

The logo for SDSU Research Foundation. It features the text "SDSU" in a large, bold, black serif font on the left. To its right is a vertical line, followed by the words "Research" and "Foundation" stacked vertically in a smaller, black serif font. The background is white with a large, dark red diagonal shape on the right and a red geometric pattern on the left.

SDSU | Research
Foundation

Board of Directors Biographies
February 2024



Adela de la Torre, Ph.D.

Board President

Term: Ex Officio from June 2018 to present

Dr. de la Torre is the ninth permanent president of SDSU and the first woman to serve in that role. She brings over 30 years of service in leadership roles within institutions of higher education, including the California State University system, the University of Arizona, and the University of California, Davis. Prior to her appointment as president, she served as the vice chancellor for Student Affairs and Campus Diversity at UC-Davis. Dr. de la Torre's research focuses on Latino community health – an area in which SDSU is a national leader.

Dr. de la Torre served as director for the UC-Davis Center for Transnational Health for fourteen years, as chair of the UC-Davis Chicana/Chicano Studies Department, as director of the Hispanic Center of Excellence in the College of Medicine at the University of Arizona, and as director of the Mexican American Studies and Research Center at the University of Arizona. Dr. de la Torre was a professor at California State University, Long Beach, and at the University of Arizona before joining UC-Davis in 2002, where she became the first Latina to receive the rank of Distinguished Professor.

Dr. de la Torre's grandparents immigrated to the Central Valley from Mexico. She grew up in the Bay Area, where her grandmother and mother taught her important cultural traditions – the importance of family, the value of hard work and the power of education. Her mother went to Modesto Community College and UC-Berkeley and was a public school teacher for 40 years. Dr. de la Torre earned her bachelor's degree in the Political Economy of Natural Resources from UC-Berkeley. Her master's degree and Ph.D. in Agricultural and Resource Economics are also from UC-Berkeley.



Hala Madanat, Ph.D.

Board Vice President

Term: Ex Officio from September 2020 to present

Dr. Hala Madanat is the vice president for Research and Innovation at SDSU. In this role, Dr. Madanat is charged with stewarding the university's expansive research enterprise, supporting the development of SDSU's Mission Valley Innovation District, and overseeing SDSU's research advancement, research support services and technology transfer efforts, the SDSU Research Foundation, as well as the university's start-up incubator, the ZIP Launchpad.

From 2016 to 2020, Dr. Madanat served as the director of SDSU's School of Public Health. During her tenure, research funding at the school increased 50 percent and its U.S. News ranking rose to No. 23 nationally.

Dr. Madanat is a distinguished professor of health promotion and behavioral science. Her research addresses health disparities through community engagement. Dr. Madanat has received more than \$22 million to support her work. She currently leads a \$3 million COVID-19 contact tracing program funded by the County of San Diego aimed at enhancing support in underserved communities and curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus.

She is a core investigator of SDSU's Institute for Behavioral and Community Health and serves as the lead principal investigator on the \$12 million SDSU/UCSD Cancer Center Partnership, funded by the National Cancer Institute. She has led the evaluation of several National Institutes of Health-funded grants and published nearly 90 peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, and books.

Dr. Madanat has a B.S. in Biological Sciences from the University of Jordan, a M.S. in Community Health Sciences, and a Ph.D. in Sociology with a minor in Public Health, both from Brigham Young University.



Agnes Wong Nickerson

Board Treasurer

Term: Ex Officio from May 2019 to present

Chair, Finance and Investment Committee

Agnes Wong Nickerson serves as vice president for Business and Financial Affairs and chief financial officer. She is responsible for the management of one of four major divisions that make up the administrative organization of the university. Services provided by Business and Financial Affairs to the campus community include budget and financial resource management, Athletics budgetary oversight, construction of new facilities, human resource management, maintenance and improvement of current facilities, KPBS oversight, and providing for the public and environmental safety of faculty, staff and students.

Prior to April 2019, Agnes served as associate vice president for Financial Operations at San Diego State University, (2014-2019). She also served as associate vice president of Fiscal Affairs, and chief operating officer and chief financial officer of the University Corporation at San Francisco State University (SFSU), (2005-2014), and chief financial officer at Duke University Press (2001-2005). Prior to 2001, Agnes worked in private industries including big four accounting firms, a Fortune 100 company, and startup companies.

Ms. Wong Nickerson earned a B.A. in Accounting at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, an MBA in International Finance at University of San Francisco, and an MLA in Liberal Studies at Duke University. She also serves on the Aztec Shops Board of Directors.



Randolph “Randy” Philipp, Ph.D.

