

University of California, Merced
Appendix A: Response to the Commission Action Letter of July 13, 2007

Part 1: Response to Recommendations from the Educational Effectiveness Team Report

The following three essays respond to the three recommendations of EER Visiting Team as endorsed by the Commission in the 2007 Action Letter.

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

From its beginning UC Merced has integrated academic planning with resource allocation to build essential academic and student support services across the campus ([2002](#) [416] and [2009](#) [375] Long Range Development Plans). At our opening in 2005 UC Merced focused on providing a small number of interdisciplinary majors and graduate degrees that were able to combine the broader expertise of the founding faculty. It quickly became apparent, however, that students did not understand or gravitate to these broader interdisciplinary groupings with names such as Social, Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Integrative Biology¹, Earth Systems Science, and Atomic and Molecular Science and Engineering. The students' interests were in discipline-based programs with the names that were identifiable, i.e., Psychology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology², and Physics and Chemistry.

Subsequent to our first year, as the size of the faculty grew and built depth in the foundational disciplines, there was an active response by the faculty to recast the broader interdisciplinary majors into better defined majors that were able to attract and retain student enrollment that was so critical to our survival. The [eighteen majors](#) [462] that have been approved through the academic senate and brought on line over the past three years were specifically developed because they enroll approximately 80% of the undergraduate students on the other general UC campuses. Although these majors are more typical of disciplinary majors that are usually housed in academic departments, we continue to retain centralized administrative efficiencies through the three schools. Given the budget austerity that is likely to impact higher education in California for the immediate future the current majors will provide the breadth of academic programs we need to grow student enrollment in the years to come. Going forward [417], the plan for ladder faculty additions is to continue to add depth in these majors while proceeding slowly with the addition of any new major offerings until the State's budgetary problems have been rectified and the UC budget provides the opportunity for a return to a funding model that accounts for enrollment growth that formed the basis for UC Merced's budget.

¹ An emphasis track within the Biological Sciences major.

² The emphasis track within the Biological Sciences major formerly titled Integrative Biology.

The need to continue to grow the foundational areas of the Humanities, Social and Natural Sciences will continue well into the future as the undergraduate student body continues to expand. However, there is also a broader responsibility on the shoulders of UC Merced to impact the most critical needs of the San Joaquin Valley, including health, environmental sustainability, poverty, educational attainment and cultural diversity through the development of professional programs that can have a direct impact on peoples' lives. Over the past two years the faculty has worked to cast a vision of what UC Merced needs to become as it grows into a mature campus that has a significant impact on the most critical issues of the region. The [Strategic Academic Vision](#) [3] portrays this vision for the campus and provides the program planning guide for the development of actionable plans that will define priorities that will drive resource allocation as the years unfold. We are also hopeful that this vision will help to drive private fund raising from the beginning of the campus that can support the achievement of this vision despite dwindling public support for higher education.

2) Continue to embrace and enact UC Merced's mission as a student-centered research university serving the students of the state and the needs of the Central Valley.

As expressed in [UC Merced's mission](#) [2], our core research and teaching roles are intimately intertwined at both the undergraduate and graduate educational levels. The expectation that UC Merced will achieve excellence in the university's tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, benefiting society through discovering and transmitting new knowledge and functioning as an active repository of organized knowledge, is being met through the partnership of our faculty and students. As a key tenet in carrying out this mission, UC Merced will build on the rich diversity of its academic community to enhance its contributions to society ([Strategic Academic Vision](#) [3], p.38 "Inclusive Excellence").

