

**REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

To University of California, Merced

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Initial Accreditation Review

Team Roster

Chair, Don Kassing,
President, San José State University

Assistant Chair/Team Editor, Stacey Morgan Foster,
Vice President for Student Affairs, Eastern Washington University

Michael P. Clark,
Vice Provost for Academic Planning, Professor of English, University of California, Irvine

Lynda Goff,
Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Vice Provost and Dean Emeritus
of Undergraduate Education, University of California, Santa Cruz

George P. Pernsteiner,
Chancellor, Oregon University System

Don S. Taylor,
Assistant Vice President for Academic Programs and Global Engagement, California State
University, Sacramento

The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution under the WASC Commission Standards and Core Commitments and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.

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EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTENT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

Established in 2005, UC Merced has undertaken the complex work necessary to establish the first new US research university in the last 40 years with steady determination and extraordinary skill. Not only has the campus tackled building new facilities, designing curriculum and recruiting a workforce and students, but it has done so within a challenging fiscal environment. Throughout this process, the campus has also vigorously pursued accreditation and has done so in a way that has begun to interweave assessment into the fabric of the academy.

The campus was granted candidacy in 2007 and applied for initial accreditation in 2008. The Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) was conducted in Fall 2009. This report is the Educational Effectiveness phase of the Initial Accreditation Review. The campus submitted their report in December 2010, responding to Commission and team recommendations and organizing their review around three themes of educational effectiveness, program review and student success.

When the team visited in Fall 2009, enrollment was 3,384 Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES). As of Fall 2010, enrollment has increased 28% to 4,334 FTES. The campus has a stable enrollment pipeline at present, drawing primarily from three regional California areas in equal numbers: the Central Valley, the Bay Area, and the Greater Los Angeles Area. A compact with the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) sets enrollment increases at 600 additional FTES every year for the next three to four years. The Fall 2011 FTES target is on track to be 5,000.

While the entering student academic index appears slightly below the average compared to other UC campuses¹, UC Merced has some distinguishing characteristics and challenges. The majority of students are the first in their family to attend college (54.6%), and a majority of

¹ For first-time, full-time freshmen enrollees for Fall 2009. UCM average SAT: 1035; UC average SATs are approximately 1200. UCM entering high school gpa: 3.44; UC average gpa is 3.84 (UC Stat Finder)

freshmen (57%) are Pell eligible, representing students with the highest level of financial need. In a region with lower than average high school completion rates and college attendance, UC Merced is challenged to meet its research mission while delivering to this underserved area a much needed academic opportunity. The campus seems to have embraced this challenge, directing resources toward analysis and implementation of a plethora of student success interventions and pedagogic adaptations to help students be successful and to realize the aspirations of the UC system.

Of the UC campuses, Merced is the most ethnically diverse². First year retention has risen to 87.1%.³ With only two years' worth of data, the four year graduation rate has been 33.3% and 29.7% (for the 2005 and 2006 classes), and the five year graduation rate (the only one available given the institution's youth) is 52.1%.⁴ Pell eligible students perform similarly to their peers, with 86.8% retained after year one, and with 31.7% and 29.1% of the respective 2005 and 2006 classes graduating in four years. The Pell student five year graduation rate is slightly below the general student population at 48.7%.

The campus continues to move forward with facilities development. A new 350 bed residence hall will come on line in 2013, and an \$88 million science/engineering building is in the planning for 2014, a \$40 million classroom building soon after that, and a \$10 million extension to the wellness/recreation center, as well as continued planning for other campus infrastructure.

The campus demonstrates significant evidence of incorporating the objectives for undergraduate general education⁵ throughout the curricular and co-curricular experience. These objectives have now been well integrated into learning outcomes in the academic programs and within Student Affairs. A well-developed faculty assessment effort is described within this report and should be noted as a best practice, as is the mapping of GE objectives across the Student Affairs division.

² African American 6.2%, Asian/Pacific Islander 28.2%, Hispanic 33.8%, Native American 0.5%, Pacific Islander 0.6%, White 21.5%, 2 or more races 2.7%, Non-resident alien 1.8%, Decline to State 4.7. (UCM Institutional Planning and Analysis Website)

³ First Time Full-time Freshmen (FTF) from Fall 09 cohort. This is up from 82.3% for the Fall 05 cohort.

⁴ All based on FTF criteria.

⁵ GE areas: scientific literacy, decision making, communication, self and society, ethics and responsibility, leadership and teamwork, aesthetic understanding and creativity, and development of personal potential.

Before and during the visit in March, the team had access to prolific documentation on assessment efforts and institutional data, as well as communications with executive leadership to include the Chancellor of UC Merced and the UC President. The visit provided the team with appropriate opportunities to interact with students, faculty and staff. The team visited the main campus and did not visit off-campus sites.

The team recognizes and respects the scope and gravity of UC Merced's mission, and has conducted this review in keeping with WASC intentions to provide formative assessment that will have lasting value for the institution.

B. The Institution's Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Report:

- **Alignment with the Proposal**
- **Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report**

The report accurately documents UC Merced's progress toward meeting the WASC core commitment to Educational Effectiveness. The institution provided clear and useful evidence through its report and through the visiting team's on campus interviews. The campus has done significant work to analyze its Educational Effectiveness efforts. The Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Report provided five essays which addressed the required elements outlined by WASC Commission Handbook of Accreditation and responded in either the essays or the appendixes to all of the WASC Commission's and the visiting team's recommendations from the earlier Capacity and Preparatory Review. The EER Report aligns appropriately with UCM's original proposal.

UC Merced describes its intended outcomes for the EER in Essay # I. This essay includes three topics. First, there is a description of the institution's work to align its comprehensive system of quality assurance with its institution goals. This alignment through its quality assurance system is designed to reach curricular, co-curricular and administrative units. The description of the quality assurance system includes the reliance on imported University of California policies, UC Merced Divisional Senate Policies, and the role and responsibilities of specific senate committees.

The second topic in Essay # I is a description of efforts to add direct measures of education outcomes to their processes. The use of Faculty Assessment Organizers is highlighted as part of broad efforts to guide faculty in developing and implanting multi-year assessment plans focused on a set of publicly available Program Learning Outcomes. These plans have been implemented with faculty in each program assessing at least one learning outcome per program per year.