Board Secretary

Term: September 2020 to September 2024 (third term)

Member, Finance and Investment Committee

Dr. Philipp is emeritus professor of mathematics education in the School of Teacher Education and member of the Center for Research in Mathematics and Science Education (CRMSE). Dr. Philipp earned his BA and MS in Mathematics at CSU Northridge. While serving as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching mathematics at a junior high school and a teacher training institute in Liberia, West Africa, he discovered that he enjoyed working with prospective teachers. Upon returning to the United States, Dr. Philipp taught high school for several years and then continued his education and received his Ph.D. in Mathematics Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Dr. Philipp began his academic career at SDSU in 1990. His research interests include studying teachers’ beliefs and mathematical content knowledge, the effects on prospective and practicing teachers of integrating mathematics content and students’ mathematical thinking, mapping a trajectory for the evolution of elementary school teachers engaged in sustained professional development, and studying students’ integer sense. In 2006, Dr. Philipp was the first recipient of the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educator’s (AMTE) Award for Excellence in Mathematics Teacher Education, and between 2017-2019 he served as president of AMTE. He served as the interim director of SDSU’s School of Teacher Education from 2022–2023.

Dr. Philipp is the recipient of over \$16 million in grants, including current funding from the National Science Foundation.



Guadalupe “Suchi” X. Ayala

Term: September 2021 to September 2024 (third term)

Dr. Ayala is a professor in SDSU’s School of Public Health, director of the Institute for Behavioral and Community Health (IBACH), director of the SDSU HealthLINK endowment, and co-director (with Dr. Kristen Wells) of the SDSU HealthLINK Center for Transdisciplinary Health Disparities Research. IBACH is a non-profit research institute comprised of 15 tenured/tenure-track SDSU faculty dedicated to addressing health disparities among Latinos/Hispanics, sexual and gender minorities, and other marginalized and underserved populations. SDSU HealthLINK is a \$10 million endowment from the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) that is building a research infrastructure that supports the use of new technologies and big data in health disparities research.

Dr. Ayala completed her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with a specialization in Behavioral Medicine in 2002, received an MPH in Health Promotion in 2002 and an MA in Experimental Psychology in 1997. She joined SDSU as an assistant professor in 2005 and was promoted to professor in 2011. Dr. Ayala served as the associate dean for Research in the College of Health and Human Services from 2014 to 2017 and the associate director for Research in the School of Public Health from 2017-2018. Professor Ayala has led several intervention and observational studies funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Healthy Eating Research program, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention among others. Her total funding to date as an SDSU principal investigator is \$41.6 million. Dr. Ayala’s work examines a range of factors related to health and well-being in children, adults, and families, including improving access to and consumption of healthy foods by working with small food stores and restaurants, promoting physical activity through community health worker support, and preventing and controlling obesity, diabetes, and asthma through system change. Her research has produced over 180 peer-reviewed manuscripts, including several systematic reviews and evidence-based interventions.

In 2015, Dr. Ayala was presented with the Outstanding Faculty Award for the College of Health and Human Services in recognition of her achievements in designing evidence-based interventions to prevent and control a variety of chronic health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and asthma among Latinos. In 2018, she was awarded the Zahn Professorship of Innovation and Creativity which will help foster translation of the research initiatives in use of technology and big data for promoting health to the classroom in the form of innovations in Interprofessional Education.



Vickie Capps

Community Member

Term: September 2023 to September 2026 (fourth term)

Member, Audit Committee and Finance and Investment Committee

Vickie Capps is known for her exceptionally strong skill set consisting of executive leadership and mentoring, global strategic business development, corporate finance and accounting, capital markets, and investor relations, operations, business integration/restructuring and corporate governance.

Ms. Capps is currently a member of the board of directors and the audit committee chair of each of the following public companies, all within healthcare and life sciences: NuVasive, Inc., Amedisys, Inc., and Janux Therapeutics, Inc. She is also a member of the Senior Advisory Board of Consonance Capital Partners, a healthcare focused private equity firm. Ms. Capps also serves as a member of the board of directors of the San Diego State University Research Foundation. She previously served as a member of the boards of directors of Otonomy, Inc. (public), Silverback Therapeutics, Inc. (public), OmniGuide Holdings (private), Synthorx, Inc. (public), Enclara Pharmacia (private), Connecture, Inc. (public), RF Surgical Systems (private) and SenoRx (public).