As a small, exceedingly diverse research university UC Merced has been able to impact the lives of its students in ways that are not easily accomplished in larger institutions. The advantages of attendance at a small research university are many, as demonstrated in results of the [2006 UCUES survey data](#) [268]. For instance, the summary of [results](#) [464] shows that "UC Merced freshmen also reported greater use of higher-order learning strategies like incorporating ideas from different courses, evaluating methods and conclusions, and explaining and solving problems." They [reported](#) [465] less use of lower order learning strategies like recalling facts, terms, or concepts than their peers at other UC campuses. Similarly, the analysis of [2008 UCUES results](#) [42, p.5] also relate directly to our campus mission as a student centered research university. In this regard, students report that their interactions with faculty outside of the classroom are significantly higher on average than at our sister UC campuses (at UC Merced "49% worked with a faculty member on a campus activity other than coursework"), and student involvement with faculty research and scholarship is two times higher at UC Merced than the average at other UC campus (at UC Merced "68% assisted faculty with research or a creative activity"). Also, UCM students report a significantly higher intent to continue their education in graduate or professional schools than any of the other UC campuses. These results from 2006 and 2008 provide evidence of the faculty's involvement with the students to bring them into the community of scholars as partners in the process of knowledge discovery that is so critical to the ability of students to adapt to rapidly changing environments throughout their lives.

As publicly communicated in the recently completed [Strategic Academic Vision](#) [3], UC Merced celebrates its location in the San Joaquin Valley, relishing the rich cultural diversity of the region that is also manifested in our student body. As a campus with no [majority population](#) of students [42, p.1], UC Merced creates an international presence by capitalizing on the region's and the students' connections to the larger global society. UC Merced recognizes that research that begins with the natural laboratory at home can extend what is known in the state, nation and world ([Strategic Academic Vision](#), [3], p.16).

UC Merced's educational experiences are designed to prepare people for the 21st century workplace, for advanced education, life-long learning and for a leadership role in their communities. UC Merced graduates will be exceptionally well prepared to navigate and succeed in a complex world, an outcome that we will begin to examine as more UC Merced students enter the workforce. The principles guiding the design and implementation of our academic programs are envisioned within a continuum that ranges from preparatory and advanced curricula in general education and in the majors, through a variety of educational activities inside and outside the classroom.

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

UC Merced through its senior administrative officers and its representatives on the UC Academic Senate has made continuous efforts to inform and interact with the Office of the President and President Yudof regarding the ongoing budgetary issues that impact the campus's ability to continue to grow in accord with the enrollment plans that have been submitted and agreed upon.

- a. Senior administrative officers of the campus meet at least annually with the President, his top financial aids and selected Regents to discuss the budgetary and other issues that are unique to UC Merced [466, 467, 468]. In addition, the Senior Vice President and his staff have visited UC Merced to discuss operational and capital budget plans for the development of the campus on 13 different occasions since the Candidacy Review. These meetings have taken on special importance in the wake of the State's economic downturn that led to the elimination of enrollment growth support for the University of California and a reduction in the State support for UC. The confluence of this current economic situation with the 2008 through 2010 phased withdrawal of \$14M in State supplemental support [355] to the campus has produced a situation that required the system to provide dollars for UC Merced's enrollment growth [469, highlighted text]. In the 2008-09 academic year funds from our sister campuses offset the loss of the first \$4M of the State supplement [355, Base Budget & assumption C]. In 2009-10 a second component of enrollment funding has been promised by the Office of the President from system-wide savings associated with the down sizing of the system office in Oakland [355]. This will offset the loss of the \$5M of the State supplemental funding in the current fiscal year. Backfilling of the reduced State supplemental support has provided

the campus with the ability to continue basic services to students and faculty but not allowed for growth in these services. It has not, however, repaired the inherent problem built into the UC Merced funding model devised prior to opening of the campus. In a letter to the President of UC [470, 471] the System-wide senate provided data indicating that the initial funding model was flawed and that a revision in this model was required to allow UC Merced to continue to build UC quality in light of the substantial operational changes that had occurred since the opening of the last three UC campuses four decades ago.

- b.* Despite the initial problems posed by the flawed UCM funding model, UCOP has helped the campus stabilize its operational budget during the trying financial times that California has experienced since before campus opening and into the current financial debacle. Help from the system has included an ongoing line of credit of up to \$5M/year for eight years [355]. Although this source was not tapped during the first two years of operation, in the past two years we have drawn down these funds to close the budgetary gap. In addition, in the 2008-09 fiscal year OP brokered a deal with our sister campus to cover enrollment growth dollars for UCM [469, highlighted text]. In 2009-10 the system-wide office has promised to provide enrollment growth dollars to replace the lost State supplemental funding. Although there is an indication that these funds will also be provided in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, specifics about replacement dollars for the loss of the final State supplement have yet to be provided. Finally, it should be noted that UCM was also held harmless from the system-wide midyear cut and the campus's share of the cut, approximately \$330,000, was provided from the Office of the President [472].

