

Frame the Future Thought Pieces



Closing the Intellectual Property-Diversity Gap



Paul Roben
Associate Vice Chancellor — Office
of Innovation and Commercialization,
University of California San Diego

The spirit of ingenuity characterizes America, as it does in many countries around the world. Since its founding, the United States has been a nation of inventors, searching for creative solutions to problems and striving to create better ways of doing things. This inventive spirit was enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8, Clause 8: "To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries." And through the creation of the patent system.

While the patent system has underpinned innovation in the United States, it has not done so equitably. The same can be said for many countries. In the United States, only 13 percent of all inventors who hold a patent are women. Fewer than three percent are black. A country's competitiveness is not sustainable if only a fraction of its population is contributing to the Intellectual Property (IP) economy. We must do more to narrow the IP diversity gap.

This requires education, raising awareness, celebrating success, measuring diversity, and creating equitable access to the IP economy.

In terms of raising awareness and educating people on the process for protecting IP, this needs to be done in a way that resonates with the minorities we are trying to reach. At the University of California San Diego (UC San Diego), we have delivered several programs in this space:

"While the patent system has underpinned innovation in the U.S., it has not done so equitably. In the U.S., only 13 percent of all inventors who hold a patent are women. Fewer than three percent are black."

- [MyStartupXX](#) is an accelerator program designed to increase diversity in entrepreneurship, particularly among women.
- [LatinX Leadership Program](#) is a training initiative to empower LatinX students with leadership skills and exposure to real-life entrepreneurial experiences.
- Veteran Ventures is a program delivered by veterans for veterans to teach entrepreneurial skills relevant to the IP economy.

In all of these programs, it is important that the content is delivered by people who resonate with the intended audience, and that they bring their experiences (both good and bad) to the room. It is through that storytelling approach from people who "look like me" that you

The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils

The GFCC is a global multi-stakeholder membership organization that has universities, corporations, government agencies and private sector industry organizations and councils as members. Combining its members and fellows, the GFCC has a footprint in more than 30 countries. Leaders and organizations in our network strive to advance innovation, productivity and prosperity in their nations, regions and cities.

To know more about the GFCC, visit our [website](#) or contact info@thegfcc.org.

 /GlobalFederationofCompetitivenessCouncils

 www.thegfcc.org

 @thegfcc

 /thegfcc/

 the-global-federation-of-competitiveness-councils/

will truly empower women and minorities to believe that they have as much to contribute to the IP economy as anyone else.

We continue, at UC San Diego, to seek partnerships with community organizations (such as [We Tha Plug](#) that promotes black entrepreneurship) to encourage and support entrepreneurship as a means of sustainable economic development across all communities in our society.

As we educate, we must also celebrate – take advantage of every opportunity to celebrate the success of people from underrepresented minorities through showcases, community events, and digital media. The more people see the “art of possible,” the more they will participate in the IP economy.

Equitable access is also important for closing the diversity gap. No one segment of our community is inherently less entrepreneurial than another. However, access to the required resources is far from equitable. We, who have access to the resources, must work with our community partners to ensure all segments of our communities have access to the appropriate network of people, such as management teams and investors. We can do this through events, showcases, and other forums, and through educating these networks on the benefits of accessing these communities.

At UC San Diego, we have made the process of licensing technologies from the university as streamlined as possible for anyone with a credible business plan. We do not require cash payments from new startup companies to take these licenses, with the goal to accelerate and broaden the process of company formation.

Finally, we need to think about creating an equitable playing field for everyone, including those who do not have the resources to protect their IP through the patent application process. Local or national governments could consider a system to subsidize the costs associated with filing patents for those who do not have the resources or income levels to do it.

On a final note: We cannot fix what we don't measure. National patent organizations need to be provided with the resources to measure and report on the number of patents applied for by women and underrepresented minorities. Without such a national database, it will be very difficult for legislators to make the necessary changes to close the diversity gap. In that regard, the coalition [Invent Together](#) was founded by a variety of interested groups, including the American Association of Universities and companies such as Qualcomm, to support diversity in innovation and patent creation. They have supported legislation that will provide the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office with the resources to measure and report on these metrics.

In closing, and to quote Invent Together: “We can diversify who is inventing and patenting; we can create jobs, boost the U.S. economy and remain a global leader in innovation. We can do this by increasing the availability of data and research on the patent gaps and by breaking down barriers based on race, gender, income, and other characteristics.”

I would submit that this is an imperative for all countries to maintain sustainable competitiveness.