

Interim Report

Name of Institution: University of California, Merced

Person Submitting the Report: Laura Martin, ALO

Report Submission Date: November 1, 2021

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Report organization: UC Merced’s Interim Report consists of responses to the required topics (Sections I-VI in the Table of Contents above), together with a set of evidentiary appendices. Appendices are referenced by number throughout the report narrative. Associated hyperlinks will take readers to the documents in the [WSCUC Box folder](#). A list of appendices is provided in Section VII of the report. Additionally, hyperlinks throughout the report, provide relevant information available only online as well as supplemental information, context, or easy access to a relevant resource (e.g., our Commission Action Letter).

I. Statement on Report Preparation

Briefly describe in narrative form the process of report preparation, providing the names and titles of those involved. Because of the focused nature of an Interim Report, the widespread and comprehensive involvement of all institutional constituencies is not normally required. Faculty, administrative staff, and others should be involved as appropriate to the topics being addressed in the preparation of the report. Campus constituencies, such as faculty leadership and, where appropriate, the governing board, should review the report before it is submitted to WSCUC, and such reviews should be indicated in this statement.

This Interim Report was prepared by the Interim Report Committee Subcommittee of the [Periodic Review Oversight Committee](#) (PROC) – a joint committee of the Senate and administration, whose responsibilities include advising campus leadership on how best to meet accreditation expectations. A high level, institutional committee, PROC is co-chaired by the Associate Provost¹ and Vice Chair of the Academic Senate and composed of senior operational and academic administrative leadership (Vice Chancellors and Vice Provosts) or their designees and representatives from six Senate committees addressing resource allocation, research, undergraduate education, graduate education, faculty welfare, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. The committee broadly is representative of the campus and, as such, is well positioned to oversee development of the Interim Report on the campus's behalf.

Established in spring 2019, the Interim Report Subcommittee was charged with facilitating preparation for and preparation of the Interim Report under PROC's guidance. The subcommittee is composed of the following PROC representatives (or designees): Interim Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education, Chris Kello; Senior Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, James Zimmerman;² Executive Director, Space Strategies and Real Estate, Margaret Saunders;³ Director, Academic Planning and Assessment Support Center, and PROC Analyst, Kerry Clifford; and Assistant Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer, Laura Martin.

In the fall of 2019, following PROC's guidance, the subcommittee developed a strategy for preparing the Interim Report (Appendix 1: Interim Report Planning Update PROC 1.16.2020 Final). Approved by PROC at its January 21, 2020 meeting, the strategy provided, for each issue identified by the WSCUC Commission, a high-level outline of the proposed content of the response, associated evidence, a timeline for ensuring requisite work was completed, and a lead individual. The underlying objective was to draft the Interim Report in summer 2021 with all materials to support that work in place by the conclusion of spring 2021 semester. Between January 2020 and summer 2021, subcommittee members worked to ensure progress was made on required elements of the Interim Report, updating PROC on progress at the start and conclusion of each semester.

In keeping with PROC's timeline, the Interim Report was drafted over the summer and early fall semester of 2021. It was reviewed and discussed by PROC at its October 28 meeting. Final drafts were reviewed by Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Gregg Camfield.

¹ As of fall 2021, the Associate Provost is serving as the Interim Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer. As such, the Assistant Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost for Academic Planning and Institutional Assessment is co-chair.

² Designee for the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, Sarah Frey, a PROC member

³ Replaced the Vice Chancellor for Physical Operations, Planning and Development, and Chief Operating Officer, Mike McLeod, who served on the committee until his retirement at the conclusion of July 2021.

II. List of Topics Addressed in this Report

Please list the topics identified in the action letter(s) and that are addressed in this report.

The following four topics were identified by the WSCUC Commission, in [its action letter](#) dated July 20, 2018, as the subject of this Interim Report:

- A self-reflective review of the outcomes of the 2020 Project
- A description of the mechanisms established for undergraduate students to access appropriate tutoring services
- A copy of the next strategic plan for UC Merced
- An update on the results of the fiscal conversations between UC Merced and the UC Office of the President, including any successor MOUs, with an eye to how these affect the growth plans and fiscal sustainability of the campus

III. Institutional Context

Very briefly describe the institution's background; mission; history, including the founding date and year first accredited; geographic locations; and other pertinent information so that the Interim Report Committee can understand the issues discussed in the report in context.

UC Merced officially opened on September 5, 2005 as the 10th campus of the University of California system. Sharing in the system's mission of excellence in teaching, research, and service, UC Merced was located in the historically underserved San Joaquin Valley to uplift the educational, health, societal, environmental, and economic outcomes, and to build civic capacity in this traditionally underserved region, the state of California, and beyond.

UC Merced was first accredited in June 2011 for seven years, the maximum period possible. This was followed in 2018 by the campus's first review for reaffirmation of accreditation, which resulted in a 10-year period of reaffirmation. Now in its 17th academic year, UC Merced [enrolls](#) 8,321 undergraduates and 772 graduate students in undergraduate and graduate degree programs spanning three schools: the [School of Engineering](#), the [School of Natural Sciences](#), and the [School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts](#). Across these three Schools and 20 departments, 473 tenured/tenure track and lecturing [faculty](#)⁴ support 25 [undergraduate majors](#), 28 [standalone minors](#), 18 [master's degree programs](#), including one professional degree program, a Master of Management, and 17 [doctoral programs](#). Through University Extension, the campus offers two non-degree certificate programs - onsite and distance education instances of the Multiple Subject and Single Subject Preliminary Credential Preparation Program, publicly known as the [Teacher Preparation Program](#) (TPP).⁵ The online TPP is the only active distance education program offered by the campus.

For all degree programs, instruction takes place on UC Merced's campus. UC Merced is authorized by WSCUC to deliver educational programs at one additional location, the UC Merced Downtown Campus Center (DCC), an administrative building⁶ located centrally in the City of Merced approximately seven miles from campus. The DCC's two classrooms are used for instruction by University Extension. Until this fall (2021), this included the onsite TPP. With campus expansion, the onsite TPP is now being offered on campus.

Consistent with our purpose to serve the historically underserved, as of fall 2021, 71% of UC Merced undergraduates are [first generation](#),⁷ 61% are [Pell Grant eligible](#), and 85% are from [groups historically underrepresented in higher education](#). Slightly more than one quarter (27%) of our [undergraduates are from the San Joaquin Valley](#). At the graduate level, 34% of students are from groups historically underrepresented in higher education and, this fall, 48% of incoming students reported being first generation.⁸ Additional information can be found on our [Fast Facts](#) site. Designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution, UC Merced is [by demographic metrics](#) the most diverse campus in the UC system. [Recent accolades](#) highlight our success serving our students and our increasing national and international reputation.

In June 2020, UC Merced took delivery of the final buildings of [the 2020 Project](#), a \$1.3 billion expansion that has nearly doubled the campus's physical plant to accommodate growth to 10,000 students. The 2020 Project, which was delivered in three phases over three years (2018, 2019, and 2020) and includes student housing, classrooms, teaching and research space, student wellness and counseling facilities, and recreational spaces, is the subject of

⁴ Spring 2021 headcounts. About 65% are tenured/tenure track Senate faculty.

