REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM
CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW

To University of California, Merced

September 29-October 1, 2009

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Initial Accreditation Review

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The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution under the WASC Commission Standards and the Core Commitment for Institutional Capacity 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.

SECTION I—OVERVIEW AND CONTENT

IA Description of Institution and Visit

Since its establishment in 2005 with the admission of its first undergraduates, UC Merced's development has been steady. (Graduate students had started the year earlier.) In its formative stage of development, UC Merced presently has an enrollment of 3,414 students, with a diverse demographic and is one of a few research universities qualifying for designation as an Hispanic Serving Institution. A majority of students are the first in their family to attend college (52.4%). A significant number of students are low income, with 42% receiving Pell Grants. Almost all students are full-time enrolled. The average SAT is 1043. Freshman to sophomore retention is 83% (2008 cohort). The seminal undergraduate class graduated in 2009. The expected four year graduation rate for this cohort is 48-50%.

Merced is the tenth University of California campus, the newest research campus in America in over 40 years. It proudly proclaims itself the first research university of the 21st Century. The academic program is organized on an interdisciplinary model in three schools with 18 undergraduate majors[1] and two graduate degrees, Environmental Systems and the Individual Graduate Program (which supports eight other programs).[2] The campus has defined objectives for undergraduate general education in eight areas: scientific literacy, decision making, communication, self and society, ethics and responsibility, leadership and teamwork, aesthetic understanding and creativity, and development of personal potential.

UC Merced's location in the San Joaquin Valley of California is purposeful and significant: dedicated as a student-centered research institution, the campus is sited in a region renowned for

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[1] UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS: Engineering: Bioengineering (BS), Computer Science and Engineering (BS), Environmental Engineering (BS), Materials Science and Engineering (BS), Mechanical Engineering (BS); Natural Sciences: Applied Mathematical Sciences (BS), Biological Sciences (BS), Chemical Sciences (BS), Earth Systems Science (BS), Physics (BS); Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts: Anthropology (BA), Cognitive Science (BA/BS), Economics (BA), History (BA), Literatures and Cultures (BA), Management (BS), Political Science (BA).

[2] GRADUATE DEGREES: Engineering: Biological Engineering and Small-Scale Technologies (MS/PhD), Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (MS/PhD), Environmental Systems (MS/PhD), Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics (MS/PhD); Natural Sciences: Applied Mathematical Sciences (MS/PhD), Physics and Chemistry (PhD), Quantitative and Systems Biology (MS/PhD); Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts: Social and Cognitive Sciences (MA/PhD), World Cultures (MA/PhD).

agriculture and experiencing a low rate of college attendance compared to the rest of the state. The region is undergoing a transformation, as it expands its reputation for agriculture to welcome new industries and businesses in transportation, manufacturing, technology, and healthcare. The campus embraces its role as a strong contributor to the renaissance of the region. Recognition and support for the campus has resulted in fundraising and grant activity of $71 million to date.

The campus commitment to environmental sustainability is evidenced in its newly developed facilities, including five LEED certified buildings (four at the gold level) out of a total of nine campus buildings and three residential facilities. The developable site is 815 acres situated within a larger domain of 26,000 acres set aside as a conservation easement by the state. Campus housing will expand from 1,100 in 09/10 to over 1,300 in 10/11, with almost 30% of undergraduates living on campus. The University also utilizes space at the decommissioned Castle Air Force Base two miles north of campus for research laboratories, some administrative departments (such as IT), and surge space. Additional campus facilities are located in downtown Merced, University of California Centers in Fresno and Bakersfield, and the Great Valley center in Modesto.

This report is the Capacity and Preparatory phase of the Initial Accreditation Review. The campus submitted their report in July 2009, focusing on WASC recommendations and a comprehensive CFR overview. The campus was granted candidacy in 2007 and applied for initial accreditation in 2008.

The team leadership had full access to campus executives, as well as to the President of the UC system. Team members had opportunities to interact informally with students, faculty and staff, as well as to access the confidential email account. Data and resources were provided by the campus in a timely and professional manner. The campus visit on September 29, 30, and October 1 provided a comprehensive orientation to the University, as well as afforded the team appropriate consultation and inquiry opportunities. The team visited the main campus and did not visit off-campus sites.

IB Alignment with the Proposal and Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report

The report accurately documents UC Merced's progress toward WASC's Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity and provides a direct assessment of the successes and future challenges facing the institution. In addition to delivering a comprehensive and accessible discussion of each Standard and Criteria for Review, the report highlighted three goals: student-centered research university; value-added in general education; and interdisciplinary and strategic planning. Discussion of these three goals was integrated at a basic, but not highly developed, level in the report. Processes are described within the report to address the criteria for review.

The report's preparation is the result of a consultative process involving a cross-functional team that included students, staff, faculty and administrators. Of particular note is the role of the Faculty Accreditation Organizers (for each undergraduate and graduate program) and Evidence Providers (for co-curricular programs) in developing evidence to support the report.
The campus also provided the materials to address the items in the Checklist for materials, a required component of WASC reviews for campuses at this stage of evaluation.

The institution has made a serious and commendable effort to create a learning environment that promotes interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and teaching. The Strategic Academic Vision encourages and reinforces this commitment.

The movement to undergraduate majors was expected and reflects student demand as well as the disciplinary interests and training of many of the faculty. Nevertheless, that movement may challenge the institution's original focus on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and teaching. The absence of academic departments and the clustered academic units with faculty from multiple disciplines is unique within the UC system and suggests a structure that will provide an environment for innovative approaches to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and teaching. It is counter to the traditional organization structure that we find in most institutions and it will be very interesting to see if over time this structure ensures the institution's commitment to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and teaching.

The impact on strategic planning, too, will be interesting and challenging. Conversations about future curriculum content and direction, along with resource allocation, will likely be intense and creative. The institution may successfully navigate this journey because of its early and serious commitment to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and teaching. The administration and faculty leadership will be critical in developing this commitment over time.

The self-review process appears to have catalyzed the institution to develop innovative and comprehensive learning outcomes, to initiate sincere assessment practices, and to begin a validated program assessment. Campus members demonstrated an enthusiastic and thorough understanding of the WASC process and a strong commitment toward a sustained culture of inquiry.

IC Response to Previous Commission Issues

The campus has made progress in varying degrees in addressing the three recommendations in the EER:

1. *Develop and institutionalize a plan that integrates UC Merced's vision and goals with its resources, and ensures that by the time of the Initial Accreditation review, UC Merced will be judged to substantially meet the WASC Standards and Criteria for Review.*

Observation: Institutional planning, as evidenced by the Long Range Development Plans and the Strategic Academic Vision, is adaptable to the recent budget austerity and provides insights about how the campus is addressing the challenges of the interdisciplinary design and the need to increase growth in foundational areas relative to enrollment demands. The campus's transition to a short term plan is necessary, as early enrollment did not match the initial growth trajectory under the initial plans for enrollment, faculty, and programs. Projected growth has now been retarded by the state's fiscal environment. This is discussed in more detail in this report under Standard 3.

2. *Continue to embrace and enact UCM's mission as a student centered research university serving students of the state and the Central Valley.*

Observation: Data (UCUES survey) support the observation that UCM students are interacting with faculty at higher levels than at other UCs. In fact, students report involvement with faculty research at a rate two times higher than at other UCs. Sixty-two percent of students report a desire to pursue graduate education. The campus draws 30% of its class from the San Joaquin Valley, serves a high proportion of first generation students, and has a developing graduate study program that benefits from a rich UC environment for study opportunities at sister campuses. The Strategic Academic Vision provides evidence of the campus commitment to inclusive service to the region.

3. *Ensure that a) UCOP is fully aware of the challenging fiscal context and constraining regulatory and compliance environment within which UCM must operate, and b) that UCOP provides the necessary resources and assistance for UC Merced to realize its full potential.*

Observation: The UC Office of the President has regular and effective communication with campus leadership and demonstrates their understanding of the environment, as well as a strong commitment to the institution's success. The system has provided budgetary support from the UCOP as well as a line of credit for UCM. The funding model difficulties of UCM have been highlighted by the system-wide academic senate. As will be discussed in the report under Standard 3, the campus and UCOP are engaged in a continuing discussion to address the campus goals given the limitations of the current fiscal environment.

