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California NanoSystems Institute's new mentor-in-residence is ready to assist campus entrepreneurs, innovators and startups

Attention, UC Santa Barbara researchers and current or would-be entrepreneurs: Are you mystified by market application? Stumped over strategy? Not sure how to attract industry excitement for your innovation? Flummoxed by funding? Then a chat with Jonathan Gartner may be just what you need. The California NanoSystems Institute's (CNSI) first ever mentor-in-residence is here to offer guidance in navigating that gap between academia and business, backed by a wealth of experience and a deep network.

"The idea of a mentor-in-residence is actually something that other universities have adopted, and based on where we are in our innovation, it is time for UCSB," said Sherylle Mills Englander, executive

director for strategic initiatives and operations at CNSI. Gartner, she added, is here to provide that bridge between great ideas and effective commercialization. He is available to consult with any UCSB researcher or any UCSB-affiliated entrepreneur or startup, including faculty, researchers, postdocs or graduate students.

Gartner comes to the campus after a career spent across a variety of industries and geographies. Primarily serving in chief operating officer roles, he most recently served as a leader of Navis Capital, the largest locally based private equity firm in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Prior to that, he has had a number of both client-facing and operational roles at ABN Amro Bank in North America, Europe and Asia. Additionally, he has experience in public policy, municipal finance, energy and education technology.

“I’m thrilled to be on campus,” said Gartner, who will be holding office hours in the Incubator Lounge at Elings Hall. “One of the really exciting things about how the academic scene in America works is that we do a better job than most at taking really creative ideas from the laboratory to commercial endeavors. We do a wonderful job, but it’s not easy.”

To take the confusion and mystery out of that leap from academia to industry, he is ready to help researchers identify key metrics and milestones needed to successfully translate technology and innovation to practical application and uptake, as well as help connect them to others with expertise in relevant markets. He can also help make connections with potential industry leads for the NSF I-Corps program.

For campus-affiliated startups, Gartner’s personal experience as an angel investor means that he evaluates startup companies on a regular basis, and knows the questions to ask and answer for a stronger business strategy.

“In some ways, it’s not that complicated,” he said. “In other ways, executing successfully is incredibly complicated and incredibly rare. What are people’s motivations? What is the investor looking for? What are the industrial clients looking for? I don’t have the answers to all of the scientific and technological questions that researchers at UCSB are doing, but I’m pretty good at asking questions that they need to answer in order to take their work from the lab side of things to a commercial endeavor.”

Perhaps the most common fundamental question that researchers need to answer for would-be investors is the problem statement: what the problem is and, subsequently, how it can be solved with the given technology or innovation.

“And ultimately the investor, to be crass about it, wants to know, can I make money off of that?” Gartner said. “And that’s kind of how the whole system works: identifying the problem and identifying how you’re going to solve it in a profitable manner.”

Of course there are the other ins and outs of spinning an idea off into a commercial endeavor, including questions of risk, growth and legal restrictions and the market landscape. And those, too, are issues he hopes to tackle with mentees in a low-risk environment that allows creativity to shine. “This is the right place to make mistakes, because any penalty is maybe some gentle feedback. And feedback is always good, whether it’s positive or negative,” he said.

Gartner holds office hours Mondays and Fridays, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., in the Incubator Lounge at Elings 3623 — on the ocean side of the third-floor lobby. He is available by drop in, or by appointment, which is preferred, through [his calendar](#) or by emailing jonathangartner@cnsi.ucsb.edu.

Tags

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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.