⁵ Two additional non-degree certificate programs – onsite and distance versions of the Certificate in Child Development and Care - have been approved by WSCUC but are currently inactive.

⁶ Principally an administrative building, the DCC has two classrooms developed as part of the campus's goal to foster programmatic opportunities and partnerships with City of Merced.

⁷ Neither parent has graduated from a four-year university or college.

⁸ UC Merced began tracking first generation status in all 2019. These data are not publicly available in a dashboard.

section IV. A. of this report. Over the coming decade, UC Merced has set its sights on expanding the reach and impact of its mission as guided by the campus's new 10-year strategic plan – the subject of section IV.C of this report. And, as described in section IV.D of this report, a new MOU with the UC Office of the President provides us with the financial resources to do so.

IV. Response to Issues Identified by the Commission

This main section of the report should address the issues identified by the Commission in its action letter(s) as topics for the Interim Report. Each topic identified in the Commission's action letter should be addressed. The team report (on which the action letter is based) may provide additional context and background for the institution's understanding of issues.

Provide a full description of each issue, the actions taken by the institution that address this issue, and an analysis of the effectiveness of these actions to date. Have the actions taken been successful in resolving the problem? What is the evidence supporting progress? What further problems or issues remain? How will these concerns be addressed, by whom, and under what timetable? How will the institution know when the issue has been fully addressed? Please include a timeline that outlines planned additional steps with milestones and expected outcomes. Responses should be no longer than five pages per issue.

A. ISSUE 1: SELF-REFLECTIVE REVIEW OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE 2020 PROJECT

In its 2017 [Institutional Report for Reaffirmation of WSCUC Accreditation](#), UC Merced outlined several major integrative planning efforts that were underway to support continued growth of our young campus. Central to these efforts was the [2020 Project](#), a \$1.3 billion expansion of UC Merced's physical plant to provide new capacity for instruction, research, and student life. As the project's completion was still over two years out at the time of the accreditation visit, in its July 20, 2018 [letter reaffirming accreditation](#) (p.1), the Commission asked UC Merced to provide in its Interim Report *a self-reflective review of the outcomes of the 2020 Project*. This reflection is provided as Appendix 2: 2020 Project Reflections & Lessons Learned. Below, we provide a brief overview of the 2020 project together with information contextualizing the reflection.

Initiated in 2012, the [2020 Project](#) was developed to address existing, acute space needs and to accommodate the campus's growth to 10,000 students.⁹ Structured as a public-private partnership (P3; the first of its kind in the UC), the \$1.3 billion project added a million gross square feet to the campus in the form of 13 buildings, upgrades to the central plant, numerous outdoor recreation facilities, and a central loading dock. In doing so, the project nearly doubled the campus's physical footprint, [providing new capacity](#) for instruction, research, and student life, including residence halls, athletic fields, and a pool and a conference center to serve the campus and community. As part of the P3 structure, the campus's private development partner, Plenary Properties Merced, is responsible for operating and maintaining the project's buildings for 35 years. The project's intended outcomes were outlined from the start in the form of the [Merced 2020 Project Objectives](#).

Project 2020 was completed over three years with 20% of the total project delivered in each of the summers of 2018 and 2019 and the remaining 60% (substantial completion) in the summer of 2020. [The first delivery brought](#) student housing, additional classrooms, a new multipurpose dining facility, and a competition soccer field; [the second](#), wet and computational laboratory buildings with faculty offices; and [the third](#), an additional wet-lab building with faculty offices and classrooms, a new student wellness and counseling center, additional student housing, a conference center, a student enrollment center, a swimming pool, and outdoor recreation courts.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the campus's experience with these new facilities has been limited. The final delivery, substantial completion, became available while campus operations were remote, and the second delivery had only been in use about one- and one-half semesters before the campus shifted to remote operations

⁹ At the time the project was conceived, the campus enrolled 6,000 students.

in March 2020. This fall semester (2021) marks the return to fully onsite operations for students, faculty, and staff after 17 months of remote learning and work. Thus, as a campus, we are early in the process of learning how well this new space serves stakeholder needs six years after the project's space program was developed.

Given this context, Appendix 2: 2020 Project Reflections & Lessons Learned provides an analysis of the process by which the project was developed and completed, identifying attributes essential to both the project's success together with recommendations and considerations for future capital projects. In general, the reflection concludes that the project was a success; project objectives were achieved, and the project was delivered on time, on budget, and with fewer than 150 change orders, a very modest number for a capital development effort of this scope and size. At the same time, the reflection offers important observations and recommendations to inform future projects of this type.

The reflection was developed through a multi-stage process. First, key leaders representing the project's partners were invited to comment on the project's planning and delivery process, specifically what worked and did not work, the resulting impact on the project, and any advice to the campus regarding similar future projects (Appendix 3: 2020 Reflection Request). These comments were then synthesized into a reflection by the Executive Director of Real Estate and Space Planning. Respondents were then invited to review the document prior to its review by the Interim Report Subcommittee of PROC, and then PROC itself. Feedback from stakeholders was integrated as the document was finalized. Guidance generated through this analysis is already informing the campus's next capital project.

B. ISSUE 2: UNDERGRADUATE ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE TUTORING SERVICES

In its July 20, 2018 [letter](#) reaffirming accreditation (p.2), the Commission commended UC Merced for its “new and innovative academic support and student services that address the needs of a growing, diverse student body” and “its all-hands approach to providing opportunities to ensure student success despite less access to auxiliary funding sources that are typically available to many larger or mature institutions.” While these findings were strongly positive, the [accreditation team](#) (p. 37) also noted that the numerous tutoring services offered by the campus often overlap and that students are not provided guidance on how to identify the most appropriate program for their specific needs. In turn, the Commission recommended that UC Merced *improve and simplify mechanisms for undergraduate students to easily access appropriate tutoring services and provide a description of how we did so.*

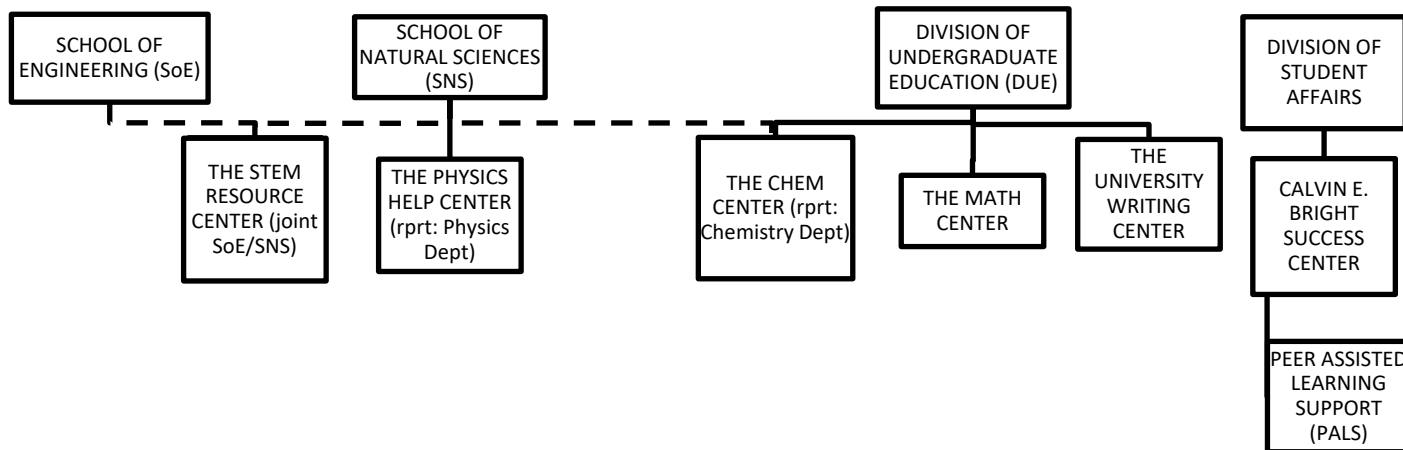
Below, we describe the progress we have made and outline plans to continue to strengthen and monitor student access to tutoring services as well as to ensure consistency in the quality of those supports. We do this in five sections - *organizational restructuring, unified communications, tutor development, next steps, and a conclusion* – each of which addresses a component of the work we have done and will continue to refine and improve.