The third topic is a description of the University's efforts to leverage the quality assurance tools it has developed to map overlaps between programmatic curriculum and General Education goals along with institutional goals. The institution has also created a set of internal processes that test whether programmatic and pedagogical changes impact learning outcomes. In addition, the institution is discovering how to integrate its programmatic assessment findings with related or support activities in other parts of the university. A Senate-Administration Council on Assessment (SACA) has been established with the charge to integrate assessment data from all parts of the university. This committee then recommends new policies, suggests improvements in practices, and identifies institutional questions to direct future assessment. During the campus visit the team learned that SACA's work influences the budget process in direct and indirect ways. The final point of the third topic is an acknowledgement of where the campus is on the quality assurance journey started five years ago. UC Merced is asking the hard questions about where they are, how well they are doing, what limitations they are experiencing, and what they need to do to improve. These conversations seem to be robust and clearly shape short and long term views of their assessment efforts.

The report was well-organized and comprehensive. Substantial data were available imbedded within the report as well as carefully organized within appendices. The visiting team found that the report, as well as the interviews on campus, portrayed the work of the campus accurately and honestly. The team also noted broad involvement in the accreditation process and the commitments associated with it. During the visit, the team had the opportunity to interview over 250 people and felt assured that there was a deep commitment to the institution's proposal and review. The institution has implemented its plans for assessment, program review and student success very effectively. Required exhibits were available and helpful to the visiting team and provide direct and indirect evidence, although at different rates across the University.

Conversations with faculty, staff and administrators were candid and serious. UC Merced is engaged in the accreditation process honestly and openly. Their effort is rigorous, with searching questions answered and solid methodology developed. As in the CPR visit, the visiting team was impressed by the University's effort to involve and empower a broad and robust team in its efforts to meet the WASC Standards. UC Merced seems to have attained an institutional commitment to engage in serious self-review and improvement.

Aligning institutional goals with a comprehensive system of quality assurance and improvement is challenging work. Creating this alignment creates loops of integrated thinking and systems. All the components must eventually fit together and reinforce each other. UC Merced has put uncommon effort into connecting the elements of their quality assurance system and understanding the linkages between them. There is still work to be done, but it is clear the institution has done considerable work in the short time it has been in existence and has made remarkable progress.

C. Response to Previous Commission Issues

The Commission requested in its letter of March 3, 2010 that UC Merced address within the EER Report issues raised by the Commission and the major recommendations by the team. These issues cover the areas of **assessment; program review; student success; and financial, strategic, and academic planning**. UC Merced provided an appendix for each issue with narrative discussion, evidence, and direction for further discussion as found in the EER Report. While not intended as an exhaustive review of each area, the observations below are relevant to these specific previously cited issues.

Assessment: Assessment of student learning is comprehensively addressed within the EER. For example, at the academic department level, UC Merced has made excellent progress in using assessment to inform the Program Learning Outcomes. Almost all syllabi now have learning outcomes, and these are evaluated against course outcomes to determine how effective and realistic they are to achieve the course's objectives. A particularly effective method to steer these efforts is led through the newly formed Senate Administrative Council on Assessment

(SACA). Evidence was provided to demonstrate both direct and indirect assessment in the academic and Student Affairs areas. Plans to expand assessment to other stakeholder groups (such as alumni) are well underway and incorporated into unit assessment plans

The team had noted in the CPR Report that the Library would benefit from additional assessment and discussion in the EER Report, in particular related to technology and information resources provided by the Library. UC Merced provided a thorough discussion about current Library assessment activities and actions taken in response to assessment findings, as well as information about benchmarking Library resources (collections and funding) against like institutions. While most assessment appears to be focused on satisfaction indicators, the recent activity of the Library to more vigorously survey users is to be commended. The Library also conducted a very useful evaluation of student information literacy for Writing 10 students (see Section IIA). Not all data had been analyzed as of the visit; nevertheless, the team was encouraged by the responsiveness to the issue.

Administrative assessment was beginning to be addressed through a regular process led by SACA. The process SACA had described was clear and had the support of the University's executive leadership to sustain its activities. The administrative unit assessment process was in progress during the team visit, and from interviews with University leaders it seemed evident that such assessment was at a variety of stages across the administrative units, with the exception of Student Affairs, which is far ahead. In particular, the Business Administration units were in a very early stage of assessment, which in and of itself was not an issue. However, the unit did not appear to have a developed understanding of the types of assessment tools available or the relationship and importance of their assessment processes to the overall University strategic direction.

Program Review: The Commission encouraged UC Merced to develop a regular program review process. Through the EER Report (in particular Essay III), the campus highlighted the progress made to develop a schedule and to complete several program reviews. This area appears to be well underway and is progressing across the campus consistent with the assessment efforts noted above.

Student Success: Concerns noted were specific to addressing student satisfaction, ensuring student opportunities for research, integrating classroom and real-life applications, infusing planning with a priority to deliver student success, and using data more effectively. The campus successfully responded to all these concerns, while acknowledging that as enrollment grows—especially in this climate of financial constriction—increasing research opportunities for students becomes more challenging. It was clear, nevertheless, that the campus had not changed its commitment to student research opportunities. While campus planning and the overall orientation of everyone at UC Merced is very student-focused, the team noted concern about the need for near-term facility development to address quality of life issues related to social space and student support services. This is discussed later in this report in Section II E. Regarding use of data, the team found during this visit that the campus had a more effective method of using and talking about data than during the CPR visit and was responding to questions raised in innovative ways (Essay IV).

Financial, Strategic and Academic Planning: The development of a three year MOU (2010-2013) with the UCOP provides for significant financial support and stability during a difficult financial environment in the state. The campus has agreed to raise enrollment by 600 FTES each year during the period of the MOU and will be focusing resources on improving student retention, developing faculty in strategic lower cost areas, and increasing depth in existing programs (rather than diffusing resources to start new ones) to ensure the stability of the enterprise. An extension of the \$5 million supplemental support budget further shores up the financial situation for the University. Capital budget planning continues with UCOP working diligently to highlight the need for the two planned academic buildings (Science/Engineering and a general academic and class facility). As noted in the above discussion, planning is somewhat stalled in the development of other areas of the capital plan related to student life space.

