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New UC Riverside Center Aims to Boost Broadband Policy Research

Looking to help close this digital divide, the University of California-Riverside plans to open a new Center for Broadband Policy and Digital Literacy.

BY MAGGIE CABREY, TECHWIRE / DECEMBER 14, 2016





(Techwire) -- As technology becomes more integrated in our everyday lives, it seems the line separating those who have Internet access and the individuals who don't is becoming more apparent. Looking to help close this digital divide, the University of California-Riverside (UCR) plans to open a new Center for Broadband Policy and Digital Literacy.

The university is the only UC in inland Southern California, a rural-next-to-urban region where the the divide is especially evident. Part of UCR's School of Public Policy, the Center for Broadband Policy and Digital Literacy will tackle digital inclusion issues occurring in the inland area and assist the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) by expanding broadband policy research in the state.

In development since early 2015, the center was co-founded by Lloyd Levine, president of Sacramento-based consulting firm Filament Strategies, and university Dean Anil Deolalikar. Levine is a former state Assemblymember.

In an interview with *TechWire*, Levine spoke on the project's progress, future steps and the purpose behind building a Center for Broadband Policy and Digital Literacy.

"I see us providing great benefit to policymakers by providing real-world scientific research on exactly what the digital divide is and what it means to be on the wrong side of the digital divide," Levine said.

The school will be taking a collaborative approach to accomplish its mission, with plans to partner with the UCR Graduate School of Education to support the CETF School2Home program, a state initiative that aims to integrate more technology in low-performing schools. The center will also work with the California Telehealth Network and UCR School of Medicine to support telemedicine research and curriculum.

As work to build the center continues, UCR is in the process of securing funding for the project, which includes a \$7.5 million endowment to make the center “self-sustaining.” Staff are also developing a website and Board of Expert Advisers.

In addition, Levine said they are working on their first policy paper to release early next year and conducting a national search for the program’s first professor. The professor, who will also serve as chair for the new center, would officially start on July 1, 2017.

Levine gave a presentation on the project's development at the California Broadband Council meeting Thursday, where he told policymakers how the center has been meeting with a variety of government entities, such as the California Public Utilities and Federal Communications Commission, to introduce the program.

"If government is pushing everything to digital, which they should because it's more efficient, they need to be part of the solution to providing access to people so all those who are a part of the constituency that makes up government have access to that which they are funding," said Levine. "I want the center to be researching those [issues], putting forth policy papers that shine light on the impacts and provide policy solutions."

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