Organizational Restructuring

The organizational structure of tutoring at the time of the accreditation visit in 2018 is provided in Figure 1. As outlined, tutoring services were variously offered by the Schools of Engineering (SoE) and Natural Sciences (SNS), the Division of Undergraduate Education (DUE), and the Division of Student Affairs (DSA), a situation which reflected the organic development of efforts to support our students as the campus grew and matured. For example, the programs in SNS were developed by faculty in response to perceived need and initiated with National Science Foundation funding or departmental support. Likewise, as the School of Engineering grew, a need for undergraduate student tutoring was identified and SoE, together with SNS, developed and resourced a STEM Resource Center that would function primarily as a tutoring center for the pre-Engineering courses offered by SNS and the Engineering courses offered by SoE. And, in the Division of Student Affairs, a generous grant from the family of Calvin E. Bright enabled the Bright Success Center to develop the Peer-Assisted Learning Support

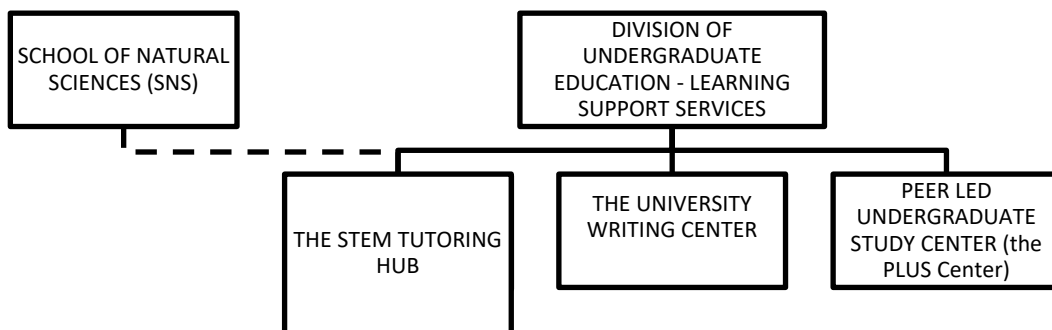
(PALS) program, which provided tutoring support for courses offered by SNS, SoE, and the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts.

Figure 1: Organizational chart of UC Merced tutoring services in 2018. Dashed lines indicate shared oversight, with the STEM Resource Center reporting jointly to the School of Natural Sciences and School of Engineering and the Chem Center reporting to SNS and the Division of Undergraduate Education.



In Fall 2020, the new Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education (VPDUE) and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, in consultation with school leadership, developed a new cohesive organizational structure for all UC Merced undergraduate tutoring services. Beginning this fall semester (2021), the new structure brings all tutoring services together under “Learning Support Services” in the Division of Undergraduate Education (Figure 2). Learning Support Services includes three units, the [STEM Tutoring Hub](#), the [University Writing Center](#), and the [Peer Led Undergraduate Study Center](#) (the PLUS Center), a re-envisioned version of the Peer Assisted Learning Support program. The STEM Tutoring Hub encompasses the previous tutoring offerings of the Math, Chem, and Physics Help Centers, and is itself a service of a re-envisioned STEM Center (Appendix 4: Email Announcing New STEM Center).

Figure 2: Organizational chart of UC Merced Learning Support Services in fall 2021. Mouse over for hyperlinks to websites specific to each resource. Dashed lines indicate shared oversight, with the STEM Tutoring Hub reporting jointly to SNS and the DUE.



As of the start of the Fall 2021 semester, all tutors who were previously affiliated with the Math, Chem, or Physics Help Centers were invited to take positions within the new STEM Tutoring Hub. A single staff member, the [STEM Tutoring Hub Coordinator](#), is now charged with the day-to-day operational logistics for all STEM tutoring. DUE plans to appoint faculty liaisons from each of the major disciplines served by the Hub to consult on the hiring, training, and evaluation of tutors and to facilitate collaboration with course instructors. A faculty liaison for

chemistry is already in place. Faculty liaisons for computer science and physics will be added as early as spring 2022, pending sufficient funds.¹⁰

To accommodate anticipated growth in student demand resulting from the re-envisioning of PALS, the University Writing Center has added a graduate Teaching Assistant (TA) to its staff. Importantly, the graduate TA increases the unit's capacity to supervise the tutor pool. Finally, the Center will be offering writing support for graduate students, a service that is being transitioned to the Writing Center from Graduate Division.

The Peer Led Undergraduate Study Center, the re-envisioned version of PALS, began operating in mid-October. The Center is designed to meet student learning support needs in high enrollment, lower division courses with high DFW¹¹ rates in disciplines not addressed by the STEM Tutoring Hub and the University Writing Center. Consistent with this focus, at the time this report is being submitted, the PLUS Center [offers tutoring](#) in several lower division courses in economics and psychology. The menu of offerings is expected to grow over time. The structure of PLUS Center tutoring reflects campus research that pointed to group study (versus drop-in tutoring) as the most effective approach to supporting student development of the critical thinking and study skills, as well as the information processing, needed to be successful in these high DFW rate courses.

Leadership for Learning Support Services is provided by the Learning Support Leadership Team, which includes the director/coordinator of each learning support center, the senior associate dean for undergraduate education, and the VPDUE. Faculty liaisons will join the leadership team, once appointed. The Learning Support Leadership Team, which began meeting in June 2021, will continue to hold a monthly standing meeting over the next two years to strengthen the alignment and coherence of Learning Support Services. At the conclusion of this period, this governance structure will be evaluated and revised, as needed.

The reorganization of tutoring to form Learning Support Services was undertaken to

1. improve the visibility of and access to services for students;
2. eliminate student confusion about which center to go to for support;
3. strengthen tutor training to make the student experience and outcomes more consistent;
4. increase collaboration with faculty to inform learning support offerings, enable faculty to confidently recommend services to students, and to facilitate a dialogue with faculty about student needs to inform revisions to curriculum and pedagogy in departmental courses;
5. create a common framework for assessing impact of learning support services on student success; and
6. gain operational efficiencies.

