

POLITICAL ECONOMY PROGRAM

Accelerating Innovation

A Policy Framework for the University of the Philippines Spin-offs

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Executive Summary

The University of the Philippines (UP) has a strong research base and an increasingly robust intellectual property (IP) and technology transfer system. Yet, despite its growing portfolio of potentially commercializable technologies, only eight documented spin-off companies were established in UP Diliman between 2018 and 2025. This policy brief argues that the principal challenge is no longer the generation or protection of research outputs, but the absence of an integrated institutional framework for transforming these outputs into sustainable, investment-ready ventures.

Drawing on a review of UP policies and relevant literature, as well as a focus group discussion with members of the UP science and technology community, the brief identifies seven key policy gaps: the absence of a dedicated UP System spin-off policy; fragmented commercialization pathways; insufficient financing to cross the “valley of death”; limited incentives and entrepreneurial career pathways for researchers; lack of standardized governance for founder participation and equity; inadequate institutional capacity for venture building; and limited monitoring of commercialization outcomes.

To address these gaps, the brief proposes nine interconnected policy recommendations centered on establishing a dedicated UP System Spin-off Policy and an integrated commercialization pipeline. These include creating a technology maturation and spin-off development fund; adopting founder-friendly commercialization policies; reforming academic incentives; strengthening entrepreneurial capacity and venture-building services; expanding industry and investment partnerships; and institutionalizing monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

These reforms seek to shift UP from a primarily technology transfer-oriented model toward a comprehensive entrepreneurial university model that systematically supports innovation from research and technology development through venture creation, investment, scaling, and societal impact. By strengthening this ecosystem, UP can maximize the public value of its research and contribute more effectively to national competitiveness, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable development.

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Introduction

Innovation is widely recognized as a driver of economic growth, industrial competitiveness, and sustainable development. Across the world, research universities have evolved beyond their traditional roles of teaching and knowledge generation to become key actors in national innovation systems. Through spin-offs—companies established to commercialize university-generated research and intellectual property (IP)—universities translate scientific discoveries into products, services, and technologies that generate economic value, attract investment, create high-quality employment, and address pressing societal challenges.

The Philippines has established a strong policy foundation to promote innovation and technology commercialization. The Philippine Technology Transfer Act of 2009 (Republic Act [RA] No. 10055) requires publicly funded research institutions to protect and commercialize research outputs for public benefit. The Philippine Innovation Act (RA No. 11293) institutionalizes innovation as a national development priority by strengthening collaboration among government, industry, academia, and civil society. Complementing these laws, the Innovative Startup Act (RA No. 11337) provides financial and nonfinancial support to technology startups and recognizes higher education institutions as critical sources of innovation and entrepreneurial talent.

As the national university, the University of the Philippines (UP) plays a central role in advancing national development—an objective reflected in the UP Charter of 2008 (RA No. 9500). Consistent with its mandate to undertake pioneering research, the University established the UP Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy and the Technology Transfer and Business Development Offices (TTBDOs) aimed at protecting IP, facilitating technology transfer, and supporting industry partnerships. Together, these initiatives seek to ensure that publicly funded research generates tangible economic and social returns. To date, UP has developed a growing pipeline of technologies with commercial potential. From 2023 to 2025, UP Diliman reported 124 active invention disclosures, 64 IPRs filed, and 15 technology licensing agreements.

Given UP's expanding innovation portfolio, there are also efforts to set up university spin-offs, defined as legally established enterprises that would commercialize technologies, IP, or research outputs created in the university. Unlike conventional startups

that are mainly focused on market opportunity innovations, spin-offs are built upon university-generated innovations and typically maintain formal relationships with the institution through licensing, equity participation, or other technology transfer arrangements (Modina et al. 2024). They have become an increasingly important mechanism for commercializing early-stage technologies that may be too risky or immature for direct industry licensing, while allowing academic inventors to remain actively involved in technology development and market validation. Furthermore, university spin-offs may face additional commercialization issues not experienced by startups brought about by the policy limitations of a higher educational institution setup.

