why do you think UC San Diego has become such a successful research institution in only 50 years (including surpassing other UC campuses in funding)?**

**VC Brown:** Our success can be attributed to three groups of people: extraordinary faculty members and scientists, many of them internationally recognized leaders in their fields, whose scholarship and research attract funding from diverse sources; conscientious and skilled administrators and staff, who manage the complex workings of the institution; and the very brightest students, who push all of us to remain at the forefront of discovery. The Office of Research Affairs serves all of those groups, and we see our role as boosting their effectiveness and ensuring their success.

### **Why has research flourished at UC San Diego despite the economic recession?**

**VC Brown:** Departments, laboratories and other units across campus are working very hard to submit proposals and win grants, and the interdisciplinary model of much of our research — including our innovative Organized Research Units — gives us an advantage in the competitive process. The Office of Research Affairs helps identify opportunities, makes the application and renewal processes faster and easier, manages the incredibly complicated contract and grant system and, if some discovery

shows promise, helps move inventions to the marketplace. In short, to maintain a level of funding consistent with our institutional missions, we have to out-work our competitors — and do that work smarter.

### **How can we continue to grow our research enterprise at UC San Diego?**

**VC Brown:** We have several "big ideas" about moving the research enterprise forward here at UC San Diego. We're working with Health Sciences to bring their discoveries into treatment rooms and markets much more quickly, helping more people faster. Our oceanographers, engineers, physicists and biologists are moving to expand their partnerships and collaborations here and around the world. In the social sciences, in particular, we are working with other countries to build international - and mutually beneficial - relationships.

### **What are the benefits of being a \$1 billion research enterprise? What are the challenges?**

**VC Brown:** What we've seen is that achievements and success tend to promote further achievements and even more successes. Modern laboratories, the most efficient equipment, the most accurate devices, the most powerful computing systems — these resources give our scholars and researchers the tools to generate discoveries, which I consider the return on investment our nation expects. With the proper funding, scientists and scholars can also expand their inquiries into areas and avenues they otherwise couldn't explore, and it's in these frontiers that many of tomorrow's solutions will be found.

The challenges, of course, involve maintaining that productive level of funding, and managing the truly staggering number of rules, regulations, requirements and reports associated with the kinds of funding we receive. It's a testament to the dedication and ability of our staff that much of that titanic effort goes unnoticed by our colleagues in the classrooms and labs.

### **What impact does UC San Diego research have on our community and our world?**

**VC Brown:** In the medical field alone, you'd probably find few people in the region who haven't benefited directly or through a family member from UC San Diego research. We're ranked the best in the nation in several specialty areas, including pulmonology, psychiatry, diabetes and endocrinology, orthopedics and geriatrics. When you consider the impact of a Qualcomm, or more recent and emerging alternative-energy start-ups like Sapphire Energy, it's clear that we're "good neighbors" in

the San Diego region. As the San Diego Business Journal recently pointed out, the university has incubated 646 companies since our inception, with a yearly impact estimated at more than \$15 billion. I can't mention every deserving area, but in oceanography, the arts, supercomputing, engineering, the social and the physical sciences, our work is changing lives for the better from the Arctic Circle to New Zealand.

**What brought you to UC San Diego 20 years ago and what's kept you here? What do you enjoy about the Vice Chancellor position?**

**VC Brown:** I came here originally to build my research career with internationally recognized addiction researchers, people working on the impact of alcohol and other drugs on brain functioning. I have focused my career on understanding how alcohol and drug abuse impact us at different stages of our lives; how people work their way out of substance-abuse problems; and how to tailor treatments for those with problems such as depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, or neuro-cognitive impairments, which often accompany substance abuse.

The Vice Chancellor position offers me the opportunity to promote all of the important research conducted at UC San Diego, not just my own. I welcome the opportunity to assist our faculty in building their research portfolios, and forging new collaborations here in the United States and around the world.

## **Fun Faves**

**Favorite place at UC San Diego:**

Torrey Pines Beach

**Favorite place on Earth:**

Poon Hill, Nepal

**Favorite hobbies:**

Gardening, snorkeling

**Favorite accomplishment:**

Seeing my research findings integrated into prevention and intervention for youth and adults with alcohol/drug problems.

**Favorite words to live by:**

I've always found this portion of the Hippocratic Oath to be especially meaningful: "I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow."

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