To ensure that this new organizational structure facilitates easy and appropriate access to tutoring and contributes to student academic success, the Learning Support Leadership Team, with support from the assessment analyst for the DUE, will annually evaluate the efficacy of this new structure and its support for student learning and success. Findings will be used to iteratively improve tutoring services as well as the approach to assessment. The program's first formal evaluation will take place at the conclusion of the 2021-22 academic year and will be based on an assessment plan to be developed and implemented during the academic year. In addition to formal annual evaluation, over the course of this academic year, quick assessments examining the extent to which we are realizing the six intended outcomes outlined above will be undertaken and real-time adjustments made accordingly. Toward these ends, the following information will be gathered for discussion by the Learning Support Leadership Team:

- tutor center usage
- tutor training feedback survey

¹⁰ Liaisons will be paid a stipend. DUE's ability to pay additional stipends is currently limited due to temporary COVID-driven budget cuts.

¹¹ Grades D, F, or withdrawal (W)

- formal drop-in observation of tutoring sessions
- responses to tutoring-related questions on the annual New Student Survey, compared to the results of prior administrations
- midsemester and end-of-semester grades (students using services vs. not using services)
- feedback survey for faculty about perceived availability and impact of learning support services
- informal feedback on operational efficiency from directors and coordinators in the Learning Support Center

Unified Communications

As outlined above, a core objective of the re-organization of tutoring services was to improve the visibility of and access to services for students. Toward this end, the Learning Support Leadership Team held a retreat on Monday August 9, 2021 to develop a unified and strategic approach to tutoring-related communications to students. A key agreement from this meeting was that, starting this fall, all campus-level, tutoring-related communications would advertise the complete suite of tutoring offerings so that students can see the entirety of what is available to them. This contrasts with previous years in which each center independently advertised its specific offerings, an approach which required students to assemble the picture of available resources themselves.

As of fall 2021, campus-level communications include

- a webpage - <https://success.ucmerced.edu/tutoring> - on UC Merced's [Success Anywhere site](#), a one stop location for undergraduates to access resources that enable them to "be informed," "be engaged," and "be well." The tutoring page, which will be regularly maintained by center coordinators each semester, provides all available tutoring services, including the courses supported and when and where these services are offered.
- an email sent to all students at the start of the semester announcing Tutoring and Learning Support Services (Appendix 5: Tutoring Campus Email to Students). The email takes students to the Tutoring page on the *Success Anywhere* website. Emails will be sent at the start of every semester, with advertising ongoing throughout the semester.
- a "flyer," announcing tutoring resources, placed in all undergraduate courses in *CatCourses*, the campus Learning Management System (Appendix 6: Tutoring Services Flyer). Students see the flyer when logging into their courses. Going forward, the office of Academic and Emerging Technology will place an updated flyer in *CatCourses* by the end of the second week of each semester.

Starting in January 2022, two additional avenues for communicating tutoring opportunities to student will be implemented. Specifically, the Learning Support Center will

- push tutoring services information directly to students' phones and other devices using the [UC Merced Connect application](#), UC Merced's new centralized digital communication platform that enables targeted messages to specific audiences; and
- integrate an overview of Learning Support at UC Merced, including tutoring services, into the New Student Orientation.¹² The presentation will outline UC Merced's philosophy regarding learning support and provide students with the information they need to access these resources.

Finally, Learning Support Services continues to look for ad-hoc opportunities to apprise students of these resources. For example, in Fall 2021, tutors distributed flyers to students while they waited outside during a scheduled fire drill in the second week of classes.

Unified Tutor Development

The re-organization of campus tutoring services also enabled the Learning Support Leadership Team to initiate a unified tutor development program with the goal of ensuring a consistent student experience across tutoring

¹² UC Merced hosts a New Student Orientation in January.

programs. Prior to this, tutor preparation varied among services; some focused more on disciplinary knowledge and others pedagogy.

Grounded in a set of shared principles (Appendix 7: Tutoring Principles), the components of program include

- a common training, during the first three weeks of every Fall semester, for all tutors in the Learning Support Center. The first training was offered this fall (Appendix 8: DUE Learning Support All Tutor Meeting).
- workshops that, over the course of the academic year, provide advanced professional training to tutors.
- some differentiated training to address discipline-specific needs within each Learning Center unit.

Once fully developed, the program will enable tutors to earn digital badges (with levels) that are grounded in clear learning outcomes and the requirement to demonstrate professional skills.

Next Steps

The unification of UC Merced’s Learning Support Services is a work in progress. The outstanding work to be done, and the date by which we intend to complete it, is outlined in the table below.

Action Item	Completion Date
<p>Develop a formal, multi-year assessment plan for Learning Support Services. This plan will support annual assessment of the unit’s objectives to inform both ongoing development of services and the unit’s first periodic program review in seven years’ time, per campus policy. Toward this end, past assessment practices are being inventoried so that valuable approaches can be adopted, and longitudinal data can be used to evaluate the efficacy of this new organization, as possible.</p>	Dec 2021
<p>Build out the tutor development program to provide a comprehensive suite of offerings, with corresponding badges, that enhance tutor expertise and are grounded in skill-based credentials for inclusion on professional resumes. This work will be undertaken by the Learning Support Leadership Team, starting with the development, by December 2021, of a preliminary map linking the professional skills associated with tutoring to badges. Workshops will then be developed. The model will be assessed and fine-tuned each year going forward.</p>	December 2021 (skills map)
<p>Establish faculty liaisons for the major disciplines served by the tutoring centers. As mentioned previously, a faculty liaison already exists for Chemistry. The aim is to recruit liaisons for computer science and physics for spring 2022, budget permitting. Additional liaisons will be recruited as funding is available.</p>	Spring 2022
<p>Continue to clarify staff roles within the context of the Learning Support Center and develop the Learning Support Center culture. With the reorganization, staff directors and coordinators are transitioning to a more collaborative and coordinated operational context from working largely independently. Some staff have also assumed new or expanded responsibilities, which will require some ongoing professional development. New roles and responsibilities should be substantially stabilized by the conclusion of this academic year.</p>	May 2022
<p>Align tutoring budgets to the new organizational framework. As part of this, differences in funding sources and types must be addressed. This work will be led by DUE’s newly hired Chief Administrative Officer.</p>	July 2022
<p>For the next year and one half, continue monthly standing meetings of the Learning Support Leadership Team to strengthen the alignment and coherence of Learning Support Services. At the conclusion of this period, reevaluate the governance structure and revise, as needed.</p>	Summer 2023

Conclusion

The structural reorganization and corresponding change in communication are significant steps toward addressing the concerns about student access to and clarity of our campus tutoring services. We are also realizing improvements in our tutor training through the combined expertise of our various tutor directors/coordinators. We have articulated a common set of principles to describe the methods and philosophy for how we deliver our services, so that students should find common elements in tutoring approaches across our tutoring offerings. Finally, through systematic assessment, we will continue to refine and improve tutoring support services.