When the team visited in 2009, collection of data was cited as a strength, but the actual application of data was cited as needing improvement. Since then, the campus has initiated a more purposeful program for using institutional research, coordinating surveys, and beginning to develop a data warehouse. In fact, the campus undertook a study of three decision-making processes (instructional budgets, allocation of faculty FTE, and admissions) to analyze how data

was used and the impact on decision-making. The study process and conclusions reflect an institution with a culture of inquiry that continues to improve and impress.

In conclusion, UC Merced has provided documentation to demonstrate that the institution has accomplished the seven action items recommended by team during the last visit. While generally reflecting thoughtful and thorough activity to address issues as varied as GE review, teaching evaluations, and engagement of lecturers, of particular note is how the campus responded to the recommendation to centralize and improve campus-wide assessment through the creation of SACA (Senate-Administrative Council on Assessment). Throughout the visit, the effectiveness of this body was evident as a force to integrate curricular, co-curricular and administrative assessment (see EER Essay V. A).

SECTION II. EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A. Evaluation of the Institution's Educational Effectiveness Inquiry

As required, UCM has taken a comprehensive or Standards-based approach to its initial accreditation review. Therefore, there are no “themes” per se about Educational Effectiveness. Instead, the institution organized its approach to this topic around three broad questions about the effectiveness of academic programs:

1. How broadly and successfully are we engaging in assessment of student learning?
2. What are our assessment efforts revealing about the quality of UC Merced's student learning relative to expectations at the program and institutional levels?
3. How are the results being used?

Two additional questions focus on co-curricular learning in Student Affairs and in the Library.

1. How broadly and successfully are we engaging in assessment of student learning in the co-curriculum?
2. What are our assessment efforts revealing about the quality of UC Merced co-curricular learning relative to expectations at the program and institutional levels?

Educational Effectiveness in the Academic Programs (CFR 1.2; 2.3-7, 10, 11; 3.8, 11; 4.1-8)

UCM has been extraordinarily successful in establishing outcomes and assessing student learning in its academic programs at the undergraduate and the graduate levels. At the time of the EER visit, all 27 undergraduate degree programs and minors and the 10 graduate programs had developed program learning outcomes and all but two of these programs had assessed at least one of those outcomes and acted on the results. That is an impressive degree of participation in these processes, and the quality and effectiveness of the outcomes and assessment procedures were consistently very high across all units. Outcomes were concrete and specific, and they correlated closely with individual courses and the curriculum for each unit. The assessment procedures were effective, and the analyses of the results were especially

impressive in their insight and sophistication, particularly as to the connection among disciplinary expectations and standards, the specific characteristics of the students taking the courses, and curricular design and requirements.

Institutional learning was evident in the use of the results of the assessments: most of the units have discovered through the assessment some short-coming in course design and/or the curriculum, and they had acted quickly to address that issue. Sometimes those problems stemmed from the predictable uncertainties associated with setting up new programs. At other times, the assessments revealed characteristics of the students that were not a good fit with the curriculum as originally planned and/or faculty expectations. Occasionally the issues were traced to faulty outcomes or assessment procedures. The reports from the units distinguished among those different kinds of insights and described corrective actions focused directly on the source and nature of the problem. The EER report notes that the measures and kinds of data used by the separate programs vary significantly and that the integration of these different kinds of information—the next step of the process--will help create a comprehensive, unified picture of student learning at UCM. That is an accurate assessment of their current status and an effective plan for continued improvement and institutional learning.

Students are involved significantly in these processes, though not consistently in all units. Undergraduates in several units report being consulted in the development of outcomes for courses and the programs in which they are enrolled. In the Team's conversations with students, their familiarity with assessment practices and objectives was being carried over directly into their approach toward student evaluations of courses. Furthermore, graduate students have been deployed to assist in the administration and analysis of assessment procedures across the campus. Embedding graduate students as researchers in this way supplements the usual forms of graduate support (i.e., fellowships, TAs, etc.) and significantly enhances the students' professional training. It is making them better teachers by engaging them in curricular planning and course design at a level of analytic sophistication and breadth of concrete application beyond that of most pedagogical training programs. Furthermore, the research on teaching and educational effectiveness that they are doing in these programs is preparing them for a future in which the profession focuses more intently on such scholarship as an integral part of academic research in all fields.

Educational effectiveness outside of more traditional disciplinary structures is approached in several forms. As the EER report notes, the measures and kinds of data used by the separate programs vary significantly. The campus has focused on the integration of these different kinds of information as a near-term goal to coordinate student learning across institutional boundaries. UCM is using its central assessment oversight committee, the Senate-Administrative Council on Assessment (SACA), to coordinate learning in the disciplines with the broader institutional goals of General Education. Although the committee has been established only recently (replacing the earlier Accreditation Steering Committee), it has already embraced its leadership role as what the EER report calls “the most important effort UC Merced has made to institutionalize integration” of its educational programs beyond the disciplines (p. 45).

UCM’s approach to integrated learning across the disciplines is informed by its own institutional research, by using UC-wide surveys of student attitudes (UCUES) and by more general objectives, including those described by the AAC&U VALUE rubric for “Integrative Learning.” The EER report is especially thoughtful and insightful on the benefits and difficulties of coordinating broader, interdisciplinary objectives with disciplinary learning and a decentralized assessment program based in the units that develop and apply the measures specific to their fields. The report also explains how UCM faces a special tension between the interdisciplinary goals of General Education and the discipline-specific learning aligned with the career goals of the numerous first-generation students it enrolls. In an effort to address that understandable proclivity among these students, UCM has found itself stressing the development of more traditional majors at the expense of the more integrated interdisciplinary education that was part of the campus’s original plan.