So far, however, despite the University's substantially larger research output, only eight documented spin-off companies were established between 2018 and 2025 in UP Diliman. Discussions with UP spin-off founders reveal that the critical barriers are institutional rather than technological. Researchers face limited pre-commercialization funding, insufficient support for prototype scaling and manufacturing, fragmented mentoring for business development, lengthy regulatory and business registration processes, uncertainty in navigating IP and UP's research dissemination requirements, limited access to investment, and inadequate mechanisms for connecting researchers with industry partners, customers, and investors.

These challenges are particularly evident during the "valley of death," which refers to the gap between proof of concept and the innovation's market readiness and where promising technologies often fail to secure the technical, financial, and entrepreneurial support needed for commercialization. A focus group discussion (FGD), held on 3 June 2026 at UP Diliman with select members of the UP science and technology community who either have set up spin-offs or are contemplating this option, highlighted the difficulty of financing pilot manufacturing as well as ensuring product certification, regulatory compliance, and market penetration after government-funded research projects conclude. The FGD participants also emphasized that the university possesses strong research capabilities, but generally lacks basic manufacturing capacity, commercialization expertise, and long-term business development support required for sustainable venture growth.

Since university spin-offs are a subset of innovative startups belonging in the broader Philippine startup ecosystem, their common commercialization challenges may stem from policy gaps. Despite enabling legislation, persistent gaps remain in financing, incubation, procurement, talent development, and commercialization pathways for technology-based enterprises (Teves et al. 2023). Philippine spin-offs are also like startups in that they face recurring constraints, including limited market validation, inadequate funding, weak business models, and insufficient entrepreneurial experience—challenges that are especially pronounced among university researchers transitioning into founders (Escolano 2022).

Policy Gap Analysis

UP has already made significant progress in strengthening its innovation ecosystem through the amended UP IPR Policy, the establishment of the TTBDs, and the implementation of incubation initiatives such as UPSCALE Innovation Hub. The current institutional framework, however, remains largely centered on IP management and technology transfer rather than the systematic creation, growth, and scaling of university spin-offs. The result is an innovation ecosystem that has strong research capabilities, but lacks an integrated governance framework to consistently transform research outputs into sustainable, investment-ready enterprises.

Successful entrepreneurial universities distinguish between IP policies (for governing ownership and protection of IP) and spin-off policies (for dedicated governance on venture creation, founder participation, equity allocation, commercialization support, and institutional engagement throughout the venture lifecycle). Recent policy reviews also conclude that universities that adopt clear and founder-friendly spin-off frameworks produce more spin-offs, attract more private investment, and achieve higher commercialization outcomes (Tracey and Williamson 2023). The 3 June FGD surfaced the challenges facing university spin-offs.

Gap 1. Absence of an Established Dedicated UP System Spin-off Policy

The amended UP IPR Policy recognizes spin-offs as one technology transfer modality and introduces mechanisms such as technology incubation, pre-spin-off funding, and TTBD support. However, these provisions remain embedded within an IP policy whose primary objective is the protection, management, and

commercialization of university-generated IP. The policy does not provide a comprehensive governance framework governing the establishment, operation, growth, and long-term relationship between UP and its spin-off companies.

Consequently, many operational decisions, including founder eligibility, governance structures, institutional oversight, venture lifecycle management, and performance evaluation, continue to be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Gap 2. Fragmented Commercialization Pathways

UP possesses numerous commercialization mechanisms, including invention disclosure, IP protection, licensing, collaborative research, incubation, startup mentoring, and industry engagement. However, these initiatives are largely program-driven rather than integrated into a unified commercialization pipeline.

Spin-off founders emphasized in the FGD that commercialization involves far more than IP protection. Successful spin-off formation requires coordinated support across market validation, customer discovery, prototype development, regulatory compliance, manufacturing, investor engagement, and business scaling. Many founders described the commercialization journey as fragmented, requiring them to navigate multiple offices, funding programs, and external agencies independently.