In addition to the three recommendations, there were <u>three issues</u> raised by Commission in the last report. The campus has provided significant evidence regarding these issues and shows a continued commitment toward improving in all areas:

1. *Recruitment, enrollment, retention.*

Observation: UCM moved to address leadership in enrollment management and has organized functions in an Office of Enrollment Management to include core services of admissions, registrar, financial aid, scholarship, and the "students first center". The campus has created targets through 2020 and improved their marketing/communications materials and planning. There is a significant increase in applications and yield, evident most recently with the 2009 campus enrollment exceeding the target by 200 students. Retention numbers continue to lag behind more established UCs, even declining the first three years (from 82.3% in Fall 05 to 79.1% in Fall 07). However, the freshman to sophomore retention rate rebounded to 83% in Fall 08. The campus has responded to retention problems by providing more intrusive advising and creating other student success programs. This topic is covered more at the end of the report on the section on student success.

2. Funding and growth.

Observation: Although growth projections have been modified to reflect slower initial enrollment than expected and to accommodate the state's poor budget climate, UCM exceeded its target for freshmen in 2009. The campus continues to define primary factors in increasing student enrollment as growth of the faculty and limitations on facilities—both funding dependent. The Long Range Development Plans and the Strategic Academic Vision both provide appropriate guidance and demonstrate the institution's commitment to address this issue. This topic is discussed at length under Standard 3 in the report.

3. Moving ahead with assessment and educational effectiveness.

Observation: The campus has a developed program through the Faculty Accreditation Organizers (FAO), who are anticipated to transition into Faculty Assessment Organizers. Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) for academic departments have been developed and revised since the initial visit. In addition, the campus has approved an academic program review process and is planning for its initial implementation with one academic program. It is anticipated that by the time of the EER visit, this review and perhaps others will have been conducted with progress toward evaluating the effectiveness of not only the program but the review process. The culture of assessment is quite evident in academic affairs (with strong support from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence and the IPA) and in some support units, such as Student Affairs. Assessment is not consistent in other support units at present.

Regarding faculty promotion, tenure and merit, a formal process through the Committee on Academic Personnel provides for appropriate review and taps the resources of the UC system by involving external reviewers. The importance of teaching is emphasized by this team and by the UC Merced Chancellor.

SECTION II—EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY UNDER THE STANDARDS

Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

1.1 Formally approved appropriate statements of purpose; define values and character.

The Institution has a formally approved statement of purpose and has operational practices that are appropriate for an institution of Higher Education. These are outlined and presented in the materials prepared for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and are appropriate for an institution of Higher Education and clearly define its essential values and character. There is considerable evidence gained from the CPR, the campus visit interviews and UCOP conference call that the institution functions within the UC system and it local environment with integrity and autonomy.

UC Merced's Mission Statement is anchored in teaching, research and service with an emphasis on benefiting society and creating and transmitting knowledge. In addition the document *Beginnings: A Legacy Renewed for the 21st Century* is a reflection of campus-wide thinking and agreement on a Strategic Academic Vision for the next twenty years. This document outlines key considerations that should guide the campus in the decades ahead as it continues to define its characteristics and academic programs. The Academic Vision is connected to the Long Range Development Plan as well as the Long Range Enrollment Plan, indicating coordinated efforts in Strategic thinking and planning. The effort to define and encourage a philosophy of learning, discovery, and engagement within a network of scholars sets a tone about academic work that is admirable and suggests a clear definition of academic values and expectations. The document also outlines key elements that will shape its academic program decisions and planning. The Guiding Principles outlined state clearly a commitment to a student-centered research institution, and the institution should be commended for such a thoughtful approach to its role.

There is also considerable evidence in the document that the institution has begun to outline and address its very specific role in the San Joaquin Valley. The focus on population growth, water, a narrow economic base, health care delivery shortages and low levels of education begin to

identify areas for academic programs and scholarly research. In addition the graduate research and professional program themes highlighted will shape the planning and decision making for the institution as it expands its graduate programs and adds professional schools.

1.2 Clear objectives; indicators of achievement at institutional, program and course level; system to measure student achievement; public data on achievement.

Educational Objectives are defined in a number of different ways and are recognized within the key parts of the institution responsible for leading these efforts. The work of blending general education, the majors and the co curricular activities is evident. The general education principles are an important and carefully thought out set of objectives that are communicated and integrated into a significant part of the curriculum. On-going work indicates that those principles will be completely integrated into the curriculum within the next 18 months. The institution deserves praise for this accomplishment. Our conversations on campus, our observations, and our review of the materials in the CPR Report confirm the uncommon effort to create program goals and leaning objectives for each program and to align them with some or all of the eight GE guiding principles. These academic program goals are also clearly stated in the institution's catalog. Program Learning Outcomes have been established for each undergraduate program and one graduate program, with work on outcomes in the other graduate programs underway. Student learning outcomes for each course also seem to be well underway, with completion expected by the end of the fall 2009 semester.

The institution has a system of measuring student achievement in terms of retention, completion and student learning. The data are assembled by the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis. Considering that the institution has just graduated its first class, this data collection effort is significant. The data is broadly distributed for institutional planning purposes and assessment, and it is available for external audiences. In addition the implementation of student learning assessment has been delegated to a working committee that evolved out of the campus WASC steering committee and its preparation for the CPR. This committee will have overarching structural supporting responsibilities for assessment practices in the institution.

The coordination of teaching assessment will be through several academic and Administrative units. The complexity of this work is managed and connected through the Academic Senate's Committee on Academic Personnel, the office of the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel, the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence.

1.3 High performance, responsibility, accountability of leadership system.

The University provides considerable evidence that it has a leadership system in place that is marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility and accountability. The work to create the initial start-up infrastructure and the early operating requirements allowing them to open up the campus clearly demonstrates a commitment to developing leadership systems. The campus should be commended for this work and what it has accomplished in the first four years of operations. The campus has effectively used the systems within UCOP and the UC Academic Senate to structure its own accountability requirements. In addition, the careful thought given to the organizational structure demonstrates the institution's commitment to matching responsibility to appropriate administrative operating units or academic senate committees.

The Chancellor has provided clear direction to the campus on growth, academic values, leadership, economic development responsibilities, and ethics. The academic division has provided effective leadership in providing an academic vision (*Beginnings: A Legacy Renewed for the 21st Century*).

The Administration has also developed useful and serviceable personnel evaluation tools that are in place and used. Financial oversight procedure and policies have been designed for operating units and external audit compliance is in place.

1.4 Academic freedom.

UCM operates under UC policies and procedures regarding academic freedom and other protections for faculty, staff, and students. Descriptions of those UC polices are publicly

available at the UCOP Website, as cited in the UCM CPR report (pp. 6-7). The Website for the Committee on Privilege and Tenure also lists pertinent Senate bylaws and sections of the Academic Personnel Manual, including the Faculty Code of Conduct. UCM's policies and procedures are consistent with those of other UC campuses and sufficient to protect academic freedom.

In addition, UCM describes students' rights to expression of their views in *The Student Handbook*. The UCM *Faculty Handbook* includes statements of the faculty's responsibility to protect "students' academic freedom" and notes the existence of Senate committees charged with, among other things, protection of academic freedom. These publications are made available to new faculty and students at their orientations, according to the CPR report .

Staff members receive formal and systematic notice about whistleblower protection policies and other practices designed to protect them against retribution by their supervisors. During the campus visit, the team conducted open fora with faculty and staff. Both groups shared that they had knowledge of and access to campus policies relevant to their duties.

1.5 Diversity: policies, programs and practices.

UC Merced's commitment to diversity is affirmed in the mission statement as well as the Principles of Community, which appear in the University catalog and website. The institution seems to be keeping pace with other state research institutions regarding diversity of students, particularly African American and Hispanic students. The institution has the potential to have more diversity in their student population than other UC campuses if the current target population continues to be their focus. The institution is continuing to focus efforts on recruiting minority first generation college students as well as transfer students from the community colleges. The institution also has plans on increasing their number of international students, although international recruitment is not included in the Long Range Enrollment Plan.

It is clear that the mission and vision of Human Resources is reflected in the focus on promoting and building a diverse workforce, with a faculty base reflecting growing ethnic diversity;

although, there are no African American faculty members, which questions the campus culture being "a perfect representation of our state." The leadership understands that this is an issue and reported that it needs to be addressed. The campus staff workforce seemed to be very diverse across all sectors of the institution. The institution's diversity statement is consistent with the University of California's Diversity Statement. It appears that Human Resources does have a system for tracking applicants as well as new-hire demographics.