Ms. Capps has had a distinguished career in finance and executive leadership. After she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration/Accounting from San Diego State University, she began her career with Ernst & Young LLP and served 10 years as a senior audit and accounting professional. Her subsequent work experience included CFO positions at several multinational corporations. Ms. Capps was recognized as a Director of the Year honoree by the Corporate Directors Forum in 2022 and as a CFO of the Year honoree by the San Diego Business Journal in 2009 and 2010. Ms. Capps is a California Certified Public Accountant.

Ms. Capps' unique and broad-based talents were an integral part of DJO Global, Inc.'s growth story from 2002 through 2013. When Ms. Capps joined DJO, a global orthopedic device company, as CFO in 2002, company revenue was approximately \$180 million. For 2013, DJO's revenues exceeded \$1.1 billion, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of over 20 percent. This strong growth result reflected Capps' key contributions, which included a highly successful corporate continuous improvement program, managing above-market organic sales growth, and leading over ten acquisitions and one transformational merger. During Ms. Capps' tenure, DJO's market capitalization increased from approximately \$54 million in July 2002, or about \$3 per share, to over \$1.2 billion in November 2007, or \$50.25 per share, when DJO merged with Blackstone Capital Partners' ReAble Therapeutics, Inc., a transaction that took DJO private. As a testimonial to the strength of the DJO management team, including Ms. Capps, Blackstone retained the DJO team to lead the newly merged business. Ms. Capps was also responsible for the international business of DJO from 2006 through 2009. She left DJO in December 2013 to pursue the current phase of her career as an advisor and board member.



Joan Coppenrath

Community Member

Term: September 2021 to September 2024 (second term)

Member, Audit Committee

Finance and operations executive Joan Coppenrath has more than thirty years of experience in public accounting and private industry including financial services, mortgage banking, and real estate. Her expertise includes strategic asset disposition, financial planning and reporting, financial accounting, operational management, and loan system conversions.

Ms. Coppenrath has been with HSBC Auto Finance since 2001, where she has served as controller, chief financial officer, and currently as strategic initiative finance executive. Prior to joining HSBC, Ms. Coppenrath held positions with GMAC Mortgage (senior VP, mortgage loan servicing), Wells Fargo Bank (VP, mortgage loan servicing) and KPMG (senior audit manager).

An SDSU alumna with a B.S. in Accounting, Ms. Coppenrath also serves her community. She is a board member of Just in Time for Foster Youth and has volunteered with the San Diego Zoological Society, Junior Achievement, and National Charity League.



Steven Gill, Ph.D.

Term: September 2022 to September 2025

Member, Audit Committee

Steve is an associate professor in the Charles W. Lamden School of Accountancy at San Diego State University. He received his Bachelor's of Science in Accounting from the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL, his Master's in Taxation from Northeastern University in Boston, MA, and his Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. He started his academic career at San Diego State University in 2008. Prior to academia, Dr. Gill worked for five years in both the audit and tax service lines of PricewaterhouseCoopers and has almost seven years of additional accounting industry experience including internal auditing, corporate financial accounting, and financial management roles including director of taxation.

Steve's research includes how taxation affects investors' decisions and methods to enforce difficult tax laws and standards in order to collect taxes owed by individuals. He developed case materials in conjunction with a Big Four accounting firm which applies technology into the income tax accounting process. Those materials and the affiliated software were later provided to his students at SDSU.

He has taught courses in individual, business, and corporate tax areas, and has developed and taught courses in accounting research and communications. Dr. Gill has authored leading textbooks covering topics in individual income tax and tax research areas. Steve has been serving as a non-director member of the audit committee for the past three years.



Tom McCarron

Community Member

Term: September 2022 to September 2025

Member, Finance and Investment Committee

Tom McCarron served as senior vice president for Mission Valley Development at San Diego State University from 2019 until his retirement in December 2020. He had 28 years of finance management and leadership experience in higher education roles. In this role, Tom led the acquisition and development phase of SDSU's vision to build a world-class university campus, including residential housing, a research center, and multi-use stadium in Mission Valley.

Previously, Tom served as the vice president for Business and Financial Affairs and chief financial officer at San Diego State University since July 2013. He was responsible for the management of one of four major divisions that make up the administrative organization of the University. Services provided by Business and Financial Affairs to the campus community include budget and financial resource management, Athletics and KPBS oversight, construction of new facilities, human resource management, maintenance and improvement of current facilities, and providing for the public and environmental safety of faculty, staff, and students.

Mr. McCarron oversaw the fiscal activities of the university and its 501 (c)(3) non-profit support organizations and enterprises. He was a member of the boards of directors of the San Diego State University Research Foundation and Aztec Shops, Ltd. Prior to his arrival at SDSU in 2013, Tom worked at California State University, Northridge for 14 years. He served as vice president of Administration and Finance and chief financial officer (2007-2013), and as the executive director and president of the University Corporation and North Campus Development Corporation (1999-2007). Tom also served as chief financial officer of the California State University Institute (1993-1998). Preceding his career in higher education, he spent over fifteen years in finance and management roles with primarily Fortune 500 companies. He started his career as an internal auditor.

