WHY UCI MATTERS

Founded 50 years ago, UCI is now a powerhouse in education, research, and community

BY TERENCE LOOSE

Telling individual stories about the history of UCI has been the mission of an 18-month project of the UCI Libraries. The result is UCStories, an online video series that captures stories like those from 110 campus makers representing the diversity of UCI Irvine's campus more than fifty years ago in 1964, Orange County didn't look anything like it does today, with its booming economy, cutting edge technology industry, and vibrant real estate market. In fact, Irvine didn't even exist. UCI was named after, and founded on, the Irvine Ranch, a vast expanse of land that stretched 22 miles inland and nine miles along the coast. In those early years, as the university graduated its first class of 50 undergrads, three master's degree recipients and one doctorate, crows could be heard flying right nearby. But perhaps these humble beginnings are the best indicator of how large UCI's impact on the community, the region, and the globe has been, and why the next 50 years promise to be even more significant.

In just half a century, UCI has produced three Nobel Laureates (F. Sherwood Rowland and Irwin Rose in chemistry and Frederick Bitter in physics) and developed the top-tiered UCI Medical Center. The school has been named the nation's 9th best public university by U.S. News & World Report, and spawned new technologies and ideas; there are 50 inventions in the UCI portfolio, with more than 400 active U.S. patents, including a cooling device that allows for the use of lasers during surgery. That technology has earned UCI more than $40 million in royalties.

UCI is also the county's second-largest employer, contributing $4.8 billion annually to the local economy, according to the UCI Budget Office. “No other institution established in the last 50 years has a footprint as significant as we have,” says UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman, a fact confirmed last year when Times Higher Education ranked UCI No. 1 in the U.S. and number 7 in the world among universities less than 50 years old.

But far from one to rest on the laurels of those 50 years of success, Gillman has issued a strategic 10-year plan to take UCI boldly into its promising future. “While there is tremendous pride in what we have done to date, there is also an eagerness, even a fierce determination, to do more; make even stronger contributions in research, education, and service; accelerate our ascendency among globally preeminent research universities; marshal our passions, skills, and ingenuity to further improve people’s lives,” he says.

His vision for UCI includes further expansion, such as growing the faculty size by 20%, or about 20 percent, increasing funded research from the current $1.000 million a year to half a billion; increasing the number of students from the current 33.000 to 46.000, becoming a leader in quality online education, and much, much more.

One of the most interesting, and promising, aspects of Gillman’s vision for UCI’s future is his objective to increase integrated public-private partnerships. Included in that is the fostering of entrepreneurship and regional economic development by leveraging UCI’s Applied Innovation office, which brings student and faculty innovators at the university together with the business community. In order for UCI to continue to thrive, we have to be willing to take our future into our own hands – develop new partnerships, invest in research that matters, serve our community in meaningful ways, and provide the best educational environment for each and every Anteater,” says Gillman.

An important part of that is to foster faculty-industry alliances and commercialization of UCI technology for the broad public benefit. In this way, the public and private investment in UCI continues to benefit the community. In other words, more inventions; more economic impact, more groundbreaking technologies and research, and most of all, more close relationships between UCI faculty, students and private business. Only in that way can UCI stay as relevant in the future as it has grown to be over the past 50 years.

Emile Haddad, chairman of the Board of Trustees at the UCI Foundation, agrees: “This first 50 years was about establishing a strong foundation,” Haddad says. “The next 50 years is about building on that foundation to truly create a worldwide class university that is renowned for its education, research and contributions to the quality of life in Orange County, the nation and the world. This is the opportunity in front of us and this is the opportunity we must deliver on.”

That opportunity for the future, Haddad describes is the bedrock upon which Gillman has based his 50-year plan. “We care, and will continue to be, an essential part of what energizes the people of this region a good quality of life and a promising future,” Gillman says. “Their promising future is intrinsically tied to UCI’s promising future.”

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