1.6 Education as purpose; autonomy.

The institution's primary purpose is education and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy. This principle is assured through the governance structure at the board level and through the California State Constitution.

1.7 Truthful representation to students /public; timely completion; fair and equitable policies.

The University Catalog is the primary information source for academic goals, programs, and services. The catalog is offered online as well as in hard copy. Other information online includes course schedules, final exam schedules, and information related to policies, activities, organizations, and the Student Housing Handbook. The institution follows best practices identified by AACRAO and FERPA, while providing student access to password-protected data through security measures.

The institution's non-academic policy and procedures are developed in an inclusive manner with members of the Associated Student Union providing feedback. In addition, the institution has student representatives participate on university-wide policy groups. The institution's graduate programs' "catalog descriptions are supplemented by each program's Policies and Procedures document" (CPR Report). The institution's website provides publications, which clearly display expectations for faculty and graduate students, as well as financial support information and resources. In addition, the institution has a graduate student program coordinator, within each school, to provide support for current students in the graduate program.

1.8 Operational integrity; sound business practices; timely and fair complaint handling; evaluation of performance.

The institution has in place appropriate policies, sound business practices and provides timely and fair responses to complaints and grievances. Once again the institution has built its policies and practices around the UCOP guidelines and expectations, thus benefiting from the UC experience and association. This includes financial audits, financial aid policies and practices as well as accounting and budget policies. The grievance policy is well thought out and appears to be effective.

1.9 Honest, open communication with WASC; inform WASC of material matters; follow WASC policies.

The institution's leadership has created a set of expectations, action steps, and institutional policies that assure that there is honest and open communications with WASC. The campus has policies and practices in place that assure compliance with the Commission's requirements for all substantive change policies.

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

2.1 Programs appropriate in content, standards, level; sufficient qualified faculty.

Extensive processes are in place at UC Merced to ensure that the content, length, and standards of the academic programs conform to disciplinary and professional standards. Those processes include extensive vetting at several levels of the institution, starting with Curriculum Committees of each School and passing through a campus-wide Undergraduate council or Graduate and Research Council. Graduate programs are subject to additional UC system wide review by the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs. (Additionally, the Engineering program is subject to ABET approval; the Chemistry program conforms to the standards of the American Chemical Society, etc. [Appendix 2.1.3].) Further, new undergraduate majors and graduate programs require WASC substantive change review. Once established, academic programs are subject to regular program review. (Policies described in UCM CPR Appendices 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.) Approval by these levels of review presumably indicates the programs are appropriate for their disciplines.

Campus-wide, sufficient faculty are available to staff these programs, as indicated by the extraordinarily low (for the UC system) student-to-faculty ratio reported in the UCM CPR report (15:1). Other UC campuses range from 15:1 (UCB) to 19:1 (UCD, UCI, UCSD, UCSC) (UCM 08/09 Common Data Set). In Fall 2008, however, almost half of the instructional faculty reported were lecturers. The student to ladder rank faculty ratio was about 22.6:1 (i.e., 2,534/112). This ratio is still sufficient in terms of campus-wide resources, and in terms of meeting this standard for "sufficient qualified faculty" to offer the educational programs, the distinction between ladder-rank faculty and lecturers is less important than it would be as a measure of research strength.

Sufficiency is harder to determine at the levels of School and program. As would be expected, enrollment is unevenly distributed across campus (Table 2.7 in the CPR Report), and student-faculty ratios vary by School. (NB: Tables 4.2a-c do not distinguish between ladder-rank faculty and lecturers in faculty headcount by School.)

Fall 2008	Undergrad. Students	Faculty (Ladder-Rank and Lecturers)	Student/Faculty ratio
Eng	493	31	15.9
Nat Sci	802	68	11.8
SSHumArt	918	104	8.8

These variations reflect enrollment distribution at comparable institutions and disciplinary differences in the way instruction is delivered across disciplines. The ratios by School and the range of variation among Schools are well within acceptable levels and comparable to (often better than) other UC campuses if distinctions between ladder-rank faculty and lecturers are ignored. Variations of the ratios within Schools are sometimes more dramatic, however. Based on Tables 2.5a and 4.2a-c for Fall 2008 for example, in the School of Social Sciences/Humanities/Arts, S/F ratios are 59.3:1 in Management compared to the much lower ratios and smaller variation in other units, ranging from 13.5 in Cognitive Science to 12.5 in Economics to 10.6 in History to 10.2 in Literatures & Cultures. In the larger programs in Engineering, ratios range from 30.2 in Mechanical Engineering to 17.3 in Bioengineering to 13.8 in Computer Science and Engineering to 5.6 in Environmental Engineering. Ratios vary similarly across programs in the School of Natural Sciences.

This variation is not necessarily cause for concern at this point given the rapid growth of the campus in the past and projected for the future, and the small numbers of current faculty and students. Nevertheless, the determination of appropriate numbers of faculty for any given program is obviously an important planning tool for the campus. Facing potential realignment of goals to grow specific programs in order to accelerate/ensure enrollment campus-wide, the campus will need to have specific planning projections for faculty hiring by discipline to ensure an effective balance between enrollment-driven instructional needs and the requirements of its research agenda. This issue might be an area worthy of increased attention by the next visit.

2.2 Clearly defined degrees re admission and level of achievement for graduation: a) undergraduate degree requirements and graduate degree requirements.

Requirements for graduation are clearly defined. The faculty has an advanced model for articulating student learning outcomes and program learning outcomes through the use of faculty accreditation organizers.

UC Merced has a comprehensive set of requirements at both the undergraduate and graduate level to assure that graduating students have engaged in the most rigorous and comprehensive educational programs possible. In many ways, their approaches, particularly at the undergraduate level, can be viewed as a "best practice".

Undergraduate students chose from 18 official majors administered in 3 academic divisions (Social Science/Humanities/Arts, Natural Sciences, Engineering). The curriculum of each major and their "Program Learning Outcomes" (PLOs) have been developed by faculty groups and approved by the Academic Senate. Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) must be aligned with institutional goals, and UC Merced has developed a set of eight "Guiding Principles" to be addressed in the development of any program: scientific literacy, decision making, communication, self and society, ethics and responsibility, leadership and teamwork, aesthetic understanding and creativity, and development of personal potential.

In addition to the PLOs, each course in each major is required to develop a set of "Student Learning Outcomes" (SLOs), which provide students and instructors defined learning maps and foci. The success of these approaches is remarkable. Nearly all courses have published syllabi that provide consistency in the material presented and in the expected student learning outcomes. About 80% of courses (as of Spring Semester 2009) have student learning outcomes included in the course syllabus. Nearly all programs (>90%) have well-defined clearly stated Program Learning Outcomes and Assessment Plans (83%).

In addition to completing an academic major, students may also complete an academic minor and a significant amount of general education (45 units which is about 37% of the total unit requirement for graduation). Like the academic majors programs, general education at UC

Merced has been designed around the Eight Guiding Principles with courses stressing particularly quantitative reasoning, written, oral and other communication skills, and integrating broad domains of knowledge. Typically students are required to take two 4-unit Core Courses, Writing 1 (Academic Writing), Writing 10 (College Reading and Composition), Math 5 (Calculus Preparation), Math 21 (Single Variable Calculus) and "School-specific" GE curriculum, which include electives outside a student's major. First-year students are also encouraged to participate in 1-unit Freshman Seminars.

The general education curriculum is undergoing some structural modifications, particularly with respect to the requirement for a Freshman Core Course (Core 1) and a Junior Core Course (Core 100). At present, only Core 1 is being taught and required and Core 100 has been put on hold due to budgetary constraints (using faculty in this course reduces their time devoted to major undergraduate and graduate teaching).

In addition to course work, many programs require some type of "capstone" experience. Many UCM undergraduates (68%) have participated in faculty sponsored research projects that have led to publications and/or presentation at scholarly meetings. In addition to undergraduate research, senior capstones also include portfolio development and review and requirement for service learning (also an option for a GE requirement in Engineering).

2.3 SLOs and expectations for student learning at all levels; reflected in policies, advising, information resources, etc.

As discussed in CFR 2.2, UC Merced has established a strong infrastructure for strategically developing programs, courses, curricula and the means to assess each. They have developed Guiding Principles, Program Learning Outcomes, Student Learning Outcomes, and Assessment Plans for programs and courses. They have also created a syllabi development process to assure consistency in the material covered in a specific course (independent of the specific faculty member teaching the course).