Tom served on several California State University committees, such as the CSU Budget Advisory Committee, and the Tax-Sheltered Annuity Advisory Committee, and was appointed by the chancellor as a member of the CSU Financial Sustainability Working Group. His previous roles within the California State University system were as a member of the Risk Management Authority Executive Committee, as past president of the state-wide Auxiliary Organizations Association, and as past chair of the Chief Administrative and Business Officers.

Tom earned his B.S. in Accounting from California State University, Northridge and his MBA from Pepperdine University. Tom and his wife, Virginia, have served as lectors and Eucharistic ministers since 2001 starting at St. Bernardine of Siena in Woodland Hills, CA, and currently at Mission San Diego de Alcala since 2013. He was also a member of the St. Bernardine Parish and Finance Councils and served as finance chair until moving to San Diego in 2013. Tom is a graduate of the FBI Citizen's Academy and also served on the American Red Cross Business Leadership Council for several years.



Tarek Morsy

Associated Students President

Term: Ex Officio from September 2023 to present

No biography provided.



David Page

Community Member

Term: September 2022 to September 2025 (second term)

Chair, Audit Committee

David Page is the vice president of Finance for San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance. With significant experience in change management, process improvement, strategic planning, and team building, he has led the implementations of multiple financial systems, including a new general ledger system (Financial Edge), a new budgeting/forecasting/reporting system (PowerPlan), a travel request, expense reimbursement and pcard reconciliation system (Concur), and an e-procurement and payables system (Coupa). Prior to joining the Zoo, David served as corporate controller for two public companies, one in the information technology consulting industry and one in the golf manufacturing industry, and a privately held company in the biotech industry. He began his career as a certified public accountant at Ernst & Young.

David holds a B.S. in Accounting from San Diego State University and a Master's in Business Administration from California State University San Marcos.



Mahasweta Sarkar, Ph.D.

Term: September 2022 to September 2025

Dr. Sweta Sarkar is a professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at San Diego State University (SDSU). She received her doctorate degree in January 2006 from University of California, San Diego. After a brief stint as a senior scientist in SPAWAR Lab, Point Loma, Dr. Sarkar joined SDSU as a tenure-track faculty member in August 2006. Her research interest lies in the area of wireless networks, especially developing artificial intelligence infused MAC layer algorithms for applications ranging from precision agriculture, healthcare to brain-computer interfaces. She has published over 100 research articles (with several best-paper awards) and one patent. Her research is funded through several grants awarded by the National Science Foundation. Her research lab hosts undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and visiting faculty members from all over the world.

She serves as the chair of the Technical Program Committee of multiple Tier-1 IEEE conferences and guest editors of several technical journals. She is the recipient of the President's Leadership award at SDSU for her excellence in research and the Outstanding Faculty Award for her excellence in teaching. In her role as the co-director of Education in the NSF-funded Engineering Research Center - Center for Neurotechnology - she conducts extensive outreach programs in building the next generation of women scientists and those from underrepresented communities. She is currently the chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee in the College of Engineering at SDSU and serves as the College's liaison to the University's Diversity Council. She received the Faculty Excellence Award in Diversity and Inclusion in 2021 for her outreach work with underrepresented minority students of the community.

Dr. Sarkar has also been awarded a fellowship under the Fulbright Specialist program (2021-2024), established by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, to further her international academic and outreach collaborations.



Jennifer Thomas, Ph.D.

Term: September 2020 to September 2024 (second term)

Dr. Thomas is a professor and the master's program advisor in the Department of Psychology. She joined SDSU as an assistant professor in 2000.

Her research focuses on reducing the severity of fetal alcohol effects, particularly using choline supplementation as a potential treatment. Dr. Thomas's lab integrates students into all levels of research, enabling them to gain experience with behavioral testing and histological evaluation.

Dr. Thomas is the recipient of over \$9 million in grants—primarily from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. This includes a prestigious NIH MERIT Award. She has also been instrumental in the administration and/or preparation of conference, consortium, and training grants.

Dr. Thomas received her B.S. from Iowa State University and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa.



William “Bill” Tong, Ph.D.