Several studies similarly identify fragmented institutional support as one of the principal barriers to university entrepreneurship, particularly in developing economies where commercialization support services are distributed across multiple organizations without a common governance framework (Musleh et al. 2025).

Gap 3. Insufficient Financing Support to Cross the “Valley of Death”

One of the most significant commercialization bottlenecks is the transition between laboratory research and market deployment. Most government research grants generally support technology development up to proof-of-concept or prototype stages. Once these projects conclude, researchers frequently encounter funding gaps for pilot manufacturing, certification, regulatory approval, market validation, customer acquisition, pilot testing, and production scaling.

The discussions with founders repeatedly identified this financing gap as one of the most significant obstacles to successful spin-off formation. FGD participants emphasized the need for dedicated commercialization grants, prototype funding, manufacturing support, and investment readiness programs after research funding ends. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) likewise identifies early-stage financing and commercialization support as persistent weaknesses within the Philippine startup ecosystem (Teves et al. 2023).

Gap 4. Limited Founder Incentives and Entrepreneurial Career Pathways

Although UP encourages university-developed technology commercialization, existing institutional incentive systems remain predominantly aligned with traditional academic performance indicators such as teaching, mentoring, publications, research, extension, and collaborations. Researchers highlighted the tension between publication requirements and technology transfer timelines, particularly invention disclosure filing prior to research dissemination. Many also noted that commercialization activities require substantial commitments that are not adequately recognized within existing faculty or research, extension, and professional staff (REPS) workload, promotion, or performance evaluation systems.

Recent studies on academic entrepreneurship indicate that inadequate institutional incentives, limited entrepreneurship training, and cultural misalignment between academic and entrepreneurial objectives remain major barriers to spin-off formation. Universities that explicitly recognize commercialization as part of academic achievement consistently demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial performance (Musleh et al. 2025).

Gap 5. Lack of Standardized Governance for Founder Participation and Equity

Successful spin-off ecosystems require transparent policies governing founder eligibility, faculty, REPS, and student involvement, university equity participation, licensing arrangements, founder equity allocation, conflict-of-interest management, use of university facilities, faculty and REPS leave arrangements and secondment, and exit mechanisms. Although the UP IPR Policy establishes the legal basis for commercialization, many of these operational issues remain broadly defined or subject to administrative interpretation. This creates uncertainty

for founders, investors, and industry partners during company formation and investment negotiations. Policy transparency and standardized deal terms are key determinants of investor confidence and spin-off growth. The UK Independent Review of University Spin-out Companies recommends standardized, market-based licensing and equity practices to reduce negotiation time and improve founder attractiveness to investors (Tracey and Williamson 2023).

Gap 6. Limited Institutional Capacity for Venture Building

The TTBDs have substantially strengthened UP's technology transfer capability, while initiatives such as UPSCALE, UP Enterprise, and IGNITE have expanded entrepreneurship support. Nevertheless, these initiatives primarily function as incubation or technology transfer programs rather than comprehensive venture-building platforms.

Successful spin-offs require sustained support in the following areas: customer discovery; business model development; regulatory strategy; manufacturing partnerships; investor readiness; fundraising; executive recruitment; and international market expansion.

The proposed Innovation Grants, Incentives, and Programs framework of UP Diliman recognizes that current institutional support remains incomplete as well as requires further institutionalization and thus recommends the provision of commercialization grants and proof-of-concept funding as well as startup acceleration, founder development, and innovation incentives.

Gap 7. Limited Monitoring and Evaluation of Commercialization Outcomes

Current institutional metrics largely emphasize research productivity and IP outputs, including invention disclosures, patents, and licensing activities. While these indicators remain important, they do not adequately capture the long-term impact of university entrepreneurship. A mature spin-off management system should also monitor the number of spin-offs created, survival rates, follow-on investment, employment generated, revenues, exports, technology adoption, societal impact and returns to the University.