C. ISSUE 3: UC MERCED'S NEXT STRATEGIC PLAN

In its [Report of the WSCUC Team for Reaffirmation of Accreditation](#), the review team highlighted the successful integrative planning efforts undertaken by UC Merced in support of campus growth to 2020. At the same time, the team noted that “2020 will soon be here,”¹³ and recommended that UC Merced develop a strategic plan beyond 2020. In its July 20, 2018 [letter reaffirming accreditation](#) (p.1), the Commission asked UC Merced to provide in its Interim Report a copy of the next strategic plan for the campus. Consistent with this recommendation, UC Merced’s 2021-2031 Strategic Plan is provided as Appendix 9: UC Merced Strategic Plan 2021-2031. It is also available on UC Merced’s [strategic plan website](#). Below we provide a brief overview of the plan and outline our progress with implementation, including the timeline and next steps.

Developed over the course of AY 2020-21 at the request of Chancellor Muñoz, and through a [broadly inclusive process](#) conducted under the guidance of the [Strategic Planning Governance Committee](#),¹⁴ UC Merced’ strategic plan unites in one document the campus’s collective aspirations for continued growth and development over the next decade to a research university of 15,000 students and toward designation as a very high research (R1) institution in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. In doing so, the plan builds on [prior and existing planning efforts](#), including an [academic planning initiative](#) that produced in spring 2021 the first ever multi-year academic plans (Appendix 10: Academic Plans) for each of UC Merced’s schools and academic divisions, including the divisions of undergraduate education, graduate education, and the library. A general overview of the strategic plan’s development is available [here](#).

In support of the campus’s aspirations, the strategic plan outlines [three goals](#) that speak to the core of the campus’s mission together with [nine cross-campus, strategic, administrative initiatives](#) that address core aspects of UC Merced’s administrative needs. Each goal is further defined by objectives, and for each objective, measures and targets to enable the campus to track and evaluate progress. The strategic plan also provides in broad strokes [the process](#) by which the campus will achieve those goals. In total, the strategic plan constitutes a framework for institutional-level planning and decision-making that, for the next decade, will focus institutional energies on the development of our teaching, research, and equity, diversity and inclusion ambitions and our essential administrative operations in a coherent, integrated, and transparent manner. Exactly what actions the campus will take to realize these goals, and the sequence in which we will do it, will emerge through the process of implementing the strategic plan over the next decade.

In fall 2021, the campus began to implement the plan. At his October 8, [State of the University address](#) and in an associated campus-wide email (Appendix 11: Email Announcing Strategic Plan 10.8.2021), Chancellor Muñoz formally introduced the strategic plan to the campus. And, at its October 14th meeting, the first of the semester, the Senior Administrators’ Council (SAC) adopted a process for implementing the plan (Appendix 12: SAC Oct 14 Slide Deck). The SAC will guide the strategic plan’s implementation, advising leadership on resource allocation in support of the plan’s objectives and providing accountability on progress. Following guidance from the SAC, permanent cross-divisional planning teams, responsible for realizing specific objectives of the strategic plan, are being established (Appendix 12: SAC Oct 14 Slide Deck). With input from the SAC, these planning teams will chart,

¹³ P. 26, [Report of the WSCUC Team for Reaffirmation of Accreditation](#)

¹⁴ The SPGC provided guidance for, and oversight of, the strategic planning process undertaken in AY 2020-21.

and annually adjust as circumstances warrant, pathways and timelines for achieving the objectives, and associated measures and targets, laid out in the strategic plan.

A Communications and Engagement Team has also been established and begun meeting. The team is charged with developing a campus-level communications and engagement plan to build stakeholder awareness and understanding of this next phase of strategic planning (Appendix 13: Communications and Engagement Team Charge). Finally, the Chancellor has released his funding priorities for our first annual strategic plan-aligned planning and resource allocation process to be completed in spring 2022. It is through this annual priority setting process that leadership will sequence the work required to achieve the strategic plan over time. As noted in the strategic plan itself, and as guided by the SAC, we expect these planning and resource allocation processes to be iteratively refined and improved over time.

In conclusion, UC Merced has elaborated and begun to implement a comprehensive, long range strategic plan to guide the campus's continued development in support of its particular and specific instantiation of the research, education, and service mission of the University of California system. The campus is energized by the potential of the plan to guide and focus our continued growth and development and eager to organize and integrate our planning processes in support of its goals.

D. ISSUE 4: FISCAL UPDATE - CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN UC MERCED AND UC OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

In its [Report of the WSCUC Team for Reaffirmation of Accreditation](#), the review team encouraged the campus to pursue a third memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the UC Office of the President. Its reasons included the campus's dependency on revenues generated by auxiliary enterprises to successfully finance the 2020 Project, the youth of our campus, and correspondingly the lack of ancillary funding typical of mature campuses, as well as the campus's critical role in helping the UC System honor its obligations under the State's Higher Education Master Plan. With these things in mind, the team believed that a third MOU would provide the financial stability needed to continue to successfully meet the campus's mission and ensure the success of our distinctive student population.¹⁵

Correspondingly, in its July 20, 2018 [letter reaffirming accreditation](#) (p.1), the Commission asked the campus to provide in its Interim Report an *update on the results of the fiscal conversations between UC Merced and the UC Office of the President (UCOP), including any successor MOUs, with an eye to how these affect the growth plans and fiscal sustainability of the campus*. Below we provide an overview of the history of UC Merced's MOUs with UCOP, describe the new ten-year MOU with UCOP, signed by President Drake on August 19, 2021, and explain the new MOU's relationship to the campus's plans for growth and financial sustainability (Appendix 14: Merced MOU 2021).

Historical Overview of UC Merced's MOUs with UCOP

Over the 16 years of the UC Merced's operation, the campus and UCOP have executed three MOUs. The first expired in 2014. The second, which was set to expire in July 2020 with the completion of the 2020 Project, was informally extended for an additional year given the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. The third, signed in August 2021, expires in 2031 (Appendix 14: Merced MOU 2021). Each responds to the financial landscape at the time it was executed with the goal of supporting the campus's ongoing growth and development. Our campus remains grateful for UCOP's continued partnership and commitment to ensuring UC Merced has the resources necessary to grow the campus's contributions to the University of California system. Looking forward, at the conclusion of the newest MOU, it is expected that UC Merced will be funded using the funding formula applied to all UC campuses. The new MOU, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section, charts a clear path toward this objective.

¹⁵ Pp. 45-46, [Report of the WSCUC Team for Reaffirmation of Accreditation](#)

UC Merced's first MOU with UCOP, which was established during the economic crisis of the late aughts, focused on ensuring the campus had the financial resources to expand enrollment to 6,200 students (Appendix 15: UCM First MOU w_UCOP). During the crisis, state educational appropriations to the UC system declined 34% from \$2.97 billion in 2007-08 to \$1.96 billion in 2011-12.¹⁶ During this same period, when other campuses were seeing significant decreases in their fraction of state appropriations to the UC, UC appropriations to UCM increased 395%, from \$11 million in 2007-08 to \$54.5 million in 2011-12.^{17,18}

This first MOU provided core funds to support ongoing growth of the campus, including increasing the number of faculty and staff, expanding student services, administrative support, operations and maintenance, and growing our facilities. The MOU targeted enrollment growth of approximately 600 students a year, which between 2008-09 and 2012-13 the campus exceeded every year. Indeed, in 2010-11, campus enrollment grew by nearly 1,000 students (967 to be exact). While highlighting the importance of UC Merced to the UC's mission, the campus's rapid growth strained campus facilities and challenged our ability to hire faculty and staff quickly enough. It was this strain on the campus's facilities that necessitated the 2020 Project and the establishment of a second MOU.