This tension between disciplinary training and integrated learning across disciplines is likely to persist, but the campus is addressing it at several levels. The focus on integrated learning is most generally evident in UCM’s “Guiding Principles,” eight broad educational objectives that inform all of its educational and co-curricular programs and that are widely publicized across the campus. The most direct programmatic effort toward integrated learning is the two CORE courses at the freshman and junior levels. CORE 1 (the freshman-level course) has clear outcomes and is assessed systematically. It is an effective course and being improved

by thoughtful revision based on assessment results, and by applied research in teaching methods carried out in large part by the non-Senate Lecturers who constitute the instructional staff for this program. Careful and productive attention to the results of these assessments is evident in the continuous revision and adjustment of CORE 1 to meet the needs of the students and to address the expectations and standards of the faculty. For example, the Writing Minor is currently under review, and the Writing Program is also reviewed as part of the more general assessment of General Education. There was some uncertainty about the connection between the review of the minor and assessment of other aspects of the Writing Program, it is clear that the Writing Program has thoroughly and effectively integrated systematic assessment into its own planning processes and curricular revision.

CORE 100 is more inchoate in terms of its objectives and curricula. The requirement is often realized more as a collection of disciplinary counterparts to the broader focus on writing and critical thinking in CORE 1. The campus is focused productively on this issue, however; it has mapped CORE Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) against the Guiding Principles and is using several forms of evidence to determine the most useful way to approach integrative learning in the junior and senior years. CORE 100 is under revision, as is an assessment plan for General Education. In addition, General Education is being reinforced institutionally through the creation of a General Education Subcommittee for the Undergraduate Council and a Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education (EER 46).

Educational Effectiveness in Co-Curricular Units (CFR 2.3, 10, 11)

Beyond the academic units, review of educational effectiveness also focused on Student Affairs (EER pp. 17-21 and Appendix I.A.i) and the Library as units most directly connected to success in student learning. In Student Affairs, assessment plans for each office are detailed and systematic, although levels of implementation and action on results vary considerably throughout the unit. In some cases—the Office of the Registrar, for example—description of the outcomes, assessment measures, and how the office used the results to improve practices are a best-case study of assessment in co-curricular units (see Attachment 114 of the EER report). More generally, however, compared to the assessment of the curricular programs in the academic units,

the assessment of co-curricular programs in administrative units and analysis of the results is less consistent and sophisticated and to date less productive (though usually quite labor-intensive; there is no lack of effort here, just less productive direction in some cases).

Both these strengths and these limitations of assessment in Student Affairs are evident in the objectives and outcomes measures developed by Career Services Center and the Counseling and Psychological Services. These units have clearly defined outcomes and objectives, and they have developed processes to assess their progress. Their criteria tend to be more focused on input and participation than learning outcomes, however, and evidence is often more indirect (surveys, student/user-evaluations, etc.) than direct. On the other hand, these limitations are characteristic of co-curricular assessments on many campuses, and there is an excellent discussion in the EER report of how these indirect measures, explicitly identified as such, are being used while more direct measures are developed and applied (pp. 48-49). The EER report observes that the next step should be “to determine if the services we are providing are the types of support students need to be successful” (p. 19). The report also says that Student Affairs assessment organizers are aware of the need to “refine student learning outcomes in order to be able to develop valid direct measures of student learning”. Appendix I provides a more specific account of these efforts to align outcomes in Student Affairs with academic outcomes and assessment. This precise understanding of what needs to be done should ensure greater consistency in attaining the high level of educational effectiveness already attained by some of the offices in Student Affairs.

Educational Effectiveness in the Library (CFR 2.10, 11)

The Library at UCM, as at all research universities, combines aspects of research, curricular learning, and co-curricular support (see EER report Appendix I.A.ii). This complex mission complicates the definition of outcomes and requires different kinds of assessment. Appendix I lists several specific points of Library support associated with outcomes in the Writing Program (p. 8), and during the visit the Team was provided with the results of the detailed assessment “Information Literacy Skills of Writing 10 Students.” The assessment is focused and detailed; analysis is insightful, sophisticated, and informative. The results indicate

significant student learning occurring in the course. Other forms of instructional support provided by the library are listed in the report, but no outcomes for those library courses, guides, etc. are defined, nor are any assessment plans described to evaluate these other forms and venues of instruction.

Of necessity and by design, the Library at UCM is radically innovative in its reliance on electronic resources and forms of access. That makes traditional measures of quality and viability difficult to apply. In areas where such measures are applicable, such as user satisfaction and research instruction and support, the outcome measures are appropriate, assessment methods effective, and performance indicators are good. They also post the results of these surveys and their analyses of the results on their Website.

The Library's account of its collections, benchmarked against UC and national standards for electronic resources, is substantive. The collections, including extensive electronic resources, are clearly adequate to support student learning at a level appropriate for a research university. Some usage data is provided, though not benchmarked (e.g., Appendix One p. 11). User surveys have been conducted, and there is an extended account of preliminary analyses of the results and consequent changes to the services (pp. 12-15). Results—essentially students' compliments and complaints—are similar to those elicited by many university library surveys within more traditional library settings, so the heavy reliance on electronic resources does not seem to be creating unusual problems for the students. To the contrary, UCM's Library is taking advantage of its electronic and digital resources to respond to these routine problems in innovative and effective ways.

B. Institution's Systems for Enhancing Educational Effectiveness and Student Learning

Sustainability of Current Assessment Policies and Procedures (CFR 2.8-9; 3.8, 11; 4.1-8)

The current level of funding to support assessment of educational effectiveness is good at most levels and should get even stronger in the future if funding and staffing related to

assessment increases as planned. As noted in the EER essay, SACA identified several key elements required to sustain and enhance existing assessment practices, including the following:

- a new position, Director of Assessment, reporting directly to the Provost;
- expert staff support based in the schools;
- additional staff in the Academic Senate and IPA to support assessment.

All of those recommendations had been approved at the time of the EER visit, and searches were under way to fill the positions. The recommendations are astute in their identification of strategic points at which expertise will be most helpful to inform and support the extensive work by the faculty and staff in the units. The Director of Assessment should also serve to help integrate those separate efforts and coordinate assessment in the disciplines with General Education outcomes and broader institutional goals. The plans are realistic and appropriate for the size and complexity of the institution, and they should enable the campus to scale up its assessment efforts as enrollments grow and new programs are established.