The assessment and development tools are available through websites and catalogs. Staff advisors are aware of Program Learning Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes and integrate

these into their advising practices. There is little information presented on the role of the library in promoting this information. The e-portfolio initiative presented in Appendix 2.3.2 is innovative and appears to be a valuable tool for students to achieve academic objectives.

Within academic units, Faculty Accreditation Organizers (FAOs) have the responsibility for overseeing the assessment program and with working with faculty members to assure that the culture of assessment and the methods adopted by UC Merced are familiar to all.

2.4 Faculty responsibility for attainment of expectations for student learning.

UC Merced has done an admirable job in developing learning expectations, developing programs support these expectations and devising a process to measure the effectiveness of these programs. The institution has fostered collaborations with the faculty, administration, academic senate, staff and students to ensure an integrated system for developing courses that are based on guiding principles. This commitment to shared governance is to be commended.

New faculty members are introduced to their responsibilities in developing and assuring quality learning expectations in their orientation. Each undergraduate and graduate program has a Faculty Accreditation Organizer (FAO) who provides leadership in developing and implementing multi-year assessment plans of the faculty-developed program learning outcomes.

Learning expectations are presented to students in orientation, in classes, through class-material and through several initiative efforts. The message in all this is clear: UC Merced is dedicated to assuring the highest quality student learning experience and in promoting student success. Parents are also an integral part of the “success equation” for students and the administration, and the campus works with parents to educate them about what they might do to help assure their student’s success.

Academically under-prepared students and students on academic probation are encouraged (and in some cases, required) to enroll in a course that helps them develop the academic and social skills that will be required for their academic success. In addition, faculty submit “midterm”

grades to the students and Registrar. At-risk students identified as receiving less than a C- are provided additional resources to help them succeed. Lower division students in Natural Sciences who go onto academic probation must take a one unit academic skills course and sign a contract that requires them to use campus resource centers weekly to improve their academic performance.

In addition to developing all these programs to assure student academic success, UC Merced has done a remarkable job in developing tools to measure the effectiveness of their programs using the WASC Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes. Using these standards to examine the efficacy of the PLOs and SLOs campus leaders determined that they need to "improve the specificity of PLOs and SLOs to better share expectations with all stakeholders, to define more precisely the elements of student success and thus increase the 'assessability' of outcomes, and to improve alignment with student work at both program and course levels." At the level of course syllabi, they concluded that they must work to develop syllabi around descriptive, measurable SLOs that are tightly linked to the work of the course and the mechanisms of learning assessment.

2.5 students involved in learning and challenged; feedback provided.

UC Merced has been very successful in attracting students to this beautiful, but for some, isolated campus to engage in high quality learning with a focus on student success. The syllabus presented for the CORE 1 course demonstrates the degree that the faculty have gone to promote academic learning ideals and to develop academic skills that will assure student academic success. This course also supports the undergraduate research mission of the campus by providing glimpses of the type of research and approaches that natural scientists, social sciences and humanities faculty engage in studying a common problem.

The campus promotes the ideal of research and the integration of research, learning and teaching. It reports more than 68% of its students having participated in research with faculty members. Many of these students have been urged to publish their research in the campus research journal or in peer reviewed academic journals. Their research is presented in the poster sessions of

Research Week and as a consequence, students gain experience in succinctly presenting their research and conclusions in a public speaking format. Through a minimum of two writing courses, students develop their writing skills and abilities to express themselves in writing. Through a strong interaction of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, the staff and faculty of UC Merced have collectively developed strong value-added learning experiences that build upon the classroom experience. These are described in detail in their report and include learning communities, workshops, summer programs, capstone and service learning experiences. The institution provided limited evidence of assessment of the effectiveness of these programs, which is understandable given the emerging development of the programs.

2.6 Graduates achieve stated levels of attainment; SLOs embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work.

The first four-year class graduated only this May 2009 and entered into an economy where even the most highly qualified and experienced workers are finding it difficult to realize their career objectives. At this time, there is no reliable database available to judge student success in the workforce at this point in time. However, UC Merced does have the mechanism in place to measure this in the future through exit and alumni surveys (Appendix 2.6.1). The institution provides evidence of student self-assessment, an indirect method. Direct assessment is still to be realized. With the existing infrastructure to ensure assessment through a robust IPA office, it is presumed that the institution should have little difficulty addressing this standard as it matures. This is an area that should be fortified more by the time of the Educational Effectiveness visit.

With respect to embedding the standards of student learning in evaluating student work, the campus is exploring ways to incorporate such evaluation in assessment plans.
However, in the discussion of CFR 2.4, the institution indicates that more specific and measurable SLOs are needed in some courses that link explicitly to assessing student learning.

2.7 Systematic program review includes SLOs, retention/graduation, external evidence.

With respect to institutional assessment, UC Merced is truly a University of the 21st century. It has built from the foundation up with assessment as the mortar. Its success will certainly reflect the importance of building assessment criteria and benchmarks into every level of academia.

In the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and during the team visit, UC Merced provided ample evidence that it has, or will shortly have, in place review criteria for programs in both the Academic Affairs Division and the Division of Student Affairs. These reviews will be based on PLOs that are built into programs and evaluated regularly by program evaluators. Plans for assessment of other administrative units were not fully developed at the time of the visit. The Senate has recently generated "separate but complementary guidelines" for reviewing both graduate and undergraduate programs. During the visit of the team, the Senate provisionally adopted program evaluation procedures. These procedures will be used in UC Merced's first program evaluation in 2009-2010 in the Applied Mathematics program.

With respect to professional programs, the only professional programs at UC Merced are in the School of Engineering. Student learning outcomes reflect those expected of ABET Inc, the recognized accreditor of these programs.

2.8 Scholarship, creativity, curricular and instructional innovation valued and supported.

The team is impressed with how far the faculty, staff and students of UC Merced have taken this institution in such a short time and under such enormous budgetary constraints. The campus commitment to academic excellence is strong, with a growing group of ladder rank faculty. (Presently, only 31% of the faculty is tenured, compared to 82% at other UC campuses.) The institution is fortunate to have quality and engaged lecturers that as a group comprise approximately 45% of the teaching staff. Support for scholarship and creative activity appears also to be strong. The initial design of the curriculum fosters a creative approach to learning.

2.9 Linkage among scholarship, teaching, student learning and service.

It is clear from the presentations of the many undergraduate programs that integrate classroom learning with application, that faculty and the institution recognize and promote these linkages. In fact, in her graduation address at the 2009 UC Merced Commencement First Lady Michelle Obama made the point several times that UC Merced's service learning orientation was an exemplar for all of our educational institutions. However, though there are many "experiments" in progress (as might be expected in a new institution), there are questions of sustainability of these programs, as the student-to-faculty ratio increases and budget constraints continue. For example, UCM proudly points out the UCUES result showing that 60% of their 2008 students had engaged in faculty research, whereas the UC average was 47%. However, these campuses, like UC Merced, also actively promote undergraduate research, and it is likely that they would have more students engaged in this if there were more faculty to provide such opportunities for students. As the number of students increase, UC Merced may need to pay particular attention to providing opportunities for all students who so desire to engage in undergraduate research. The institution may want to look at models from other UC campuses that match students with research opportunities, help provide the tools that students will need to be successful in research and assist students and faculty members in finding funds to support their projects.
During the CPR visit, the WASC team learned of the recently awarded NIH Health Disparity Grant of 1.3 million dollars. This grant will provide funds for paid internships for undergraduate and graduate students pursuing a career in the health sciences to work with agencies in the valley communities. This program will provide many future students opportunities to apply their knowledge in a multitude of career related, service learning experiences.

2.10 Collection and analysis of disaggregated student data; achievement, satisfaction and climate tracked; student needs identified and supported.

Data collection and reporting is a strength of UCM and is overseen by the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA). UCM collects and reports data on students annually for the UCOP *Statistical Summary of Students and Staff.* The data are also published on the UCM Institutional Planning and Analysis Website. Student data by area of study are also collected and published in the IPA Website. Student achievement is tracked in the form of retention and graduation rates.

Additional campus data are collected and reported through participation in the Common Data Set initiative. Analysis of student data disaggregated by demographic characteristics appears to be a developing area.