Part II: Response to Issues Raised by the Commission

The following three essays respond to the three issues raised by the Commission. As directed in the Commission Action Letter, they are addressed in detail and supported by data as possible.

1) Recruitment, enrollment, and retention.

With the hiring of Kevin Browne as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management the Office of Enrollment Management (OEM) was established in July 2007. At UC Merced, Enrollment Management is responsible not only for setting and meeting recruitment goals, but also for enrolling a diverse class that has the academic talent and ability to take full advantage of a premier public research university [473].

OEM is comprised of four offices: Admissions, Registration, Financial Aid and Scholarships and the Students First Center. It takes the lead in marketing, student recruitment, retention strategies and financial aid modeling, as well as working with the campus community. OEM strives to implement Senate (faculty) policy related to these areas as it is developed both system-wide and on the Merced campus.

UC Merced has been part of a University of California system-wide effort to develop a [UC Long Range Enrollment Planning](#) process [474]. UC Merced's Long Range Enrollment Plan [417,

p.2-3], along with the other eight UC undergraduate campuses, has allowed us to set enrollment targets through 2020.

In addition, the UC Merced campus enrollment management efforts have led to the following actions being taken since the last WASC visit.

1. Development of a Regional Admission Model that has three full time staff in key geo-market regions (Los Angeles, San Francisco and the Southern San Joaquin Valley). This distribution of staff corresponds to the three main areas of California where our first-year students attended high school with about one-third of our total enrollment from each area.
2. A new family of [admissions publications](#) [289] which include:
 - a. [Campus Visitor Guide](#) [475]
 - b. [Freshman View Book](#) [476]
 - c. [Transfer View Book](#) [477]
 - d. “[Why UC, Why UC Merced?](#)” booklet [478]
 - e. [International Admissions brochure](#) [479]
 - f. [New general outreach brochure](#) [480]
3. Outreach strategies targeting international and out-of-state markets.
4. Creation of new positions within the Admissions Office, including an Associate Director responsible for outreach to high schools and community colleges and an Assistant Director who manages regional and transfer initiatives.
5. An Enrollment Management Communication plan [481] embedded in the Enrollment Management plan (see 8 below), which has formalized our on-going dynamic communication strategy comprising print material, email, video, and e-social relationships (FaceBook, MySpace, Twitter, etc).
6. A new financial aid communications strategy [482] to help prospective students and their parents, especially first generation parents, understand the financial aid process and how to make college affordable.
7. A campus wide Enrollment Management Council is being proposed to bring together academic, administrative, and student service units to refine and monitor targets and long-range outreach efforts. This council should be charged during summer 2009 (see below).
8. Outreach to California community colleges remains a critical component of our enrollment management efforts. Prior to 2005, outreach efforts were primarily focused on community colleges in our region. In the last few years, we have expanded our efforts statewide. UC Merced has Transfer Admissions Agreements (TAGs) in place

with 109 community colleges and created the University of California's very first International TAG program with partner California community colleges.

In Fall 2008, UC Merced enrolled 1,111 new undergraduates exceeding the target of 1,024. We expect to meet or exceed our Fall 2009 target, which was adjusted slightly by the Office of the President in response to the current State budget challenge.

As represented by data from the University of the California Office of the President, other major enrollment successes from Fall 2005 to Fall 2008 are:

- A 29% increase in freshman applications to UCM from 8,053 to 10,386;
- A 44% increase in freshman UCM-only applications from 215 to 310;
- An increase in SIR/Admit yield for regular California applications from 9.26% to 11.67%;
- An increase in SIR/Admit yield for freshman International applications from 6.25% to 13.10%;
- An increase in California resident and UCM-only freshman applications as share of the UC total California resident applications from 12.01% to 12.61%.