Centralizing portions of that work should also help reduce some the considerable stress on faculty and staff in the units without undermining their ownership of the academic substance of assessment. The workload related to outcomes and assessment is daunting. In some cases, responsibilities associated with assessment appear to have been simply added to everything else the staff and faculty were already doing. Especially in the case of faculty, that work does not fit easily into the categories of review for merit increases and promotions. Assessment is currently considered mainly as service and as part of teaching, and appropriately so. However, sophisticated assessment of student learning and the dissemination of the results is comparable to more traditional forms of scholarship and should also be evaluated as part of the research mission of the campus. Acknowledging in that way the intellectual substance and analytical rigor evident in the assessment reports from the academic units would reward those participating in these efforts without raising the false dilemma of weighting research vs. teaching and service in personnel reviews. As it moves to centralize certain portions of the work, UC Merced remains cognizant of the need to ensure that all faculty are aware of and engaged in assessment of student learning.

Integration of Educational Effectiveness in Institutional Planning (CFR 2.7; 4.1-8)

The impact and sustainability of current assessment practices and policies at all institutional levels is reinforced by their systematic integration into the planning and decision-processes from specific degree-programs within the academic units to campus-wide planning and decisions. Campus leadership has established a culture of assessment that appears to pervade the academic areas of the University. Faculty in all areas and all ranks appear engaged in and committed to inquiry, evaluation and assessment to a remarkable degree. As noted above, reports from the academic units demonstrate that results of assessment are directly considered in curricular planning by the degree programs and in the local planning for new faculty positions. The recent Senate approval of the program review process and its expected application to the Applied Mathematics program this year is noteworthy. In particular, Anthropology and Materials Science have begun work with the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis to use data from the survey of recent graduates with the aim of improving their programs, and structures are in place to reinforce and expand this evidence-based planning across the campus.

Senate leadership testified to the incorporation of outcomes and assessment in campus-wide academic planning and oversight, and assessment is being fully incorporated into the periodic review of academic programs. The Senate has also incorporated consideration of assessment and its results into the responsibilities of standing Senate committees: the Undergraduate Council and the Graduate and Research Council, and the Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocations (CAPRA). The Senate-Administrative Council on Assessment (SACA) ensures coordination of administrative and academic perspectives on the assessment program, including the potential to levy substantive sanctions against units that have not included assessment-based evidence as part of their academic planning and programmatic reviews. (The authority of SACA, and the intent to exercise it if necessary, were evident during the visit in discussions about the two academic units that had not yet met the campus's expectations for outcomes and assessment.)

Outcomes and assessment help connect the academic planning to administrative deliberations and budgetary decisions at various levels from the degree program to the Provost. During the visit, the deans described how the allocation of resources (including new faculty lines) within the schools was informed by the reports from the units about outcomes and

assessment results. The Provost confirmed the incorporation of outcomes and assessment in institution-wide financial planning and budgetary decisions regarding the academic programs, directly in his office and indirectly through consultation with standing advisory committees, including CAPRA and SACA. The integration of outcomes and assessment into the planning processes of Student Affairs and the Library was equally direct and evident.

This integration was less consistently visible in other co-curricular and administrative units where a commitment to the explicit definition of learning outcomes and assessment was still emerging, in the initial stage, or, as in the case of the Academic Senate itself, not yet begun. There does not appear to be a consistent, systematic program to assess the operation and effectiveness of co-curricular and support activities outside of Student Affairs and the Library. Further, knowledge and use of data do not seem as well integrated into enrollment management and some other administrative decision-points as might be expected.

Sufficient personnel in number and professional qualifications (CFR 2.8; 3.1)

Although the campus is concerned that it might not employ sufficient ladder rank faculty to ensure that the quality of its programs will be meet the high standards of the University of California, enough such faculty are employed to maintain high standards and to help ensure the oversight of student learning and the conduct of high quality research. Recent growth in enrollment has been accompanied by the hiring of faculty and staff and the Office of the President has confirmed that, despite state budget reductions to the University generally, the state did fully fund the increased enrollment at UC Merced last year. The qualifications of faculty and staff meet all expectations for this type of institution.

Campus leaders note that research growth will be attenuated by the high proportion of lecturers and that the lack of ladder rank faculty could have an indirect effect on student learning. Certainly, the lack of ladder rank faculty affects the campus's ability to increase its graduate student enrollment. In fact, the campus does not expect to be able to begin to reduce its proportion of lecturers and build both ladder rank faculty and graduate student enrollment for up to ten years. This can be expected to affect research efforts and funding and delay the full achievement of the vision of a research university in the Valley.

Given the large number of lecturers, there has been continuing discussion about how to best involve them further in the campus. These conversations demonstrate the thoughtful approach to academic planning that the Team observed beginning with the CPR visit.

Coordination and Support for Academic and Administrative Functions Through Information Technology Resources (CFR 3.7)

The campus' chief information and technology officer and his staff appear to function in a role of a service utility to the various units. Administrative units appear to operate their systems independently. Further, several academic units perform many information technology functions themselves. It is not clear that there is a vision for the use of information technology to advance student learning and complaints from faculty suggest that technology may not be readily available to support research efforts. Concerns were expressed about the availability of funds to replace aging hardware. Although there are some committees, the chief information and technology officer suggested that faculty involvement was limited and that whatever vision existed for the use of information technology was left over from the statements he developed at the time of the founding of the campus. It is not evident that the campus' information technology resources are well coordinated and support its educational purposes or its important functions. The CIO noted that the University of California generally is in the process of replacing its aging payroll/personnel system with a university-wide human resources system. However, this effort apparently has yet to get underway.

Financial Sustainability and Planning (CFR 3.5)

The University of California, Merced relies, in large part, on the resources of the University's Office of the President (UCOP). Its brief history is one of difficult budgets but overall financial stability and clean audits. Early on, enrollment fell short of expectations, leading to fewer resources from student fees than had been expected but student enrollment now is beginning to meet and even exceed annual goals. Due to a special supplemental state appropriation, the backfilling of state appropriation reductions by the Office of the President, the

full funding of enrollment by the state last year, the advancing of a loan (line of credit) from the Office of the President, and a memorandum of understanding with UCOP that provides a three-year commitment of \$6 million per year, the institution has had current revenues in excess of operating expenditures in every year since its inception except for this year. The three year commitment in the MOU (called a “rolling three-year commitment” by Office of the President leaders) can provide both stability and the opportunity to plan and make faculty hiring decisions with relative confidence—a rare circumstance for a public university in 2011.