Undergraduate satisfaction and campus climate are measured through the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES); results are benchmarked against UCUES from other UC campuses. UCUES also provides information about students' preparation, needs, and experiences. Benchmarking against national peers occurs through Merced's participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (results summarized in Exhibit 450). All of this data is available on the IPA website, along with a frank and detailed analysis of some of the data. Additional surveys have been designed and will be administered to alumni and graduating seniors (Exhibits 241, 242). Program-specific surveys and other collections of data are done an on ad-hoc basis by some programs; an example of a survey from the Summer Bridge program is included (Exhibit 270) and a writing diagnostic exam (Exhibit 271). In addition, UCM provides profiles of its first graduating seniors to personalize the quantitative data. Collectively, these data enable UCM to identify characteristics of its students and assess their preparation, needs, and experiences.

Graduate Students were surveyed online in summer 2008 through the UC Merced's Graduate Studies Division. Results and analysis of the report were submitted in the CPR (Exhibit 224). The survey concludes with a list of similar surveys at other institutions, but no real benchmarking of the results is provided.

Data from UCUES and the 2008 Graduate Student Survey were analyzed and the analyses published along with those reports. Exhibit 130 is an insightful analysis of financial aid strategies that concludes with specific recommendations, and the CPR report notes that other data described above are "distributed to relevant academic programs and constituents in Student Affairs to improve the University's programs and services". Similarly, the CPR report indicates that IPA sends reports to relevant constituencies. The data are extensive and sufficient. The *use* of such data by the campus is not described clearly in the CPR report, but at the time of the visit UCM provided examples of how data are used and analyzed and how some programs were

modified in light of the analyses. It therefore appears that data are distributed, analyzed, and effectively used across campus and in the decision-making process at various levels, though on a somewhat ad hoc basis.

2.11 Co-curricular and analysis of disaggregated student data; achievement, satisfaction and climate tracked; student needs identified and supported.

As noted in CFR 2.10, the IPA Office has a significant amount of data available and appears quite capable of conducting analyses as needed. However, it was not clear to the team that there was a systematic method for sharing and analyzing data across all divisional areas. The institution does have effective ways of assessing and improving services under the Student Affairs Division. In addition, Student Affairs reports three specific examples of assessment in Student Life, Career Services, and the Advising and Learning Center. The Division also has developed a five-year strategic plan that supports initiatives for the programs. The five-year strategic plan has clear initiatives, goals, and responsible individuals delineated. While these are very good initial steps, the campus will need to develop the facility to report progress on the initiatives and to strengthen the efforts between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs regarding the assessment and development of co-curricular programs.

2.12 Timely, useful information and advising.

The institution's staff provides information about academic programs. In addition, staff in the Student Advising and Learning Center advise students who do not have a declared major, as well as providing training to student advisors. Advisors meet with students once a semester, provide updates on the institutions website, hold informational sessions, and send bi-weekly email updates. The advisors attend regular meetings to stay updated with current policies and practices. The institution has adequate and knowledgeable advisors for each of the programs to provide student services and information on rules and regulations. In addition, a user friendly website is available for all students to access information regarding academic programs and resources available.

2.13 Appropriate student services.

The institution delivers comprehensive student support services, including financial aid, registration, advising, counseling, judicial, health, recreation, student activities, and library and information services. Many of these areas of service are tracked in the Student Affairs Year End Report. However, to date the institution has not used the data to implement student-learning outcome assessments. Again, as noted before, the capacity is well-developed for data analysis, but true action planning based on the data is lagging, understandably so given the early stages of the campus development.

2.14 Information to and treatment of transfer students (if applicable).

The institution provides information on necessary requirements for transfer students through the catalog and other campus publications. The institution strives to make students aware of transfer requirements through Enrollment Services and provides opportunities for peer-to-peer advising. The institution is making a strong attempt at attracting transfer students particularly from the community colleges. Institutional data on this population reveal that community college students fair as well or better than native students.

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

3.1 Sufficient qualified personnel for operations and academics.

Although budgets and enrollments did not meet initial expectations, the University of California, Merced appears at the macro level to have sufficient numbers of faculty and staff to sustain its programs within its mission. Its low ratio of students to faculty is noteworthy and suggests that a high level of academic quality can be maintained without adding faculty and academic staff even when enrollment grows (depending on discipline mix). The qualifications of faculty and staff meet all expectations for this type of institution, although there is an exceptionally high proportion of Lecturers compared to tenured/tenure-track faculty. The number of faculty at this time appears sufficient to support programs for the current number of students. However, the deployment of faculty to specific programs is not well-documented and bears further analysis. Please see the earlier discussion in section 2.1. The key issue for the campus on this criterion will be getting new tenure-track faculty lines funded by UC to keep up with enrollment growth, and allocating those lines in a manner that balances the needs of the educational programs with the research agenda for the institution. Recruitment and retention of faculty will also be crucial to maintaining the present sufficiency and should be monitored carefully.

3.2 Sufficient qualified and diverse faculty.

The faculty at UC Merced has a substantial and continuing commitment to the campus, as is evident by their willingness to spend the exceptional amount of time and energy necessary to start a new campus in the UC system. The professional qualifications and diversity of the faculty at UC Merced—both Senate and non-Senate faculty—are sufficient to achieve its educational objectives for its current students, to establish and oversee academic policies, and to ensure the integrity and continuity of the academic programs. That sufficiency is reinforced by the extensive and systematic policies and practices in the UC system designed to establish and maintain standards for appointment of Senate faculty at the level of the individual units and campus-wide, and by Senate oversight of degree-programs and other academic policies and regulations. UC-wide standards have been ensured from the beginning through participation of

faculty from other UC campuses in hiring decisions. Efforts to diversify the instructional staff have increased diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity, though that varies across fields, as at all UC campuses. Leadership is attentive to diversity, in particular to achieving diversity among the faculty. At this point, however, the faculty is less diverse ethnically than the student population—which is a common reflection in much of higher education today. Please see the discussion of this issue also under section 1.5.

3.3 Faculty policies, practices, and evaluation.

Systematic review of Senate faculty for recruitment, appointment, and evaluation for merit increases is strictly governed by the *Academic Personnel Manual* for UC, supplemented by the *UC Merced Academic Personnel Policies and Procedures*. Evidence of teaching effectiveness is considered, including student evaluations of instruction and a wide range of other evidence of teaching effectiveness. Peer review occurs throughout the process, including the initiation of the review/appointment file at the unit-level through campus-wide peer review by the Committee on Academic Personnel. Recruitment and workload are aligned with institutional purposes and general educational objectives in the Strategic Plans for each school.

Recruitment of non-Senate faculty is managed at the school-level and overseen by the campus-wide Academic Personnel Office. Workload, review processes, etc., are governed by the MOU between UC and AFT, which guarantees clear and systematic review including consideration of student evaluations among other evidence of teaching effectiveness.

Recruitment of staff, determination of workload, incentives, etc. is coordinated by the Office of Professional and Organization Development. Orientation sessions and professional-development training is available through campus-wide programs. Staff members are evaluated annually, including self-appraisal and formal assessment of performance by supervisors. Incentives such as public campus-wide awards are available for exemplary performance by staff. The CPR and supporting documents indicate this criterion is fully met by UC Merced, and the systematic procedures in place should guarantee continuation of the current good practices.

3.4 Faculty and staff development.

For faculty, the campus provides an impressive array of workshops, consultation, and advice on technology-related instruction through the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence. The area of faculty development was noted in the previous visit as needing attention, and it is clear that the campus has moved forward quite successfully to provide this support. Workshops, orientations, student assistants, etc. are available to faculty to support improvement of teaching more generally (five scheduled this year for each term). Individual consultations with advisors from the Center are available upon request. The Center also provides grants and fellowships for faculty and graduate teaching assistants of up to $5,000 and/or funding for course release for faculty. These awards are to support activities related to evidence-based performance outcomes. A Center Fellows program focuses on teaching support for new faculty, and Instructional internships are available for graduate students. These resources for faculty and graduate teaching assistants are appropriate and sufficiently supported.

Resources for staff development are offered through the Office of Professional and Organizational Development. They include orientation sessions for new employees, courses for professional development, and participation in a UC-wide, off-campus residential program, "Management Skills Assessment Program," for UC managers and an orientation program. The Top Cat Program provides cash awards for exceptional staff performance and professional development awards to fund courses and workshops leading to certifications, etc. These on-campus activities for staff are appropriate but limited.

Development of a robust faculty development program appears to be extant for the faculty and to be emerging in select areas (Student Affairs) for the staff. An area for future focus is a comprehensive staff development program across all units.

3.5 Financial stability, clean audits, sufficient resources; realistic plans if deficits; budgeting, enrollment and diversified revenue.