The second MOU, signed in 2014, focused on three main areas: (1) continued support for enrollment growth, (2) up-front costs (start-up costs) to support the expected addition of 25 new faculty members annually, and (3) partnership in our campus expansion project known as the 2020 Project (Appendix 16: UC Merced UCOP MOU – 2014). To support each of these elements, the MOU provided \$6.5 million in annual growth in our state appropriations, with an expected targeted growth of 650 students per year to take the campus to 10,000 students by 2020. The MOU also provided a one-time permanent addition to our campus's base budget of \$5 million to support the start-up costs associated with the projected annual growth in faculty. Lastly, the second MOU committed UCOP to being a strong partner in the 2020 Project.

As a result of the support UCOP provided for the 2020 Project and the campus's growth more generally, between 2014 and 2020 the campus's financial landscape changed significantly. In 2014, UC Merced's total assets were \$737.5 million (Appendix 17: 2014-15 UCM Financial Report). By 2020 they were \$2.170 billion, growing over 190% during a six-year span (Appendix 18: 2019-20 UCM Financial Report). The expense of the 2020 Project, however, has impacted the stability of the campus's cash and cash equivalents (i.e., campus's cash reserves). In 2019, relative to 2018, cash and cash equivalents fell by \$29.3 million. In 2020, they rose by \$26.4 million resulting in a net two-year reduction of approximately \$2.9 million. In 2014, prior to inception of the 2020 Project and the beginning of our second MOU, our cash and cash equivalents increased by \$10.4 million.

In addition to affecting UC Merced's cash and cash equivalents, the 2020 Project centered enrollment growth as a critical source of revenue to support the campus's debt structure. In 2015, total campus expenses, including depreciated expenses, were \$275.5 million. In 2020, they were \$457.7 million, an increase of 66% (Appendix 18: 2019-20 Financial Report). During this same period, however, total campus enrollment, undergraduate and graduate, grew 41%, increasing from [6,268 to 8,847 students](#). In fall 2020, when the final delivery of the 2020 Project was available, campus enrollment (9,018) was nearly 1,000 students shy of the 10,000 students expected at 2020, for an average growth rate over the course of the 2014 MOU of 403 students per year, rather than 650 as planned. Although projected growth rates were not met, the campus still received the annual growth of \$6.5 million in state appropriations over the period of the 2014 MOU. Nevertheless, given that approximately 84% of UC Merced's revenues are derived from enrollment either directly (e.g., tuition, auxiliaries) or indirectly (e.g., state appropriations), this lag in enrollment growth, relative to debt growth, has strained campus finances, independent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The third MOU is structured to address this.

¹⁶ It was not until 2015-16 that state funding began to exceed 2007-08 levels (\$3.05B).

¹⁷ If we include the sum of State Educational Appropriations and State Financing Appropriations UCM increased from \$27.4M to \$70.9M, a growth rate of 159%.

¹⁸ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/revenue-and-expense-data>

As noted above, the expiration of the second MOU was technically July 1, 2020. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and UCOP's commitment to our campus, the MOU was extended another year to provide more time to discuss a successor MOU. Additionally, while other UC campuses saw reductions in state appropriations for 2020-21 academic year (fiscal year, FY, 2021) that met or exceeded 10%, UC Merced's state appropriation reduction was significantly lower at 3.6% and much of it was offset by one-time funding provided by UCOP. UCOP clearly is committed to ensuring the success of UC Merced.

UC Merced's Third MOU with UCOP

In the fall of 2020, Chancellor Muñoz and Interim Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Schnier began discussions with UCOP regarding a third MOU. Initially, these discussions, which continued through spring 2021, focused on the campus's finances from a holistic perspective, with other UC campuses offering a point of contrast. Student-to-campus debt ratios as well as campus debt-to-income ratios were examined, and it was determined that UC Merced's debt structure differs significantly from those of our sister campuses. The principal reason for this difference is that, unlike the other campuses, UC Merced has not had access to state financed general obligation (GO) bonds to support growth and expansion. This is not something that can be easily remedied because access to state financed GO bonds are outside of UCOP's control. Our third MOU is structured to address this fundamental difference and, in turn, to move UC Merced toward fiscal parity with the other UC campuses (Appendix 14: Merced MOU 2021).

The goals of the successor MOU are to

- provide financial resources to support the campus's debt structure while the campus expands enrollment;
- align the financial future of the campus with the recently completed strategic plan and the associated objectives of enrolling 15,000 students in 2030-31 and moving toward R1 status;
- create financial incentives for the campus to increase enrollment through the expansion of existing programs and the development of new high-demand programs; and
- facilitate a smooth transition to the same student-based funding model used to support the other eight undergraduate serving UC campuses following the 2030-31 academic year (FY2031).

These goals are met through a three-part, ten-year MOU that consists of the following elements:

- One-time capital financing of \$61 million spread out over the next five years (FY 2022 to 2026)
- A negotiated increase in our base state appropriations that is determined by the increase in funding provided by the state to UCOP
- A performance-based increase in our state appropriation that is grounded in the UC's per-student funding formula

Collectively, these three elements have the potential to provide significantly more growth in our campus' financial base, year over year, than did prior MOUs. At the same time, to fully benefit from the MOU, we must diligently attend to the incentives inherent to the agreement.

The one-time capital funds provided by UCOP of \$61 million will be broken out over the next five years with \$9 million to be received for FY 2022 and \$13 million to be received each of the following four years, concluding with FY 2026. These funds are not permanent additions to the campus's base budget. Rather, they will offset annually about 20% of the campus's annual debt expenses, expenses that will vary between \$62 million and \$65.5 million during the five-year period addressed by the MOU. This debt, which is predominately a result of the 2020 Project, has been expected. However, with lower than projected enrollment growth between 2014 and 2020, meeting these debt obligations without these bridge funds would significantly reduce the campus's cash reserves. These bridge funds will contribute to the financial resources needed to grow campus enrollment to 15,000 students by 2030-31 AY (FY 2031).

The second component of the MOU will grow, over each of the ten years of the MOU, UC Merced's base state appropriations as a function of the growth in the state appropriations that UCOP receives. Specifically, UC Merced will receive the same percentage growth in its base state appropriations as UCOP for the first 3% in state funding growth that UCOP receives and then ½% for each 1% in growth beyond the 3%. So, for example, if state appropriations to UCOP grow at 5% annually, UC Merced is guaranteed 4% growth in base state appropriations annually. This same formula would apply to any decreases in state allocations to UCOP, should that happen. Referred to as "corridor funding," this approach to campus support is exclusive to UC Merced and the University of California San Francisco campuses, reflecting the unique circumstances of each campus.¹⁹

The third element of our MOU, which takes effect FY 2023, provides UC Merced with the same growth in our base funding provided to the other eight undergraduate UC campuses. That formula, phased in by the system between 2012-13 and 2016-17, ensures that every state student enrolled in the UC system receives the same level of state funding.²⁰ The formula is weighted, with an undergraduate carrying a weight of one, a graduate student two and one half, and a medical student five. Under this new MOU, starting in academic year 2022-23, UC Merced will receive the same amount of funding per student as the other campuses. This new revenue source replaces the prior \$6.5M annual growth we received under our second MOU. Therefore, the enrollment-based growth in our state appropriations will be performance-based. For FY 2022 UCOP has elected to retain our prior \$6.5 million in annual growth.