As part of the [UC Long Range Enrollment Planning](#) process [474], UC Merced has taken advantage of system-wide enrollment planning to develop a campus enrollment planning process. One of the outcomes will be to link enrollment, retention and graduation targets with budget and space planning. The new Enrollment Management Council will be charged to coordinate these critical components.

From the opening of our campus, retention of students has been a priority for the faculty as well as for the staff in Student Affairs. UC Merced is the only campus in the University of California that issues mid-semester grades in lower division courses (See Appendix 2.4.2). This has allowed us to provide both an early warning system and a support system for our new students. The "safety-net" for students who are at risk of failing a course is dependent upon this midterm-grade-notification system. Intervention strategies include:

- Mandatory Student Success Workshops. These sessions bring struggling freshmen into small groups to review and strategize regarding campus resources, and they construct personalized "success plans." See supporting materials in the Required Essays Appendix 2.4.2.
- USTU 010 course [210]. This course was piloted in the fall of 2008, exclusively for undeclared freshmen who placed below college-level writing. Their completion rate for their first semester with a standing safe from academic dismissal exceeded that of their peers of the same demographic by 15%. The spring offering of this course was open only to freshmen who appealed an academic dismissal. Future tracking and assessment will shape the development of this course.

- Tutoring, Workshops. Optional activities free of charge are offered every week, with approximately 100 hours of drop-in tutorial sessions led by trained, high-achieving peers. Currently, approximately 1/3 of all students utilize tutorials occasionally or regularly.
- Informational materials available at learning.ucmerced.edu [302]. Self-assessment tools, the tutorial schedule, the workshop schedule, and information on how to locate one's academic advisor are available.
- Individual intervention. Academic advisors are available five days a week, and they meet one on one with students to assist with advice on useful resources on campus, as well as academic course planning. The Coordinator of Learning Assistance also meets one on one with students for consultations on their learning and test-taking needs or concerns, as well as for referral to more specialized resources.

While the future of enrollment growth at UC Merced looks promising [417, p.2-3], there are concerns that we have noted as part of our ongoing evaluation of enrollment trends. Some notable concerns include:

- Current and near-term fiscal uncertainties make the cost of a UC education a challenge for many families in California.
- Space at UC Merced will soon be fully utilized, creating a critical need for additional classrooms, labs, faculty offices/labs, student spaces, students service offices, and student housing to accommodate planned enrollment growth
- UC Merced retention rates, while comparable or even above average in a national context, are low compared to the other UC campuses. It is a major area of attention for the UC Merced community. However, as noted in the CPR Report Conclusion, our first-generation students have triple the retention rate of the national cohort of first-generation students, 60% versus 20%.

2) Funding and growth.

As stated in the Commission Action Letter of July 13, 2007 [483], UC Merced has modified its original growth projection that was predicated solely on a budgetary need model rather than the reality of meeting the enrollment numbers on a campus that was remotely located in the San Joaquin Valley. Nonetheless, during the first four years, UC Merced's enrollment growth has paralleled the patterns for UC, Irvine, Santa Cruz and San Diego during their first four years of operation in the 1960s [484]. Although there is no doubt that the lowered enrollment projections have slowed and will continue to slow growth of the operational budget of the campus, there are a number of critical factors that have been responsible for a slightly lower trajectory in our enrollment growth.

The most significant reason for altering the growth trajectory for the campus is the slower than expected growth of the faculty. This has many root causes including the ongoing operational budget uncertainties that continue to plague UCM but is especially contingent on the accelerating start-up costs associated with establishing UC quality research programs expected of the campus.

In addition, the delay of capital funding for our next two academic buildings and the competing needs of our sister campuses for limited State capital funding for future campus development will continue to impact the growth of facilities, faculty and the student body in the decade to come. Although the most immediate impact to date has been on faculty and core research facilities needed in a modern research university, we are already beginning to feel the pinch on our classroom and instructional laboratories for the sciences and engineering.