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 trying budgets but overall financial stability and clean audits. The University of California's Office of the President appears committed to the success of the Merced campus and has shielded the campus from state budget reductions, increasing its permanent funding each year in order to meet the demands of growing student enrollment. However, the financial model upon which the campus was established is not able to be met under the current circumstances. This has required the campus to defer hiring of some new faculty and to make temporary budget reductions and sweep savings in each of the past few years. For future years, the campus will rely on significantly increased student fee income (both from growing enrollment and from significant fee increases) but will remain unable to meet its expenditure expectations unless substantially more external funding is received from the state, the Office of the President and private donors. In the alternative, expenditure expectations may have to be scaled back. Campus leaders are convinced that their operations are not sustainable at current enrollment levels and that considerably more student enrollment will be needed to bring the campus to that position. The outlook for significant revenue enhancement is cloudy. The team has recommended that the leaders of the campus and the Office of the President jointly develop a multi-year financial plan that permits the campus to serve students successfully while balancing the needs of its research mission.

Initially, enrollment fell short of early expectations, leading to fewer resources from student fees than had been expected. Due to a special supplemental state appropriation, the backfilling of state appropriation reductions by the Office of the President, and the advancing of a loan (line of credit) from the Office of the President, the institution has had current revenues in excess of operating expenditures in each year through 2007-08. The total of these one-time cash infusions has been more than $75 million from FY 2006 through FY 2009. The budget supplements were slated to be reduced substantially beginning in 2009-10 and eliminated entirely by FY 2015. At that time, UC, Merced is expected to have drawn all $40 million of the line of credit available to it from UCOP. In order to ensure its financial solvency, the University of California, Merced has

deferred the hiring of faculty and made temporary budget reductions in each year since FY 2007. This has permitted the campus to continue operations.

A recently prepared budget for 2009-10 shows the anticipated operating shortfall for the campus to be more than $19 million for the year. The institution planned to address this shortfall through the use of $10 million of one-time funds from the state and UCOP and $1.6 million of temporary savings, leaving a remaining deficit of $7.8 million. This is after holding the number of ladder rank faculty to 138 from an authorized level of 183. The campus expects to address the shortfall through even greater use of temporary savings and the deferral of start-ups. However, even if forecast enrollment levels are achieved and paid for by either the state or the Office of the President and even if student fees are raised substantially in each year, the campus can expect operating budget shortfalls ranging up to $13.6 million in future years. Temporary savings will continue to be anticipated to ameliorate this deficit but campus projections show red ink in each year through 2013-14 despite such savings. The reliance on constant temporary budget savings is not a sustainable practice.

A shift toward lower cost academic programs is a move that may change the planned academic orientation and goals of the campus (at least in the short term) and may have some effect on lowering costs below expected levels. The hoped-for reliance on auxiliary operations to provide some financial support to education and general operations may be optimistic and, in any event, could not be expected to yield much net revenue for several years. Further, a strategy that relies on UCOP loans and future state appropriation increases seems fraught with peril unless the campus receives some solid assurances of support from the Regents or the Legislature. The Office of the President has shown strong commitment to the Merced campus and has said that the campus budget will not be reduced for 2009-10 and that supplemental funding for enrollment will be provided at least through FY 2013. Some on the campus are advocating for the continuation of the $5 million per year legislatively approved state supplemental appropriation, which is due to expire after this year.

The University of California appears to have sufficient resources that could be devoted to ensuring the financial stability of this campus even in the face of further state budget cuts and the

loss to California of federal stimulus funding under ARRA. The Office of the President has committed to supporting and ensuring the financial stability of the campus, including the willingness to offer favorable repayment terms for system loans. However, the deficits expected by the campus (which will total more than $30 million by 2014) suggest that a defined and clear financial plan needs to be developed between the Office of the President and the campus leadership as soon as possible. Such a plan obviously would take into account enrollment, programs, research expectations, and student success and would consider both revenue opportunities and expenditure choices.

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, if this is not well communicated to current and prospective students, the sticker shock of impending fee levels could lead to lower than budgeted enrollment. Concerns were expressed about middle income students being able to attend the University once the new fee levels are reached. However, campus leaders believe these concerns may be overstated. The campus has attracted enough students in the fall 2009 term to meet its forecast. The fact that the budget estimates for future years assume large increases in student fees in each of the next five years suggests that concerns about affordability may become more acute.

The approval of the Section 404 permit by the Federal government represents a major accomplishment for the campus because it allows the University of California, Merced to proceed with the build-out of Phase I of its Long Range Development Plan as soon as funding and Regental approvals for projects can be secured.

3.6 Sufficient information resources/library, aligned and adequate.

Although the physical holdings of the library are relatively limited, the University of California, Merced notes that it fulfills this criterion through use of the California Digital Library and

through customized professionally directed searches tailored to meet the specific needs of students and researchers. Discussions with some students suggested the possible efficacy of this approach.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the capacity and preparedness of the campus on this criterion based on the brief CPR report and campus visit. Essentially, their argument is that the UC Merced Library "houses or enables access to information resources" for its students and faculty by participating in the California Digital Library and by providing electronic access to and support for various on-line collections, periodicals, and images. In addition, they rely on interlibrary loan to borrow print material from other UC libraries.

The claim that such electronic access far exceeds what would be expected of any new university based on print collections is certainly true. This emphasis on electronic resources makes the library especially accessible to students enrolled at a distance and/or those who access the resources off-site via the campus VPN.

Still, it was difficult for the team to assess the sufficiency of those information resources. Older input measures don't really apply (number of volumes, ratios of volumes/student/faculty, expenditures, number of reference staff, number of librarians, etc.), yet no new output measures are cited to measure user satisfaction, adequacy of materials for research, etc. The CPR report does not benchmark the information resources against any measures at other institutions, nor does it provide much information about usage or user satisfaction. At this point they are in a transitional or hybrid state between print and electronic resources, and while they understandably are looking to the future rather than the past in their planning, they need some way of assessing their sufficiency for the present. This design presents an interesting model, and feedback is generally positive. That said, an expanded inquiry model needs to be developed by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review. There is a link to "Library Assessment Information" on the Library Website that contains results of a student survey in 2009, along with changes that have been made as a result of responses to the survey. More of that kind of assessment would be helpful. This said, at the moment, the infrastructure of the library does not appear to be a capacity issue—rather, it is an assessment and descriptive issue to be addressed.

3.7 Information technology coordinated and supported.

The campus has addressed concerns from various user groups, redirected its services, and now appears to have both sufficient resources and sufficient will to ensure effective information technology to support its mission. Continued vigilance will be required to ensure that technology remains current and aligned with student, staff and faculty requirements.

3.8 Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes; priority on academics.

The University of California, Merced has a clearly defined organization structure and uses many of the formal review and decision-making structures and processes employed throughout the University of California by both the Academic Senate and the administration. Review mechanisms exist to ensure timely feedback to inform decision-making with respect to operations, facilities, technology, information resources, finances, budget, and student learning.

3.9 Independent governing board with proper oversight; CEO hiring and evaluation.

The Board of Regents of the University of California is a constitutionally independent entity that hires and evaluates the President of the University and oversees the hiring of the Chancellors of the ten campuses. The Regents exercise appropriate control over the policies, operations, and finances of the University.

3.10 Full-time CEO: CFO; sufficient administrators and staff.

The institution meets the requirement for a full time CEO and CFO. A review of the organizational charts and confirmation from discussion on campus provides evidence that the institution has sufficient numbers of qualified administrators to effectively lead and management the educational mission.

3.11 Effective academic leadership by faculty.

The faculty at UC Merced participates in shared governance of the institution according to the explicit and systematic policies and procedures of the University of California. They exercise their leadership and help ensure the academic quality of the institution, its educational purpose, and character through participation in the Academic Senate and its various committees. The Annual Reports attached to the CPR report offered numerous examples of how the faculty exercises that responsibility and authority over the academic programs of the university. This criterion is a notable strength of all UC campuses, including Merced.

Some Senate committees, including the Committee on Academic Personnel, have relied heavily on faculty from other UC campuses. For 2007-08, for example, CAP had only two faculty members from UCM and nine from other campuses. CAP membership for 2009-10 lists six faculty from UCM and four from other campuses. Privilege and Tenure, however, lists *no* UC Merced faculty among its members; all of the committee comes from other UC campuses. Rules and Elections consists of two faculty members from other campuses and three from UC Merced. Given the development of the campus, it now appears to have enough faculty to assume responsibility for self-management on these important committees. If those rosters are accurate, they undermine the strength of the case the campus makes for the faculty's willingness to exercise academic leadership more generally.

Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

4.1 Reflection/planning with constituents; strategic with priorities and future direction; aligned with purposes; plan monitored and revised.

The institution values the environmental impact of campus growth and implemented a Long Range Development Plan in 2002, which they have updated in 2009. They have also developed a Strategic Academic Vision, which is reported to have received participation from all faculty members. A Long Range Enrollment Plan has also been developed to guide the further development of the institution. Ultimately, all of the plans are ambitious and provide a sense of detail about how the institution will be developed and how the programs and infrastructure of the campus and community will witness change.

The commitment towards student support services needs to be clear if enrollment targets are pursued. The scope and quality of services for students should match the enrollment goals in order to achieve targets for student success.

4.2 Plans align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technology.

All the plans refer to other plans and appear to be consistent. An explicit linkage might be helpful in keeping all constituencies informed. The alignment between the Long Range Development Plan and the academic plans seems close. Any changes in academic emphasis will mean that all plans must be changed, driving changes also in technology plans, investment and support. The fiscal situation and suggestions from the Office of the President may be the motivating forces for any consideration of changes. Any revision of the campus' academic strategy and emphasis will test its ability to develop and maintain the linkages among all its various planning efforts. The Senate recently gave provisional approval to a program review process that seems thorough and robust but the first use of this process will not occur until later in this academic year. As the campus moves forward with adapting to budget challenges (which may necessitate alterations in the academic direction), any changes to the academic program will need to be aligned with program review and the strategic imperatives of the institution.

4.3 Planning informed by analyzed data and evidence of educational effectiveness.

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. There is growing concern that these plans may not be able to be executed due to funding constraints. The Social Sciences and Management Building is under construction but funds for the Science and Engineering II Building await legislative authorization and voter approval, which cannot occur prior to November 2010 and may not happen then. Campus officials emphasized that this building was essential to meeting the enrollment targets and fulfilling the education and research agenda of the University of California, Merced. Other projects are not even in the immediate queue for funding. This uncertainty regarding future state funding for campus development will require either that the planning process deal more effectively with alternatives to new construction and major renovation, that more non-state funds be secured through even more active philanthropic efforts and business/community partnerships, or that expectations for enrollment, programs, and research be revised. The University has significant opportunities to re-scale its plans and some limited opportunities to fund construction differently, making the revision of expectations for enrollment unlikely but keeping open the possibility of some reconsideration of the campus' research portfolio and academic programs. The University of California, Merced Long Range Development Plan, already revised to meet environmental concerns, offers considerable flexibility for campus growth if funds for buildings and infrastructure can be secured especially since the campus has received Federal approval for build-out of all of its first phase.

4.4 Quality assurance processes; assessment and tracking; comparative data; use of results to revise/improve.

Extensive curriculum and program approval processes are mandated by the UC system, including campus-level review and approval for undergraduate programs, system wide review and approval for graduate programs, and WASC Substantive Change proposals as appropriate. UC Merced is following these procedures. The example of the proposal for a BA in Anthropology is impressive and uses extensive comparative data from external sources.

Periodic academic program reviews are planned for all academic programs at UC Merced, and the campus has adopted processes modeled on other UC campuses that clearly satisfy this part of the criterion (Attachment 29). The processes explicitly call for annual assessment, alignment with student learning goals and outcomes, assessment of teaching effectiveness by the faculty, etc. (e.g., p. 3 of the "Undergraduate Program Review Guidelines" in Attachment 29). Proposed Review Questions request explicit and specific evaluation of the program's success on those issues and require comparative judgments with similar programs within UC and nationally. There is no explicit requirement that results be tracked over time, but such tracking is inevitable given the periodic and cumulative nature of these reviews.

The Senate Chair has expressed (in a letter to the Chair of the WASC Steering Committee at Merced) that "there are major concerns about their implementation" related to "the staffing level required to support these guidelines and data and document management systems to support these guidelines and data and document management systems to support the accumulation of evidence and assessments" (CPR report, attachment 29). Those concerns must be addressed, but the provisional adoption of the program review process is an important first step in moving the campus forward. As with any developing effort, it is expected that this review process will be adapted and perfected over time to suit the needs of the campus and to deliver the support required for meaningful evaluation.

Notably, at least one administrative office (the Division of Student Affairs) has developed a systematic Program Review Process. Student Affairs has developed its own Learning Outcomes and requirements for a data audit. It did not appear to the team that other administrative units had developed their own systematic review processes. This is something that should be addressed in the EER visit.

4.5 Institutional research capacity; used to assess effectiveness/student learning; review of IR.

The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA) is responsible for institutional research at UC Merced. Its mission and data sets are appropriate for the needs of the campus and comparable to that of similar offices at other UC campuses. General campus data are available

on the Website and are up to date. The account of reporting practices and examples provided by the CPR report indicates that IPA has an effective working relationship with key offices including Registrar, Admissions, and Graduate Division to provide data necessary to their planning. That data and more specialized reports are provided by IPA to Senate and administrative planning groups on campus and in the UC Office of the President. Some examples provided during the visit indicate that these groups use the reports for institutional review and decision–making processes. The report itself offers examples of data-driven planning on enrollment projections and in a facilities model from Dec. 2008, which is impressive in its detail and sophisticated use of trend data from the three preceding years.

IPA also provides data for academic program reviews. Data on "Student Stats" is appropriate to support assessment of student learning on a campus-wide basis (e.g., retention and graduation rates, etc.), though it is not apparently connected to more specific institutional and/or programmatic outcomes. Of special note is the Survey Coordinating Committee, chaired by the Director of IPA. The SCC coordinates surveys at UC Merced to avoid duplication across constituencies, ensure comprehensive coverage, and systematize dissemination of results. The report does not mention any review process for IPA, user satisfaction surveys, or other mechanisms to ensure effectiveness of the institutional research and/or the suitability or usefulness of the data.

4.6 Leadership and faculty committed to improvement; faculty assesses teaching and learning; climate and co-curricular objectives assessed.

Campus leadership has established a culture of assessment that appears to pervade the academic areas of the University. The recent Senate approval of the program review process and its expected application to the Applied Mathematics program this year is noteworthy. Faculty in all areas and all ranks appear engaged in and committed to inquiry, evaluation and assessment to a remarkable degree. At least two programs (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. However, there does not appear to be a regular program to assess the operation and effectiveness of co-curricular and support activities

outside of that being done by Student Affairs. Further, knowledge and use of data do not seem as well integrated into enrollment management and other activities as might be expected.

4.7 Inquiry into teaching learning leads to improvement in curricula, pedagogy and evaluation.

Faculty at UC Merced have been engaged on a relatively continuous basis in inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning as they develop, implement, and adjust their new curriculum to meet the needs of their students. The interdisciplinary organization of the campus, coupled with a limited range of faculty and the particular needs of their students, necessitated their rethinking some aspects of the standard curriculum, and they have monitored the effectiveness of their curricular innovations carefully. The principal means of faculty engagement is through the course-approval process, which is overseen by the Academic Senate, and the faculty Accreditation Officers group, which among other duties oversees the development of Student Learning Outcomes and assessment methods in all disciplines.

The CPR report lists one example of how a course was modified in light of such inquiry, and the team heard about several other examples during the visit that demonstrated adjustments in course content, methods of instruction, and support services that had been made as a result of assessments of student learning. Those assessments have included closely monitoring grades of individual students and benchmarking grade-distributions against other UC campuses; centrally reviewing (in Students Affairs) mid-semester grades in freshman-level courses to identify problems at the earliest possible point; and other measures such as focus-groups, course portfolios, and other direct and indirect measures. The most general example of such adjustment is a trend toward developing more discipline-based (vs. interdisciplinary) majors as a result of student demand for more traditional choices. Similar adjustments have been made to support services for students, ranging from course-specific tutoring to more general workshops offered by Student Affairs to pedagogical training and support from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence. These changes exemplify a commitment to evidence-based institutional learning and evolution led by faculty working closely with support staff across the institution.

4.8 Stakeholder involvement in assessment of effectiveness.

The CPR report describes plans for surveys of alumni and graduating seniors in many programs but says nothing of other stakeholders identified in the WASC criterion, including employers, practitioners, or any other groups. It does not appear that UC Merced is prepared to meet WASC standards on this criterion.

