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New Research Hire Boosts Drive for Innovation and Start-Up Creation



Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

UC San Diego’s Office of Research Affairs has launched an aggressive push to boost innovation across all areas of campus and to speed university discoveries and technology to the nation’s marketplaces.

The recently implemented Frontiers of Innovation programs, for example, help fund new campus centers for research as well as help support promising undergraduate, graduate and underrepresented students;

and the office actively encourages faculty groups to establish new organized research units (ORUs) focused on the university’s strategic research areas.

One part of that drive is the recent hire of Paul Roben, Ph.D., as Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Technology Commercialization (IACT). Roben served as a key member of Ireland’s Innovation Taskforce (since 2009) and co-authored a national economic-development plan for Ireland, among other achievements.

“Nurturing innovation is vital to the future of our research enterprise,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “By supporting new ideas and collaborations, we advance the frontiers of knowledge and disseminate discoveries that transform lives.”

According to Sandra Brown, Vice Chancellor for Research, Roben will “transform the functions provided by the Technology Transfer Office, the Industry Research Alliances and Industry Contracting offices into an integrated organization. The new IACT division will also provide an integrated platform to promote a strategic and multidisciplinary approach to commercializing technologies – including the creation of start-ups here at UC San Diego.”

He came to campus from nearby Salk Institute, where he served as Senior Director of Office Technology Development, and worked with multiple academic institutes to develop strategic processes and drive innovation alliances. He guided the formation of numerous new start-up companies and helped negotiate a broad spectrum of technology licenses to industry – doubling the number of licenses, sponsored research agreements, and collaborative agreements.

“With his wealth of knowledge and leadership expertise in the global and U.S. research and industry sectors,” said Dierdre Glenn, Director of Manufacturing, Engineering & Energy Commercialisation at Enterprise Ireland, “Paul Roben has the right blend of skills, experience, and professionalism to take on this exciting role.”

Roben himself exhibits both confidence and awareness of the new post’s challenges. “UC San Diego has done a remarkable job over its relatively short history of spinning off a wealth of innovative – and often wildly successful – companies,” he said, “and can probably be credited with creating the biotechnology boom in the region.”

But uncertainties about government investment in research and a tougher capitalization climate, he said, will make it all the more vital for UC San Diego, and other public research universities, to form productive alliances with industry and other private organizations, and to put their innovations and discoveries to good public use.

“We want to advance our strategic research goals – both scholarly and scientific – to the ultimate end of improving lives in California, the nation, and the world,” he said. “Innovation, commercialization, smart and timely alliances – all of these arise from our university’s basic missions: education, research, and public service.

“What we do can often sound abstract and polysyllabic, but innovating, licensing, helping companies get started is, finally, helping us excel at those fundamental missions; and I have already gotten started on my part of that.”

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