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Realizing Potential

Christian Felipe knows potential when he sees it. As a successful fund manager and technology angel investor, he has for decades honed his ability to recognize emerging technologies that have marketplace promise. In the few years Felipe has been in the Santa Barbara/Goleta area, he's backed a major tech entrepreneurial partnership, invested in several technology startups and freely shared his knowledge with many young tech-entrepreneurs looking to get their products off the ground.

Now he's going even further, with a \$1 million endowment to UC Santa Barbara's Technology Management Program (TMP) in support of the new Master's degree in Technology Management (MTM). The money will establish a new endowed professorship for the emerging program, which has been designed to catapult engineers and scientists toward becoming leaders of technology ventures. Felipe hopes the new chair will enable the TMP to attract a top senior faculty recruit.

"Knowing that a lot of technology students don't have all the business knowledge, I thought it was a great opportunity to create future entrepreneurs and technology leaders by supporting the Technology Management Program," Felipe said of his endowment.

A Southern California native with a bachelor's degree in economics from UCLA and an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, Felipe worked in the financial industry on the East Coast, starting out as a technology analyst in the late 1980s. He maintained his focus on technology startups as he became a top portfolio manager and later co-founder of Boston-based hedge fund

Sirios Capital Management, which he sold over a decade ago. He then took on the frequently risky, often exhilarating world of angel investing, in which the investors provide the startup capital, as opposed to the pool of money that is the source of funds from other venture capital investments.

“I found technology startups fascinating, and I always felt that in the long run, I wanted to continue to invest in technology companies,” said Felipe, who moved to Santa Barbara about three years ago with his wife, Caryn.

It was a meeting with TMP’s chairman, Bob York, who is also a professor of electrical and computer engineering, and a subsequent stint as judge in the annual TMP New Venture Competition (NVC) that introduced Felipe to the techpreneur culture at UCSB. For the past 15 years, the NVC has challenged the most entrepreneurial, innovative and technology-oriented young minds on campus, with winners gaining business skills that will serve them in their careers or even help them form their own companies.

“At that point I was exposed to a lot of these young, bright, energetic technology students who were promoting their companies,” Felipe said. Immediately, he was interested in how he could help, and after some additional conversations with York, his interest was drawn to the TMP’s new degree program. According to York, “this new gift will have an immediate and lasting impact on the program in helping us recruit top-notch faculty.”

The MTM is an intensive nine-month program geared toward early-career engineers and scientists. It provides them with the various skills necessary to navigate the marketplace, secure the resources and manage employees. Students of this immersive program are exposed to general business hurdles as well as challenges unique to the technology industry. Classes are taught by faculty members who have invested in, founded, led and consulted in tech ventures — both large and small. Mentorship and networking opportunities, including the NVC, also provide valuable insight. According to Felipe, there is a great need for technologists to become more business savvy.

Felipe isn’t the only tech supporter to come forward with an endowment for the new program. Reece Duca, UCSB alum and education software-oriented investor, has also contributed a \$1 million gift to help launch the program, giving the MTM a strong foundation for educating and nurturing present and future tech

entrepreneurs.

Felipe has also seen potential off-campus, in a tech-oriented community with unlimited ideas but limited resources. He responded to this need with a commitment of \$50,000 a year for three years to a recent partnership with UCSB and the city of Goleta. The Goleta Entrepreneurial Magnet aims to incubate and nurture local tech startups by giving them a home base and a platform from which to develop. Several groups who were finalists in the recent NVC continue their work in the incubator, alongside other tech entrepreneur ventures in the area. After about a year of successful operations, said Felipe, those entrepreneurs would have the qualifications to join the MTM program.

“The whole point here is that we’re trying to create an ecosystem in the Santa Barbara community for entrepreneurs — principally in the sciences area — to develop their businesses, stay in Santa Barbara and ultimately give back to the community,” Felipe said.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.