Student Success, Graduation and Retention

The campus student enrollment includes a majority of first generation students (52.4%) and students from lower socio-economic background (over 60% receive need-based aid). These factors, coupled with the valley's low college attendance rate, and a moderate entering SAT average of freshmen of 1043, would predict student success at much lower rates than achieved by UC Merced students. Not only do the students persist beyond what would be predicted, but the value-added learning potential for graduates appears to meet and exceed that of other UCs in key areas. This is a remarkable achievement, but one that can only be sustained through continued focus and resource allocation if the campus is to achieve at the level expected of other UC campuses.

Retention rates are comparable to national four year public institutions, but lagging behind other UCs. Notably, in the short time the campus has been in existence, the rates have fluctuated, declining slightly over the first three years.

Source: UCOP Statfinder--Year 1 Persistence, First-Time Freshmen (Custom Table)			
	2007	2006	2005
Berkeley	96.7	97.1	96.1
Davis	90	89.7	90.3
Irvine	93.6	94.0	93.3
Los Angeles	96.9	97.2	96.8
Merced	79.5	79.9	82.6
Riverside	85.1	84.3	85.9
San Diego	94.6	94.5	94.1
Santa Barbara	90.5	91.3	89.8
Santa Cruz	88.0	89.6	89.1

The campus reports that the freshman to sophomore retention rate rebounded to 83% in Fall 08, but continuation rates after sophomore year drop more precipitously, with only 65% retained after the third year for the Fall 06 cohort. The small numbers and rapid growth of the campus limit the significance of these data, but the relatively low retention rates are a potential source for

concern, especially considering that the overall UC graduation rate is 50% in four years, 75% in five years, and 80% in six years. That said, the four-year graduation rate for the initial cohort at Merced is expected to be 48-50%, which is consistent with other UC's and exceeding the rate of national public four year campuses (29%), and the campus is addressing this issue directly

The campus has responded to retention concerns with new programs including mandatory advising workshops and an undergraduate writing course as well as a variety of support programs, such as tutoring. Advising availability has increased consistent with funding for the student support areas and campus growth. Adding to the success of retention and recruitment is a vibrant campus culture. Whereas in the past the campus suffered from low student energy, evident mostly from a small population, the campus is now visibly active: filled walkways, numerous clubs, advertised activities, and actual facilities for student recreation and social space.

While the above is good news, other early data (UCUES and the Graduate Survey) identify surprisingly low levels of satisfaction among current students in those cohorts, indicated most dramatically by the relatively low percentage who are happy with their choice of campus and/or who say they would make the same choice again. UCM acknowledges that result directly and attributes some of it to the effect of being a young campus whose programs are still emerging. Nevertheless, responses on this critical issue should continue to be tracked to determine if data support the anecdotal observations of improving campus culture and student satisfaction.

The institution appears to be developing its capacity to provide detailed demographic information about students and student success. The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis is able to deliver many different data sets and provide research and analysis as needed. The Student Success Essay included in the Report as File 5-2, Appendix B, is an especially impressive example of sophisticated and precise analysis of data related to retention and graduation. However, while the campus has the capacity to analyze student success data rigorously and competently, it is not clear what the expectations are for use of the data by the various administrative units.

Expectations for student success are inherent in the learning outcomes from Student Affairs and from many of the Academic units. This same adaptation to assessment has not been realized across other non-instructional units. This lack of focus in other units may result in less strategic and efficient deployment of resources toward student success. The campus needs to strategically identify key student success study questions to pursue thorough co-curricular planning.

It would be particularly useful for all units to buy-in to co-curricular efforts and link their activities holistically to the University mission in much the same way that Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have. Viewing ALL units as delivering educational outcomes is encouraged.

In terms of value-added educational markers, the UC Merced Student Profile reports that UC Merced students have self-reported rates of improvement that are significant. When asked to rate their skills as freshmen and again as juniors, students indicate a remarkable improvement in self-confidence and intellectual mastery. The percentage of students rating their skills as very good to excellent from freshmen to junior year is particularly impressive in the following areas:

Analytical and critical thinking: from 18% to 65%
Understanding field of study: from 12% to 70%
Comprehension of academic material: from 18% to 61%
Leadership skills: from 19% to 64%
Presentation skills: from 19% to 60%

Self awareness: from 36% to 78%

Clearly, the institution is attending to student success and moving forward toward the very high standards of the UC system. While the campus commitment to student success has been demonstrated to be strong, it will need to be embraced across the entire campus spectrum in order to continue the momentum.

SECTION III—FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

The team is impressed with the campus attitude and esprit de corps. This attitude was evident from students, faculty, staff and administration. If one is predicting success, UC Merced has created an environment for success. There is a strong sense of responsibility to do well and a shared sense of building the campus. Faculty own student learning and it matters to them. There is congruence of the message across the campus and a sense of optimism. This is a fundamental building block of the leadership team.

The campus has strengthened its commitment to the student-centered research institution. They have become an inquiry based organization with an identity as a community of scholars.

The campus has a strong and promising Academic Program Review, which the faculty are poised to implement. A schedule for program review is not yet developed, but it is expected to be available by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review. Like any developing policy, it is expected to be refined in light of experience. While the commitment to program review is strong and evident in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, it is not completely diffused across all areas of the campus. There is not a campus-wide plan for how data is used and analyzed to inform planning, nor is there a scheduled timeline for overall support unit review.

Considering the early development of the campus, the team found a fairly comprehensive portfolio of policies in place, either as adopted from UC system models or developed specifically from the campus.

The vitality and culture of campus life have improved dramatically over the past several years. The campus is exciting and attractive. Attention to student success programs has provided

important support for the student learning environment and will continue to be an area needing attention based on the student success data.

The campus has done an excellent job of developing a culture of teaching effectiveness and creating outcomes and assessment with full and comprehensive buy-in from the faculty. The programs have systematized their assessment. The next step will be to ensure accountability for the assessment process (to be covered in the EER).

The team is impressed with the thought given to the master plan and the involvement of the campus in its development. The Federal section 404 permit has been achieved, which was essential to developing/building the campus.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UCOP and campus leadership should develop a financial plan that will align realistically the financial resources with enrollment, the educational program and research objectives.

2. Implement and evaluate the success of the Academic Program Review Plan.

3. Establish a regular practice for assessment and the use of data at the institutional level for all administrative units (in addition to that already in place for academic units and selected administrative units, such as Student Affairs).

SECTION IV—PREPARATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT AND REVIEW

In addition to addressing the major recommendations above, the campus will need to conclude work in a number of areas prior to the Educational Effectiveness Review, demonstrating that they are able to use their planning and assessment to ensure and enhance the quality of the academic experience:

1. Directly address the technology and information resources provided by the library, documenting how in a practical sense students and faculty are able to use resources to further their objectives. Results of a user satisfaction survey might be provided to address this issue.

2. Analyze the student/faculty ratio by departments and programs, disaggregated by tenure/tenure-track vs. other faculty, and describe how planning processes will be informed through this analysis.

3. Determine and demonstrate the process by which data are disseminated and analyzed to provide for optimum access and actual use of data. Ensure that leadership team members understand how to use and request data and what the expectations are for their direction of data analysis campus-wide. Systematize the use of data and analysis to inform planning.

4. Ensure a campus-wide commitment to student success planning and co-curricular programming.

APPENDIX I

Development of Educational Effectiveness Measures

Although not normally part of a WASC team report, this team did conduct a review of UC Merced's progress along the WASC Educational Effectiveness Framework. The team felt this was particularly useful to provide an overview of the institution's profile, as with this initial review, the amount of information could certainly be overwhelming. As noted in the Recommendations Section, the team found evidence of an actively engaged campus moving forward optimistically and confidently. The team found no areas at the initial stages of development—all were more advanced. The institution's progress toward Educational Effectiveness can best be described as developed in many areas with several emerging areas.

Key Description Terms→	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
↓ Element & Definition				
Learning				
A. Student Learning			X	
B. Expectations are Established				X
C. Assessment Plans are in place		X		
D. Desired Kind & Level of Learning		X		
Teaching/Learning Environment				
A. Curricula, Pedagogy, Co-curriculum Experience			X	
B. Curricular & Co-curricular Process			X	
C. Professional Development Rewards				X
Organizational learning				
A. Indicators of Educational Effectiveness		X	X	
B.Formal Program Review		X		
C. Performance Data, Evidence, and Analyses		X		
D. Culture of Inquiry and Evidence			X	X
E. Communication and Transparency		X	X	