However, prior to reaching its enrollment growth goal and financial stability, UC, Merced is expected to have drawn more than \$40 million in loans from UCOP in \$5 million increments. Interest must be paid from the time of the loan but principal repayment need not begin until after five years from the date of each \$5 million loan. This means that in the future between 2% and 3% of the educational and general operating budget must be used to repay the loans (on a 40-year principal repayment basis).

Under the Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the President, a deficit of \$4.9 million was anticipated for 2010-11. However, current expectations are for that shortfall to be about \$2.2 million. UC Merced leaders said this would be covered on a cash flow basis by the Office of the President. UCOP also had funded the campus for all of its enrollment growth for 2010-11 (including the 300+ students above the MOU target). This helped reduce the annual shortfall by \$1.6 million.

The campus expects to borrow \$5 million per year from UCOP on its way to the time of financial sustainability, for a total borrowing of \$40 million. In addition, the campus expects that it will run annual operating deficits of about \$1.9 million in each of the next two years, leading to a cumulative shortfall over the three years beginning in 2010-11 of \$6.1 million. That amount is expected to be covered on a cash basis by UCOP. If operating surpluses in future years are used to “repay” that amount, the campus will eliminate its cumulative deficit by the end of FY 2017. This assumes that UCOP or the state will fund enrollment growth through FY 2014 at the current \$10,000 per student level and that state funding is resumed in FY 2015. By that time, enrollment is expected to be nearly 7,000 students (up from 4,300) and the faculty to number 403 (54% ladder rank) compared with 274.

Both campus leaders and the Office of the President hope that continued enrollment growth will bring the campus to the point of “lift off” and financial sustainability. The Chancellor stated that it is expected that the campus will become financially sustainable when its enrollment reaches 7,500 students. That would suggest a four to five year period would be needed if the campus were to continue to meet the MOU target of adding 600 students per year. This explains the need for a rolling three-year MOU (as noted by the Office of the President).

A shift toward lower cost academic programs, suggested by the Office of the President at the time of the last WASC team visit, has been embraced by UC Merced as part of the memorandum of understanding with the UCOP. This means that the next round of faculty hiring will be focused mostly on disciplines in humanities and social sciences and less on faculty in disciplines such as science and engineering, which require more expensive laboratories, start-up packages, and other resources. The Executive Vice Chancellor believes this will conform to student expectations and desires based on the choices of majors made by current students.

The UC Office of the President has shown strong commitment to the Merced campus and President Yudof has made certain that enrollment growth funding (and, therefore, funding for additional faculty and staff) has been provided to the campus each year. The three-year rolling MOU is further evidence that this commitment will continue until the campus has reached what the President has called “lift off.” The President believes it is likely that the state will continue its \$5 million supplemental appropriation for the campus this year, despite an overall reduction in state support for the University.

The University of California appears to have sufficient resources that could be devoted to ensuring the financial stability of this campus during that period even in the face of further state budget cuts and the loss to California of federal stimulus funding under ARRA. In addition, a representative of the Office of the President suggested that the repayment of the loans made to the campus would not begin until after UC Merced received significantly more funding from both state funds for enrollment and from student fees than it does at present.

Concerns about the ability of students to pay the expected higher fees for enrollment and student services are ameliorated somewhat by the provisions of the University’s Education Finance Model, which makes need-based aid available. The lower incomes of many of the

Merced campus' students may mean many of them will not pay the higher fees. If understood by students and their families, this grant aid may mean that students will continue to enroll at UC, Merced. However, this must be well communicated to current and prospective students. Concerns were expressed about whether middle income students would be able to attend the University once the new fee levels are reached. However, campus leaders believe these concerns may be overstated. The campus attracted even more students in the fall 2010 term than it forecast. The fact that the budget estimates assume large increases in student fees in each of the next several years suggests that concerns about affordability could become more acute. However, there is not yet evidence of this.

Despite the difficulties experienced with state funding, construction of new facilities at Merced has continued to be approved. Planning funds for the new Science and Engineering Building have been released (and total funding tentatively authorized) and furnishings have been funded for the Humanities and Social Sciences Building. Efforts continue to secure state funding for a new \$40 million academic classroom and office building within the next two years. Bringing these facilities on line is essential to meeting both the enrollment needed for the campus and for the financial sustainability the campus is expected to attain after "lift off." Campus leaders have stated that the Office of the President will provide \$20 million for a scaled down academic classroom and office building if state funding cannot be secured for the entire project. This should permit the campus to reach the enrollment needed for financial stability without facilities becoming a deterrent. Construction of additional housing and an addition to the recreation center are planned and expected to go into construction in the next several months. However, campus leaders noted the lack of space to support student activities and sufficient housing (the original campus plan called for housing 50% of students on campus while current expectations fall far short of that) as significant issues (see discussion below).

Effectiveness of planning processes using data and considering educational effectiveness and student learning (CFR 4.3)

The planning process for facilities is well-defined and linked directly to enrollment, program mix, and research needs as they have been defined up until now. The Social Sciences

and Management Building is due to open in summer 2011 and funding has been secured to plan the Science and Engineering II Building. Campus officials emphasized that this building was essential to meeting the enrollment targets and fulfilling the education and research agenda of the UC Merced. As noted above, funding is being sought for a new academic and office building to support the further growth of the campus. The Long Range Development Plan offers considerable flexibility for campus growth if funds for buildings and infrastructure can be secured, given that the campus has received federal approval for build-out of all of its first phase. Discussions have begun on campus to consider moving support functions now housed in off-campus leased space and some support areas now on campus into a new facility that may be developed using a public-private partnership. This could free up some existing space for academic and student support use.