Despite the trying and seemingly overwhelming difficulties that UC Merced has had to overcome, over the last four years the University has made substantial, incremental progress across all fronts by focusing its limited resources on development of the academic core of the university to build the breadth needed to attract students to UC Merced and to build the depth and excellence needed to retain students by providing a strong foundation for their success. (See Appendix B: Student Success Essay and our responses to Standard Two of the CPR Report.) In many cases this has meant that new faculty recruitments focus on modelers who use computer simulation rather than experimentalists who need wet or dry lab facilities.

3) Moving ahead with assessment and educational effectiveness.

Preparation for our Capacity and Preparatory Review has provided faculty with the opportunity to reexamine and revise educational goals and outcomes originally defined by founding faculty. Led by [Faculty Accreditation Organizers](#) [FAOs; 31] one per academic program, this effort has produced revised program learning outcomes and multi-year assessment plans for each program³ [27, 28, 23; CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.4, 4.6] and, thus, the foundation to engage in systematic improvement of student learning that reflects the expertise and ambitions of the current faculty across the range of degree programs. Engagement in annual assessment is now underway including explicit plans for using the results for curriculum planning and revision. As an inherent part of this process, faculty have articulated course learning outcomes and begun to examine more carefully the alignment of course, program, and institutional outcomes (See CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.4; Appendix 2.2.1). These efforts will be continue as faculty engage with annual learning results and conduct Program Review, the latter expecting annual assessment and data collection [29, 30]. Support for this work, in the form of workshops, personal consultations, mini-grant opportunities, and web-based resources, has been provided by the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence (see Appendix 2.9.2).

As infrastructure to engage faculty, the FAO-based system is expected to persist with the transition of faculty *accreditation* organizers to faculty *assessment* organizers and the building out of institutional infrastructure to support FAO and programmatic assessment efforts at the level of individual Schools. Policies that require proposals for new courses and programs to include learning outcomes institutionalize these foundational practices (See CFRS 2.3 and 4.4 as

³ All undergraduate programs, excepting two minors each with fewer than five students, have program learning outcome (PLOs); all but four (two majors and two minors) have drafted multi-year assessment plans. At the graduate level, the Environmental Systems program has developed PLOs and a multi-year assessment plan. PLOs are in development for the eight graduate emphasis areas within the second approved graduate program, the Interim Individual Graduate Program (IIGP); full assessment plans will be developed as IIGP emphasis areas prepare for CCGA and WASC substantive change approval.

well as 1.2, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, and 2.7). Similarly, program review policies at the undergraduate and graduate level will ensure regular and continued engagement by requiring internal and external reviewers to carefully examine programmatic assessment practices and results, analysis of retention and completion rates, and efforts to “close-the-loop” based on assessment results (See CFRs 1.2, 2.7, and 4.6). This work will continue to refine institutional alignment of learning objectives and outcomes.

In working with faculty, the CRTE has stressed the close relationship between academic research and the scholarship of teaching and learning. In doing so, we are helping to build a culture of evidence that faculty can readily understand in the context of traditional academic pursuits. Moreover, with learning outcomes as the operational foundation of the FAO system, in the future we can integrate results of curricular assessment with program reviews, including those that attend to co-curricular functions (See CFRs 1.2, 1.5, 2.4, 2.5, and 4.6). This unified effort will ultimately evolve into an institutional system for assessment, specifically aligned with the eight guiding principles for general education (CFR 1.2). With the establishment of a University Assessment Committee, we anticipate moving forward with infrastructure and fundamental activities for institutional assessment before the 2010 Educational Effectiveness Review.

Faculty promotion, tenure, and merit

Because the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) serves as the review body that ensures quality control in personnel actions, a discussion of how UCM is applying UC criteria for promotion, tenure, and merit begins with the actual functioning of CAP (see CFRs 1.2, 1.3, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4, 4.6 and CAP [Annual Reports](#) [411]). UC Merced’s CAP draws most of its [membership](#) [48] from other UC campuses in order for UCM to be able to learn from the experience of established campuses. CAP follows the [APM’s guidelines](#) [247], taking seriously the review of teaching as a fundamental criterion for advancement, appointment, and tenure [485]. CAP’s job is to review files to ensure that the university’s criteria are met and that the process of review follows the standards. In any case where information is insufficient to assure CAP that appropriate and sufficient review has taken place prior to CAP’s review, then CAP returns the file for additional information. When CAP is satisfied that the information is sufficient, it independently reviews that information.

