

Adding the Secret Sauce:

AN INTERVIEW WITH

University of California President Janet Napolitano

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"Three-quarters of those students end up in ladder-ranked positions in the faculty - one of the many ways in which this is an extraordinarily rich community of scholars, learners, and researchers," she says.

She also spoke about her ongoing commitment to finding ways to prepare UC postdocs for life outside the academy, given that there will not be faculty positions for all of them. The UC system is looking at ways of helping postdocs in relevant fields to start their own companies, by giving them access to start-up funding, by helping them move from lab or prototype to marketability. She talks with pride of the [UC Ventures](#) initiative, which provides support for commercializing academic innovations, and [QB3](#), which includes "Start Up in A Box," where you can get legal and documentation assistance and incubator space.

She is also paying attention to the issue of UC's commitment to broader postdoctoral education going forward: "I have been talking with the graduate deans about ways to help postdocs attain the private sector education they might need, particularly in terms of business skills. I've also been talking to employers about viewing our postdoc population as a recruitment source. Postdoctoral students are highly intelligent, motivated, and skilled. In an economy like California's, they should be in demand in a lot of ways. I'm committed to helping that happen."

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I asked her if she thinks of postdocs in the humanities and social sciences in similar terms, and what initiatives are underway for this group of postdocs: "I'm not only thinking of postdocs in the STEM fields," she assured us. "When I talk with potential employers, they are very interested in people who can think creatively, who can write, who can digest data and analyze it intelligently. These are all things that postdocs in the humanities and social sciences have mastered. There is a role for them in other sectors as well and some employers already know this. Once they realize how great our humanities and social sciences postdocs are, they want to hire more of them."

President Napolitano let us know that her office will be announcing the appointment of the first University system-wide Senior Vice President for Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship who will report directly to her as part of her office's support of an environment of creativity and entrepreneurship. The [UC system-wide Grad Slam](#), in which graduate students from each campus are given three minutes to explain their work to a lay audience is a great example of the atmosphere of creativity that UC strives to create, she says. The finals

of this year's event were held in April at the headquarters of LinkedIn in San Francisco. That in itself is an opportunity for our students," Napolitano says, "as well as a whole lot of fun."

She has some advice for women in academia: "Accept the challenge. Don't be discouraged or waylaid by hurdles." She has one specific nugget of wisdom from her own experience: "Find mentors." She says mentors are important for anyone entering a profession, but particularly for young women. "I had two mentors early in my career, and they were essential to my success," she says. She is keen to encourage women in academia. "Be persistent," she says. "Don't get discouraged. More and more women are entering a whole variety of fields. You can, too."

President Napolitano also has a word for the visiting scholar population. She says she views them as a crucial source of community enrichment and academic diversity. "The different ways they've obtained their undergraduate and pre-postdoc education brings enormous diversity, from which the whole system benefits," she says. "It's part of the secret sauce that makes us so special."

Lastly, President Napolitano also assured the students and postdocs at UC Berkeley specifically that her office is actively engaging with the funding crisis on that campus. "Berkeley is an amazing institution that is heavily research-based, which is seeing the consequences now of a number of decisions made in the past that have contributed to a structural deficit unique in the UC system."

She tells us that there are both short- and long-term measures in place, including the extension of a \$190 million loan from the President's Office. "This problem developed over the course of time and it is being addressed at all levels."

Asked for any last words, President Napolitano spoke about the central importance of the creativity and energy of postdocs. "Young scholars see the future clearly. They provide the forward momentum to propel us into the new research economy. We will continue to pay close attention to this part of the university community," she said.

