



UNIVERSITY
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CALIFORNIA



Multilocation Research Collaboration at the University of California

*The Challenge: Opportunities and Barriers,
and When Best to Collaborate across
Locations*

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UC-CORO Systemwide Leadership Collaborative is a leadership training program for current and future UC administrative and faculty leaders. This leadership program focuses on the benefits of inter-campus and cross-functional involvement. As a part of the program, the Northern California participants (referred to as the “cohort”) pursued a leadership project proposed by Sandra Brown, Vice Chancellor for Research, UC San Diego, aimed at investigating and addressing the challenges, barriers, and opportunities associated with research collaboration across the UC system.

Over the course of our investigation into the barriers and incentives for cross-location collaboration at UC, we gathered information and opinions from over 75 UC stakeholders across campuses, disciplines and types, and years of experience, through interviews with university and campus senior leaders, responses to surveys, and follow-up interviews with selected survey respondents. The information collected and resulting observations are largely representative of research administrators within the UC system. Further work would be necessary to also fully include principal investigators and on-the-ground researchers, who did not respond to our outreach in significant numbers.

In an era where cutting edge research is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary and Federal research funding is progressively emphasizing larger and interdisciplinary approaches, our data showed that UC has a unique opportunity to respond by leveraging the resources and vast capabilities within its system. Our survey results provided us with historic and current realities of the challenges associated with systemwide collaborative efforts within UC. But we also heard ideas for successful mitigation of these barriers and challenges that could enable UC to respond to systemwide collaborative opportunities to create sustained funding for addressing some of the most vexing problems of our time. Some key observations stemming from the cohort’s outreach to stakeholders are summarized in the following.

First, collaboration, in and of itself, is not always optimal. A majority of stakeholders felt that cross-UC research collaboration is warranted under specific criteria and circumstances such as specific funding opportunities calling for interdisciplinary collaboration or funding opportunities from the state of California. A significant proportion of stakeholders did not feel that collaborating with another UC campus always resulted in a competitive advantage versus collaborating with another academic entity.

UC's culture also emerged as a repeated theme from the stakeholders. The culture of UC – entrepreneurial, creative, and independent – was cited as both a barrier and enabler to collaboration, as where investigators approach the same funding source separately, when a combined approach could be significantly more powerful.

Stakeholders also identified several critical success factors for powerful collaboration, including:

- Relationships – trust and a shared goal must be in place between the relevant investigators
- Larger vision and leadership support for major and multi-faceted research collaborations to succeed – there needs to be a vision that is sufficiently compelling to warrant researchers taking the time and effort to work across campuses.
- Leadership – an influential leader who has had success in collaboration and is externally focused on how to influence sources of state and federal funding.
- Funding – the availability of funds was throughout cited as a key foundational factor (as well as a barrier, in the case of a lack of funding).

Interviewees consistently indicated that UCOP could be an important enabler in research collaboration. In addition to vision and leadership, UCOP can play a role in addressing funding issues, whether by facilitating the funding application process, reducing associated internal bureaucracy, or influencing the state and federal funding agenda.

Finally, stakeholders cited many examples of existing successful UC collaborations. Drilling down into the specific factors underlying the success of each using objective criteria was beyond the scope of this project but that may be a fruitful future line of inquiry.

Taken together, we believe the stakeholders' responses point to the utility of a coordinated effort to address the barriers and identify unique opportunities for future collaboration. We recommend the establishment of a Transformational Research Collaborative made up of a group of key administrators, academics, and researchers, which will be a multilocation/multidiscipline facilitated consortium tasked with identifying existing structures and new solutions to support broad UC research collaboration on the next large challenges, and which can take up the work of further inquiry into the topics identified in this report.