Collectively, these three elements place our campus on a much stronger financial foundation than at any point in the past. They do so by providing a substantial quantity of one-time funding to strengthen our campus's ability to meet its debt obligations over the next five years; preserving corridor funding growth for our campus; and by guaranteeing growth to the campus's base funding at the same per-student rate that the other UC campuses receive. This third source of revenue is new to the campus. As evidence of the commitment UCOP is making to UC Merced, that third form of funding is the only UCOP-sourced augmentations to base budgets that other campuses receive. To bring UC Merced to parity with its sister campuses, UCOP is providing two additional sources of funds.

A key feature of the MOU is that it creates a clear incentive for our campus to increase enrollments through the expansion of existing programming as well as through the development of new high-demand programs. By broadening the portfolio of academic programs offered, UC Merced will increase the desirability of the campus, expand the applicant pool, and increase the fraction of UC applicants that identify UC Merced as their first school of choice. The funds generated through enrollment growth will support the campus's academic ambitions, including our pursuit of classification as a Very High Research Activity (R1) institution in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. More generally, the enrollment growth encouraged by this will help ensure the campus's fiscal sustainability for many more years to come and ensure that we mature within the UC system. More specifically, the MOU in concert with enrollment growth to 15,000 students is estimated to change our current deficit of over \$40 million in FY 2022 to a surplus of over \$70 million by FY 2031, thus providing the campus with significant financial resources to support our R1 ambitions.

Next Steps

Within the context of the new MOU, the principal step to strengthening the campus's fiscal sustainability is enrollment growth and there are a number of actions we must take toward that end. The most immediate is to meet the 10,000-student enrollment target under the prior MOU within the next two years and then continue to grow at an accelerated rate over the subsequent five years. Toward these ends, the campus is actively pursuing the following: enhancing recruitment approaches, strengthening transfer pathways, and increasing retention. For each of these three focal areas, Appendix 19: Enrollment Growth Strategies provides examples of the efforts that are underway.

¹⁹ UCSF receives corridor funding because it does not serve undergraduates and therefore does not receive funding based on undergraduate enrollment as the other nine campuses do.

²⁰ Prior to this effort, which is known as "rebenching," the per student allotment of state funds varied among the campuses.

Growing enrollment and strengthening retention and graduation rates are also [objectives](#) in the UC Merced Strategic Plan 2021-2031 and a planning team, composed of key campus leadership for enrollment and retention, will be established by the end of fall semester 2021 to lead the campus's achievement of these strategic priorities over the coming decade. Finally, growing operational support for enrollment growth is one of the Chancellor's two funding priorities²¹ for the AY 2021-22 (FY 2023) year's budget call process. In sum, the campus is focusing effort and energy on growing enrollment consistent with the MOU.

Together, the strategic plan and the new MOU establish a clear path toward fiscal sustainability. Importantly, this path addresses the campus's existing debt obligations and will enable the human and capital investments necessary to support the campus's continued development toward R1.

V. Identification of Other Changes and Issues Currently Facing the Institution

Instructions: *This brief section should identify any other significant changes that have occurred or issues that have arisen at the institution (e.g., changes in key personnel, addition of major new programs, modifications in the governance structure, unanticipated challenges, or significant financial results) that are not otherwise described in the preceding section. This information will help the Interim Report Committee gain a clearer sense of the current status of the institution and understand the context in which the actions of the institution discussed in the previous section have taken place.*

COVID-19 Response and Impacts

As for most higher education institutions, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the teaching and research operations of UC Merced. These effects began in March 2020 when, following the California Governor's statewide stay at home order, the campus rapidly shifted to remote operations, including for teaching and research. Below we briefly describe the campus's response to the pandemic and the impacts on undergraduate and graduate education, research, staff, faculty, and the campus's finances. As of the start of fall 2021, the campus has returned to onsite operations and has continued to operate safely under public health protocols including a vaccination mandate, daily required health screening, required masking in-doors, testing protocols, and contact tracing.

Undergraduate and Graduate Education

After tracking the emergence of the pandemic over the start of spring semester 2020, the campus moved to remote operations in March 2020. On March 16, [the campus announced](#) that all instruction would be delivered remotely when classes resumed following spring break on March 30. [On March 22](#), research operations were shuttered in response to the Governor's statewide stay-at-home order.

Over the next 17 months, instruction remained remotely delivered. The conclusion of the spring 2020 semester as well as the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters and the 2020 and 2021 summer terms were delivered under the [emergency educational policies](#) promulgated by the Academic Senate and with authorization from WSCUC to deliver our onsite programs remotely. Policies established by the Senate addressed key aspects of undergraduate and graduate education including [course delivery](#), [program requirements for graduate students](#), [pass/no pass grading for undergraduates](#) and [satisfactory and unsatisfactory grading for graduate students](#), [final exams](#), and [admissions](#). [Support for the switch to remote instruction](#) was quickly developed in spring 2020 by the Office of Information Technology and the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning. [These resources](#) were elaborated and enhanced over the course of the pandemic. The campus also quickly implemented a laptop loaner and internet access programs for students and instructors in support of educational continuity.

Over the course of these 17 months, the campus and UC system undertook efforts to understand and respond to the effects of the pandemic on teaching, learning, and student success. At the institutional level, regularly scheduled surveys were run, some with additional COVID-19 modules, and standard data points were tracked and

²¹ The other is operational support for research.

compared to prior years, for instance, enrollments, units enrolled, graduation applications, withdrawals, educational leaves, teaching evaluations, retention rates, and grades. Localized, ad-hoc assessments were also undertaken by faculty and staff to better understand the student and faculty experience. Appendix 20: 2020-21 Assessment Synopsis provides an overview of some of these assessments, what was learned, including with respect to student learning, and how the data informed action.

In general, through fall 2020 and spring 2021, many of these measures remained comparable to those of prior years, including course grades and mean teaching evaluation scores. Unsurprisingly, in fall 2020 new undergraduate students' sense of belonging was lower relative to prior years (Appendix 20: 2020-21 Assessment Synopsis). More generally, as observed across the nation, surveys and health services usage data indicated adverse effects on student and faculty health and well-being, oftentimes because conditions at home were less conducive to their studies and work. Indeed, many students struggled to find a suitable workspace, were attending to the care of family members, and/or took jobs to help support their families. To support students, instructors adopted pedagogies, for instance employing both synchronous and asynchronous instruction in a course, and course policies that provided students with flexibility in completing assignments. This understanding of our students' remote educational experiences was a crucial factor in the campus's decision in early spring 2021 to begin planning for a return to in-person instruction in fall 2021.