However, build out of the second phase of campus development under the Long Range Development Plan is contingent upon the extension of infrastructure (e.g., utilities) to an area of the campus not currently developed. If means cannot be found to pay for this infrastructure development, enrollment of even 10,000 students (projected to be the campus' target for about 2019) will not be achievable. In addition, campus representatives have noted that adequate space for student gathering and student activities (including a student union) cannot be provided without a different approach to financing such space. This is due to the fact that the current enrollment is relatively small and includes a high proportion of students with financial need. This means that revenue from a special fee would not be sufficient to pay for such facilities. Student Affairs leaders signaled this could become an impediment to enrollment and student success.

C. Student Success

The campus has identified retention and graduation rates as core measures of student success. Data reported for the EER indicate that the campus has made demonstrable progress towards improving retention rates for undergraduate students. Specifically, first year retention is at 87%, an improvement of four percentage points over the previous year's data; disaggregated analyses of first year retention indicate the campus is retaining students at the same rate across most ethnic, gender, and income groups; previously low retention rates among first year whites improved by eight percentage points; and strong improvements in retention rates were reported for both sophomore and transfer students. As impressive as these results are retention rates at UCM still remain the lowest across the UC system even though they compare favorably with other national benchmarks. But the progress is particularly noteworthy for a campus that enrolls higher than usual rates of demographically at-risk student populations reporting low-income, weaker high school and community college preparation than the other UC campuses, and coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

To this end, it is apparent that a number of programmatic strategies have contributed immensely to the emerging and consistent success in efforts to improve retention rates among undergraduate students. Notably, several academic and co-curricular initiatives designed to improve the first year experience seem to have resulted in positive gains on retention. The work of the Center for Research and Teaching Excellence, the Merritt Writing Program, the Peer Mentoring Program, and the themed Living/Learning Communities Program in residence halls are excellent examples of programs enthusiastically engaged with students to assure them a smooth transition to college life. But these and other advising related initiatives such as the de-majoring policy are beginning to put added stress on advising staff working with the most at-risk students and exacerbate concerns about space needs. The resulting increased use of advising services in an environment that projects enrollment increases over the next five years of 600 students per year is a risk to the future quality and quantity of these retention strategies.

UCM recognizes that an important element of the campus culture is personalized attention from faculty and staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests a positive relationship exists between such individualized attention and retention. For example, students indicated that regular conversations with professors provided an opportunity to discuss classroom concepts in informal

settings leading to a better grasp of the subject matter. Staff members were also reported to be accessible and very helpful to students on a wide range of support issues ranging from help with financial aid and career services to advising. Although there is recognition that these personalized interactions are made possible in large part due to size of the campus, it could not be ignored that continued enrollment growth without concomitant growth in resources to maintain this culture could weaken this outcome, with implications for retention of students. It is therefore important for UCM to achieve better alignment of retention strategies with resources and admission processes that enhance the educational effectiveness expectations of the campus. The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA) works with the AVC for Enrollment Management, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, and the Dean of the Graduate Division to update the campus' enrollment projections. The predictive parameters (e.g., admit rates, enrollment yields, retention and graduation rates, by students level, type of applicant, intended major) are reviewed several times each academic year to inform these updates. Involving the recently launched Enrollment Management Council to review and inform the enrollment projection model (with representation from the faculty representing the Undergraduate Council and other faculty as well as administrators from the Schools and other relevant areas) would be an important next step.

Tracking retention rates among graduate students reveals further vulnerability of the graduate student's experience at UCM. For example, the increase in retention of the first year doctoral cohort was offset by decreases in retention of the second year doctoral cohort. Given that graduate enrollment remains low at under 6% of the student body, and given the relative absence of senior faculty who possess the recognition to attract doctoral students and major research grants, UCM faces a monumental challenge to the emergence of a strong research/graduate culture. For a campus that envisions Carnegie classification as a research university in the not-too-distant future, it seems critical that as much attention be given to graduate students as to the undergraduate population. Notwithstanding this challenge, review of the data from the graduate student satisfaction survey suggest that retention rates among graduate students are improving, and that may be influenced in part by overall satisfaction with their programs and the motivation evinced by junior high-caliber ladder-rank faculty. Additional steps to improve the graduate experience include the decision to hire a Coordinator of Graduate Student Services to build community among graduate students, and the work of the Center for

Research on Teaching Excellence (CRTE) in responding to the need for better support for teaching.

C. Program Review

The visiting Team reviewed the current academic program reviews that are underway or recently completed and met with faculty, staff and students of each of these programs. The Team also met with members of the academic senate and administration to discuss the academic program review process that has emerged over the last two years and how the results of these reviews feed into the budget allocation and capital planning process of the campus. In addition, the Team reviewed the three pilot program reviews underway that directly impact the quality of education delivered by units in the Division of Student Affairs and examined parallel assessment and review procedures emerging in administrative units across the campus.

Undergraduate Program Review: The initial program review procedures developed by UC Merced were based on an aggregate of perceived best practices taken from other UC campuses. However, when the first review got underway (Applied Mathematics), it quickly became apparent to the campus that the policy was unworkable and it would not provide the educational assessment data that was desired. As they wrote in their EER report “We shifted from a focus on the process to a focus on the purpose of the review.” Their modified process is now designed to “ensure that students are learning what we intend to teach, that our educational efforts are appropriate to a diverse student body, and that the benefits of scholarly inquiry will inform educational process and outcomes.” The current review procedure, designed to meet both the UC and WASC standards for evaluating the quality of academic programs attempts to answer four fundamental questions about each program:

1. What do you think you are doing?
2. How are you doing it?
3. Who is doing it?
4. How well is it being done?

To answer these questions, each program establishes Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and in the case of academic units, these learning outcomes are assessed. In the applied mathematics review, these data along with data provided by Institutional Planning and Analysis provided a rich assessment and answers to the above questions. The process of program review led the applied mathematics faculty to restructure the placement exams, restructure the pre-calculus course, adopt a new calculus textbook, reorganize the calculus sequence and reorganize the core courses for majors. An external review committee met to formally review the provided self-study and their conclusions were provided to the Senate, the Dean of Natural Sciences, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Provost, where they are being used in consideration of budget support and additional faculty and staff lines to accommodate the needs of this excellent program. Currently, reviews of other academic programs are underway (Physics, Environmental Engineering and the Writing Program). Each program will be reviewed every seven years. The WASC committee had access to these three self-studies for our analyses and all were thorough and very informative.