Best practices increasingly measure commercialization success through venture creation and economic impact rather than patent counts alone (Tracey and Williamson 2023).

Key Policy Recommendations

The foregoing analysis and FGD findings indicate that the principal constraint facing UP is no longer the generation of research or the protection of IP, but the absence of an integrated institutional framework that systematically converts research excellence into sustainable, high-impact ventures. Existing mechanisms provide essential components of commercialization, yet they remain dispersed across multiple policies, programs, and administrative units.

A dedicated UP System Spin-off Policy would address these institutional gaps by establishing coherent governance, standardized procedures, founder-friendly commercialization pathways, coordinated funding mechanisms, and robust performance metrics. Such a policy would align the University's innovation ecosystem with international best practices while advancing its mandate under the UP Charter, the Technology Transfer Act, the Philippine Innovation Act, and the Innovative Startup Act to generate tangible economic and societal value from publicly funded research.

Recommendation 1. Establish a Dedicated UP System Spin-off Policy

The University should adopt a stand-alone UP System Spin-off Policy that complements, rather than replaces, the UP IPR Policy. While the IPR Policy governs the ownership, protection, and commercialization of IP, a dedicated spin-off policy should provide comprehensive governance for venture creation, institutional participation, founder engagement, equity management, and commercialization support throughout the venture lifecycle. The policy should clearly flesh out guidelines for the following: eligibility of faculty, REPS, students, alumni, and external entrepreneurs as founders; criteria for technologies eligible for spin-off formation; commercialization pathways; institutional approval processes; governance and oversight; institutional equity participation; licensing arrangements; founder responsibilities; conflict-of-interest management; use of university resources; and exit mechanisms.

A dedicated policy would provide consistency across all UP constituent universities (CUs) while reducing uncertainty for founders, investors, and industry partners. Recent international policy reviews conclude

that transparent and standardized spin-off policies significantly improve commercialization efficiency and investment attractiveness (Tracey and Williamson 2023).

Recommendation 2. Develop an Integrated UP Commercialization Pipeline

Commercialization should be viewed as a continuous process rather than isolated activities involving IP protection filing or company registration. UP should establish a structured commercialization pipeline encompassing the following stages: invention disclosure, IP protection, proof-of-concept validation, prototype development, customer discovery, market validation, regulatory readiness, venture formation, incubation and acceleration, investment readiness, community readiness, business scaling, and internationalization.

Each stage should have clearly identified institutional support, funding mechanisms, responsible offices, and measurable performance indicators. This integrated approach addresses the fragmented commercialization pathway identified by UP spin-off founders and aligns with international recommendations promoting coordinated innovation ecosystems (Tracey and Williamson 2023; Musleh et al. 2025).

Recommendation 3. Create a UP Technology Maturation and Spin-off Development Fund

One of the biggest barriers to commercialization is the financing gap between research completion and market deployment. UP should establish a dedicated commercialization fund supporting proof-of-concept studies, prototype optimization, field-testing activities, pilot-scale manufacturing, product certification, preclinical and clinical trials, regulatory compliance preparation, customer validation, IP filing expenses, freedom-to-operate analyses, business development, and investor readiness.

The fund may be supported through UP's resources and strategic partnerships with government agencies, private foundations, venture capital firms, philanthropic organizations, and industry. Providing dedicated commercialization financing directly addresses the "valley of death" identified in both domestic and international commercialization literature.

Recommendation 4. Adopt Founder-Friendly Commercialization Policies

The University should simplify and standardize commercialization agreements by developing model templates for licensing agreements, nondisclosure agreements, material transfer agreements, option agreements, equity allocation agreements, shareholder agreements, conflict-of-interest disclosures, confidentiality agreements, and founder participation agreements.

Negotiations should be transparent, timely, and based on standardized institutional guidelines to reduce transaction costs. Recent reviews consistently emphasize that founder-friendly licensing and predictable equity arrangements significantly increase spin-off formation while remaining compatible with responsible stewardship of publicly funded IP (Tracey and Williamson 2023).