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, SDSU

Term: Ex Officio from September 2023 to present

Dr. William Tong was appointed interim provost and senior vice president for Academic Affairs in June 2023, having previously served as vice provost since May 2021. He received his Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1984 from Iowa State University and worked at the Ames Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy. He joined the faculty in 1985 as an associate professor after his postdoctoral research at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy. In 1989, he was promoted to professor at SDSU.

In 2005, Dr. Tong was named a Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Dr. Tong has mentored more than 50 doctoral and masters students and many more postdoctoral students, visiting scientists/professors, and undergraduate research students in his laser laboratory.



Ming-Hsiang Tsou, Ph.D.

Term: September 2022 to September 2025 (third term)

Member, Audit Committee

Professor Tsou joined SDSU's Geography department in 2000. His research interests are in human dynamics, social media, big data, visualization, internet mapping, web geographic information systems (GIS), mobile GIS, cartography, and K-12 GIS education. His research has been applied to wildfire tracking, habitat conservation, health care and homeland security. He is co-author of Internet GIS, and serves on the editorial boards of the Annals of GIS, Cartography and GIScience, and Professional Geographers.

Dr. Tsou is the recipient of roughly \$4 million in grants; he currently holds three awards from the National Science Foundation.

Dr. Tsou is the director of the Center for Human Dynamics in the Mobile Age, a transdisciplinary research area of excellence at San Diego State University that integrates research from GIS, public health, social science, sociology, and communication. Dr. Tsou has served as chair of the Cartographic Specialty Group, chair of Cyberinfrastructure Specialty Group in the Association of American Geographers (AAG), and co-chair of the NASA Earth Science Enterprise Data System Working Group (ESEDWG) Standard Process Group (SPG). He has also served on two U.S. National Academy of Science Committees. From 2004-2007, Dr. Tsou was co-chair of the NASA Earth Science Enterprise Data System: Standard Process One. Since 2008, he has served as a senior researcher in the GeoTech Center for promoting GIS education in community colleges and high schools.

Dr. Tsou obtained his B.S. from National Taiwan University, his M.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and his Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder, all in Geography.



Alex Waters

Community Member

Term: September 2021 to September 2024

Alex Waters is the director of economic development and innovation at the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation. One of the primary roles is running CONNECT ALL @ the Jacobs Center (CAJC), the San Diego region's first low to moderate income and diversity-focused accelerator program funded by the City of San Diego. The initiative was developed to help early-stage entrepreneurs to scale businesses and create jobs.

Prior to joining CAJC, he served as the program manager for the Collaboratory for Downtown Innovation, an initiative also funded by the City of San Diego and the Downtown San Diego Partnership. This program served to empower, train and elevate earlystage entrepreneurs across the region. In this role, he managed all of the day-to-day operations, training, programming, grant writing and community outreach.

He has experience in startup operations, management, developing educational programs, and customer support from his time as the director of Post Enrollment Services at Ed Tech startup 2U Inc. Alex has worked as a consultant to build programs and streamline operations for local non-profits such as Fab Lab San Diego, UC San Diego's Design Lab, and the University of San Diego's Department of Professional and Continuing Education. He has also been an innovation and leadership coach with Moves the Needle and Seth Godin's AltMBA and Akimbo programs. Through all of his work, he provides entrepreneurs and organizations the framework to accelerate the right learning and customer-centered insights that drive businesses forward.

Alex has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from the University of Maryland – College Park and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy from San Diego State University.



Robert “Bob” Zeller, Ph.D.

Term: September 2021 to September 2025 (third term)

Member, Finance and Investment Committee

Dr. Zeller obtained his B.A. from Boston University and his Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology. He was hired as an assistant professor in SDSU’s biology department in 2001, promoted to associate professor with tenure in 2007 and to full professor in 2013. He is currently serving as chair of the Biology department. Since arriving at SDSU he has taught nearly 4,000 students and has trained approximately 36 undergraduates as well as numerous masters and doctoral students in his laboratory.

For over 15 years Dr. Zeller has served as a faculty member at the internally renowned Embryology Course of the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Research in his laboratory centers on understanding how the nervous system develops in the marine animal ascidian. Dr. Zeller’s research focuses on both the basic cellular mechanisms that govern development, as well as more applied experiments related to hearing loss and Alzheimer’s disease. This research has been continuously funded by the National Science Foundation since 2004, starting with an NSF CAREER grant. In addition to his NSF support, Dr. Zeller’s work is also currently funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Dr. Zeller is the recipient of roughly \$3 million in grants.

He is a member of the editorial board for Integrative and Comparative Biology and is currently the program area coordinator for the Cell and Molecular Biology faculty of the Biology Department. Dr. Zeller worked with the College of Sciences, the university, and research foundation to design and build the Coastal Waters Laboratory.