Graduate Program Review: In contrast to the undergraduate program review process that appears to be highly developed, relatively little information was provided regarding the review processes planned for graduate program review. These too will be on a seven-year cycle and programs that parallel undergraduate programs will be reviewed simultaneously, though it is not clear if this will be by one committee or two. Graduate groups, because of their interdisciplinary nature, will be reviewed independent of the undergraduate programs. The Dean of Graduate Studies and Research and the Senate's Graduate Council will help coordinate these reviews and will use these reviews in recommending resources for further program development. To date, no program has gone through this review process and clearly the procedures are in the "emerging" phase of development.

Program Review in Student Affairs: The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, in coordination with Academic Affairs, has worked with her Division to develop very specific goals and learning outcomes and each department in the division has or is developing its own program learning outcomes aligned with the specific goals of the Division of Student Affairs. These are being assessed in three pilot co-curricular programs including the Career Services Center, Student Advising and Learning Center, and the Student First Center. For each program

extensive survey and other “customer satisfaction” data have been acquired to use in its self-study, as well as appropriate data from the office of Institutional Planning and Data. The Division of Student Affairs has created and filled a part-time (40%) position, Coordinator of Assessment, Evaluation and Research, to help educate staff members on assessment and to facilitate program review. Currently program review procedures in Student Affairs are at the “emerging” stage.

Senate and Administrative Oversight: In addition to the Senate’s Undergraduate and Graduate Councils that are integral to the academic review process, UC Merced has established a joint Senate-Administrative Committee (Senate and Administrative Committee on Assessment – SACA) which is charged with all aspects of the assessment process of all campus units. Recently, their assistance was required in support of an academic dean to pressure two academic units to complete their Program Learning Outcomes and their required annual unit assessment. It was particularly reassuring to the WASC committee to see this committee “in action” and to see the seriousness of the campus commitment to the goals of assessment and program review.

SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, SUMMARY, MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting team appreciated the candor and honesty of the UC Merced students, faculty and administrators. This transparency is a significant strength of the institution. The visit was managed by the campus in such a way as to provide the best conditions for the Team to work. Much credit goes to the accreditation steering committee.

In particular, the team commends Chancellor Kang for his stewardship of the campus in its start-up phase. The esprit du corps of the campus and the level of engagement were exceptional, extending even to the students, whose enthusiasm and support for the campus reflect a caring, student-centered community.

The team recognizes the gravity of the task of creating the first research university in over 40 years in a climate of increased accountability and assessment as well as fiscal challenges. All at UC Merced are to be congratulated for their focus and hard work to develop the campus and to grow assessment programs in practical and useful ways consistent with the campus progress. Of note as a best practice is SACA (Senate-Administrative Council on Assessment), which has enriched self-governance and institutionalized a commitment to assessment.

A significant achievement has been the establishment of an MOU with the UCOP to ensure stability. The importance of this negotiated support cannot be overstated. Without it, the strength of the institution would be compromised. With it, the institution can demonstrate its viability even in the midst of a catastrophic state budget picture.

A continued focus on research and graduate programs was also evident. The team appreciates the complexity of supporting this commitment and the difficulty of creating the right balances in faculty and funding.

The team has been impressed with gains in assessment in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the Library since the CPR visit. UCM has satisfied WASC standards for accreditation related to educational effectiveness, especially as those standards focus on outcomes and assessment (Standards 2 and 4). The outcomes for instructional units are clearly stated and appropriate for the programs and for more general institutional educational objectives

as related to General Education (CFR 2.3). The faculty in those degree-programs are significantly involved in ongoing inquiry into student learning and use the results of that inquiry to improve the curriculum and adjust standards and expectations in courses and programs. They have also used the results to revise the assessment procedures and outcomes themselves to reflect more accurately the objectives of the programs and the characteristics of UCM's students (CFR 4.7).

The definition of outcomes and the assessment procedures are not as fully developed for institutional-level programs in General Education, though the campus is aware of that shortcoming and is working to address it with the guidance of SACA. This journey is underway for administrative units. UCM has developed outcomes and assessment measures for most of its co-curricular units and academic support programs (CFR 2.11). Many of these processes are extensive and generally meet WASC standards, though the outcomes and assessment measures are in some cases less concrete and sophisticated than those in the instructional units. The team encourages the administrative units, including IT and Business Administration, to reach the same level of competence and engagement as Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and the Library.

Major Recommendations:

- 1) At the conclusion of the MOU with the UCOP, the campus should provide information to demonstrate that it is financially viable and sustainable.
- 2) Continue to pursue the integration of assessment throughout the campus and the use of data to inform decisions. Seek to improve assessment processes and understanding in administrative units, graduate programs, General Education and among all campus leaders to create a consistent practice of assessment across the University.
- 3) The team is impressed with the leadership of the senate and the critical role they have played in developing the assessment framework. As a logical extension of this, the senate should consider a self-assessment.

- 4) In order to ensure that educational goals are met, the campus needs to develop the necessary flexibility and creative approaches to the development of facilities planning and build-out, especially as related to student support facilities.
- 5) In the tenure and promotion process, consider research on teaching as a standard, acknowledging the firm foundation of assessment. View this as a form of scholarship.
- 6) Incorporate non-ladder (non-Senate) rank faculty in the academic planning of the campus, especially where they provide considerable services or coverage for the institution.

Minor Recommendations:

- 1) External committees in program reviews should be composed primarily of experts external to UC Merced. In materials provided in some of the appendices, it is clear that the process does specify that a majority of review committee members be external to UC Merced. However, we noted that the external review committee for Applied Mathematics was comprised (with the exception of one member) of UC Merced faculty outside of the reviewed department.
- 2) The campus should continue to strive to make the results of each assessment and program self-assessment and review easily accessible on-line throughout the campus for others to use. This will be of particular importance in integrating the efforts of the Divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs – at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.