Recommendation 5. Reform Academic Incentives to Recognize Entrepreneurship

Industrial translation and commercialization should become a recognized component of academic excellence. UP should incorporate entrepreneurship and commercialization into faculty and REPS evaluation systems through recognition of the following metrics: IP protection filing, spin-off creation, technology licensing, industry collaboration, and market validation; mentoring; IPs successfully commercialized; technology adoption; and societal impact.

The complementary incentives may include reduced teaching loads during commercialization, entrepreneurial leave, commercialization awards, seed grants, revenue-sharing enhancements, and recognition in promotion and tenure.

Several studies indicate that entrepreneurial universities succeed because commercialization activities are institutionally rewarded rather than treated as extracurricular activities (Musleh et al. 2025; Romero-Sánchez, Perdomo-Charry, and Burbano-Vallejo 2024).

Recommendation 6. Strengthen Entrepreneurial Capacity Development

Most UP researchers possess exceptional technical expertise but relatively limited entrepreneurial experience. UP should institutionalize entrepreneurship development programs covering

various areas including: customer discovery, lean spin-off and startup methodologies, business model development, regulatory strategy, pilot testing, field testing, scaling-up processes, manufacturing, financial planning, IP strategy, investment readiness, venture financing, and leadership and negotiation.

These programs should be complemented by Entrepreneurs-in-Residence or Experts-in-Residence initiatives, alumni entrepreneurs, industry mentors, experienced founders, and venture capital advisors. Numerous studies consistently identify entrepreneurial capability as one of the strongest predictors of spin-off success (Musleh et al. 2025; Romero-Sánchez, Perdomo-Charry, and Burbano-Vallejo 2024).

Recommendation 7. Expand Venture-Building Capacity of UP

Beyond technology transfer, UP should develop institutional capability for venture creation. TTBDs should gradually evolve into integrated commercialization offices capable of providing the following services: commercialization strategy, market intelligence, technology valuation, regulatory advisory, business development, investor matching, legal support, licensing negotiation, spin-off and startup coaching, and international partnership development.

Existing initiatives such as UPSCALE, UP Enterprise, and IGNITE should be integrated into a coordinated venture-building ecosystem rather than operating as independent programs.

Recommendation 8. Strengthen Industry and Investment Partnerships

Successful spin-offs require continuous engagement with industry and investors.

UP should establish strategic partnerships with venture capital firms, angel investors, corporate venture funds, manufacturing companies, government agencies, local government units, multinational corporations, and international commercialization networks.

Regular technology showcase events, investor forums, industry immersion programs, and innovation demonstration projects should become institutionalized. The ADB identifies stronger industry participation and improved financing networks as critical priorities for strengthening the Philippine startup ecosystem (Teves et al. 2023).

Recommendation 9. Institutionalize Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Commercialization performance should be measured beyond IP and licensing. UP should develop a university-wide commercialization dashboard tracking relevant data: invention disclosures, IPs filed, IPs granted, licenses executed, spin-offs established, spin-off survival rates, follow-on investment, jobs created, revenues generated, exports, technology adopted, social impact, and returns to the University.

Regular policy evaluation should enable evidence-based refinement of commercialization programs and institutional policies. UP's policy should emphasize that the innovation systems in place should evaluate research through societal and economic outcomes rather than research outputs alone.

Strategic Policy Direction

Collectively, these recommendations represent a transition from a technology transfer model toward a comprehensive entrepreneurial university model. Rather than focusing primarily on protecting IP and facilitating occasional licensing transactions, UP should cultivate an integrated ecosystem that systematically supports researchers from scientific discovery through technology maturation, venture creation, investment attraction, business scaling, and societal impact.

Implementing these reforms would align UP with international best practices while advancing its mandate. More importantly, it would enable UP to maximize the public value of its research by transforming knowledge into technologies, enterprises, and innovations that contribute directly to national competitiveness, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable development.

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