

# SkyDeck's New Exec. Director Laser Focused on Startups

---

By

Steven Cohen

---

SkyDeck, UC Berkeley's startup accelerator, is on the move under the leadership of new executive director Caroline Winnett, MBA 90.

An entrepreneur, Winnett previously led several startups, most recently as founder and CEO of [BrandNeuro](#), a neuroscience-inspired marketing company. A desire to run an accelerator program at Berkeley-Haas led Winnett to meet with Dean Rich Lyons about the job.

"There's an insane amount of talent aligning here," says Winnett, who is also a classically trained violinist. "SkyDeck has a laser focus on helping these budding entrepreneurs succeed, to make sure they have an awareness that there's a place to go when they have their team together — and a somewhat mature business idea." SkyDeck was founded in 2012 as a joint venture among UC Berkeley's College of Engineering, the Haas School of Business, and the Vice Chancellor for Research Office. SkyDeck is supported by many partners, including the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and the Chancellor.

SkyDeck's Shattuck Avenue penthouse now hosts 28 teams. Nine of the current SkyDeck startups and 11 former startups have Haas affiliations.

Since taking over as executive director, Winnett has started to restructure the program. "Caroline hit the ground running last November with a vision for SkyDeck that she developed rapidly, with input from many different people who make entrepreneurship tick at Berkeley," Dean Lyons said. "She's been a great motivator for the SkyDeck teams as well."



Winnett is building more formal steps into the accelerator process, bringing in staff to support that buildout, and figuring out how to best align the university's many resources with SkyDeck's needs. She's also focusing on helping entrepreneurs with startup governance, organizational issues, marketing, and funding — all components required for companies to successfully launch.

"We're halfway down the road in fully developing that program," she says. "We're trying to expand

the program and make it more visible, not only to UC Berkeley and Haas students, but also to the outside world and the investment community."

One of many SkyDeck success stories is Jason Bellet, BS 14, who helped develop [digital stethoscope company Eko](#) at Skydeck. Bellet and his team were recently recognized in Forbes magazine's 2015 "30 Under 30" list.

"They had a great idea for a medical device, but they didn't have the funding or the customers required to break into an industry that is not easy to break into," Winnett says. SkyDeck helped Eko reorganize, persevere and attract angel investors, she said.

[Simple but Needed](#), a growing real-time inventory management business incubated at SkyDeck in 2009 by Shourya Basu, MBA 11, and Ian Ranahan, MBA 11, needed a network of customers. Their pilot customers, UC Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories, are now anchor clients.

"The most important thing I do is listen to the startups," says Winnett. "You want to get to a point where they're singing their song and people are listening."