The stringency of review varies to some degree depending on the personnel action: appointment, step advancement, mid-career review of assistant professors, promotion with tenure, and promotion. No matter the degree of review, CAP follows a set procedure. It begins with an agenda and a number of files, distributed at least a week in advance of the meeting. The agenda lists first, second, and (usually) third analysts who will present the file to the committee. The agenda also lists any recusals. All members are expected to read all files and be prepared to comment. The presentations and discussions always substantially address teaching, considering both quantitative and qualitative evidence. After the designated leaders present a case, the committee discusses the case until consensus emerges. Whether or not consensus emerges, the committee votes. If the vote is radically split, the committee usually asks itself to reconsider and to return to the case the following week. Then, if consensus still cannot be reached, CAP reports a split vote. CAP transmits pertinent information in two ways: (1) a report of the vote with reasons for it and any suggestions that the administration should convey to a candidate, and (2)

administrative memoranda recommending improvements in procedures at lower levels. Sometimes these administrative memos are directed to a particular case; sometimes to general procedures. In particular, CAP has opined on the importance of a rigorous analysis of teaching in every case.

In every appointment case, a candidate is asked to submit a statement on teaching and any pertinent evidence of teaching effectiveness. CAP also sees the letters of recommendation solicited by the schools. In each case, referees are asked to comment on teaching ability insofar as they are able. In the case of junior appointments (especially in the sciences), CAP often sees no significant teaching record, though it does ask for indirect evidence of promise in teaching, as can be seen in public presentations (CAP recognizes that such evidence is appropriate only in junior appointment cases, in which there is insufficient teaching experience to provide stronger evidence). In advanced appointments, CAP expects substantial evidence of teaching effectiveness. This usually includes student ratings and student narrative comments on teaching. Other forms of evidence vary, often with the program from which the candidate comes. CAP has more than once requested additional information when, for example, it appears that a file contains merely a selection of student ratings or when data are mediated by the candidate (CAP likes to see institutional analyses of student ratings and, if available, raw data). CAP denies appointment to advanced candidates who cannot supply evidence of high-quality teaching.

Major reviews, i.e. mid-career assessment, tenure, advancement in rank, and advancement from Professor step V to step VI receive the same rigorous review as appointments, complete with outside letters. Step advancements are treated with a degree less rigor than other actions. CAP designates two, rather than three lead reviewers, and does not require on-campus or off-campus letters to support a case. Some UC campuses do not involve CAP in step advancements; UC Merced does, in part to help UCM to develop consistency in personnel processes. CAP review at every stage gives feedback not only to the candidate, but also to deans and faculty personnel committees. While step advancements are relatively low-stakes reviews, they are especially important to beginning assistant professors, as these files occasionally show need of improvement in teaching, and CAP often gives directions to deans to support faculty development in such cases.

In the fourth year, assistant professors undergo a “mid-career” review that gives substantial feedback on a candidate’s progress toward tenure. This review is much like a promotion review, and, while it is possible for a candidate not to be reappointed after an MCA, this is generally a formative assessment. CAP insists on candor and completeness in such reviews to ensure that candidates know what they must still do to earn promotion with tenure. A strong MCA will put a candidate on the path for tenure review in two years; candidates may choose to take an additional year. MCA reports often reflect on teaching, encouraging deans and candidates to take action for improvement as necessary.

CAP does not rely exclusively on cases and administrative memoranda to communicate with administration and faculty. Twice yearly, CAP hosts on-campus forums with faculty at large, with those faculty who are serving as Academic Personnel Chairs for their faculty groups (APM chairs are analogous to Department Chairs at most universities), and for administrators. In these sessions, CAP explains the criteria and the process of evaluation and answers questions.

CAP's process is making positive change in the way faculty and deans review teaching. All Academic Personnel Chairs are bolstering their analyses of teaching in personnel cases, and schools are considering formalizing ways to support review of teaching.