The pandemic also profoundly affected the financial circumstances of our students and their families. To help mitigate these financial impacts, funding from the federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) allocations, including CARES and CRRSA Acts, and special supplemental funds provided to Minority Serving Institutions, were disbursed to undergraduate and graduate students. Appendix 21: HEERF Funding Summary outlines the fraction of students, undergraduate and graduate, receiving funds and the average amount of the award. It shows that in some semesters up to 65% of enrolled undergraduates and 35% of graduate students received funding, with an average award of just over \$800 and \$1409, respectively. For undergraduates, award rates in summer term were even higher; in summer 2020, for instance, 93% of students received an average award of \$663. Information on the criteria used to allocate awards and more general information about these funding sources and their availability and use is provided on UC Merced's [Financial Aid website](#). A third round stemming from the American Rescue Plan Act is planned for disbursement in fall 2021.

In terms of the pandemic's impact on student success, at the undergraduate level, the first year [retention rate](#) for fall 2019 matriculates was strong at 86%. For fall 2020 matriculates, this rate dropped to 79%. This decline in retention rate was exclusive to first-year students. For both 2020 and 2021, [two- and three-year retention rates](#) remained on par with prior years, with 76% and 70% of students retained into their third and fourth years respectively after the 2019-20 academic year, and 75% and 71%, respectively, retained after the 2020-21 academic year. In sum, these numbers point to the importance of the on-campus experience in student success as all but our fall 2020 matriculates had the experience of living and learning on campus before the shift to remote instruction.

With respect to graduation rates, in spring 2020, [four-year graduation rates for first time, full time first year²² students](#) decreased to 43% from 48%, the prior year's number and the campus's high. In spring 2021, this rate rebounded to 48%. In spring 2020, the six-year graduation rate held steady at 69%, a number identical to the prior two years, and in spring 2021, this number increased to 71%, an all-time high for the campus, a commendable outcome given the challenges of the pandemic for our students, faculty, and staff.

At the graduate level, student [retention](#) was not affected overall, but graduation plans were delayed for many, and a small number of graduate students took leaves of absence. International students faced hardships due to travel restrictions and visa issues, and 42 international students deferred fall 2020 enrollment due to travel or visa

²² Navigate to the Frosh Graduation tab.

difficulties. These difficulties were mostly alleviated by fall 2021. Research training and progress was delayed for many graduate students and some undergraduate students, especially those engaged in human subjects research. For graduate students, efforts to address these issues included adjusting residency requirements for remote enrollment, temporarily increasing limits on the number of teaching assistantships students may hold to account for delays in progress towards Ph.D. degree completion, and allowing for leniency in normative time to degree.

As we returned to face-to-face instruction this fall, we were mindful that, like the class of 2025, our second-year students were coming to the campus for the first time. As such, we offered [programming](#) to support the initial transition. Likewise, faculty were prepared to gauge and respond to effects the pandemic may have had on student academic preparation. In sum, we will continue to track and address the effects of COVID-19 on our students throughout the academic year, with a focus on promoting student safety, health, wellness, and educational success.

Research

As noted above, on-campus research was placed on temporary hiatus on March 22, 2020. Initially, only essential research was allowed.²³ By early June, in collaboration with the other UC campuses, UC Merced had developed a detailed [Research Relaunch Plan](#), which was approved by the County Public Health Department. The plan, which allowed small numbers of researchers to return to most on-campus labs to conduct a broader range of research beyond that defined as essential, required researchers to provide protocols describing how they would meet very specific safety guidelines.²⁴ As COVID-19 cases eased in the region, additional personnel were allowed into the labs.

With the shift to remote operations, most human subjects research pivoted online, and it was in late spring of 2021 that psychological research labs and field research were allowed to re-open. Thus, much of the research on campus continued but it was on a small scale, with few graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and principal investigators in labs at the same time. This smaller scale of research, together with other effects of the pandemic including for instance a lack of access to childcare, adversely affected faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars. As noted above, efforts have been made to support these academic staff and students. For faculty in particular, measures include the option for [assistant professors to extend the tenure clock](#) to account for impacts on research productivity, and the [expectation that COVID-related impacts](#) will be taken into consideration in personnel reviews going forward. An [existing modified duties program](#) has also been temporarily expanded as a means of relief for faculty with COVID-related dependent care.

Finances & Operations

The pandemic also substantially affected UC Merced's finances, with the largest impacts resulting from the loss of auxiliary revenues associated with housing and dining. In spring 2020, UC Merced lost approximately \$10 million, when students returned home following the shift to remote instruction and the remainder of their housing and dining contracts were refunded. The impact on dining and housing revenues continued through AY 2020-21 as instruction continued to be delivered remotely, resulting in a total loss of \$54 million in FY 2021. Importantly, given the campus's dependency on enrollment revenues, overall [campus enrollment](#) did not decline during this period. Growth, however, was slowed in part because of the relatively small first year class of 2020 and its lower retention rate as noted above. Enrollment growth was also slowed because Ph.D. admissions were limited in keeping with funding availability.

The campus did receive significant support under HEERF I, II and III, but the \$37.8 million that was provided to support institutional expenses did not cover immediate institutional costs, leaving the campus with at least \$26 million in lost net revenues between the start of the pandemic and July 1, 2021. These lost revenues were

²³ E.g., activities to keep cell lines alive, to enable data collection critical to multi-year projects, etc.

²⁴ E.g., required facial covering, 6-foot physical distancing at all times, one-way corridors, daily health checks, COVID-19 testing, and sign in procedures.

exacerbated by the fact that nearly 80% of the campus's existing debt relies on auxiliary revenues for payment. To address these shortfalls and to support campus operations through the pandemic, campus financial reserves were used, including a \$100 million loan-based augmentation by UCOP. This loan debt was incorporated into our financial projections and factored into the campus's MOU negotiations with UCOP. Specifically, these debt obligations will be met as a function of MOU-driven revenue associated with campus enrollment growth toward 15,000 students.

As part of the campus's response to the fiscal crisis precipitated by COVID, strict fiscal controls were implemented on April 9, 2020. A position control committee, composed of the Chancellor, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, CFO, and position control support staff, was established to manage all vacancies in permanent staffing as well as expiring contracts. This committee focused on saving as much salary expense as possible with the objective of reducing overall payroll expenses, the largest campus expense, while simultaneously maintaining mission critical staffing. To further reduce payroll expenses, stipends and staff awards were temporarily suspended. Additional spending controls were also enacted on June 29, 2020 for any purchases that exceeded \$5,000 and efforts to reduce extraneous expenses on office supplies were undertaken. Importantly, fiscal controls did not include layoffs of permanent employees. Instead, as needed, permanent employees were redeployed to address pandemic specific needs. As a general rule, however, temporary employee contracts were allowed to expire.

Through our position control efforts, approximately \$12 million of the campus's payroll was held vacant from spring 2020, the inception of the position control process, through July 2021. Although these efforts did reduce campus expenses, they also created a staffing shortage that continues to impact the campus's ability to provide core functions (e.g., facilities, business operations, IT). To start to address the impact on these core services, in spring 2021, a budget allocation process was undertaken to strategically release \$4 million of the vacancies. The remainder of the vacancy funding was used to generate cost savings to address the deficit resulting from the pandemic. Moving forward, the campus budget call process will focus on revitalizing staff support and ensuring staffing is aligned with the priorities outlined in the strategic plan. Addressing staffing needs is a major focus of leadership as the campus recovers from the pandemic.

Although the pandemic significantly impacted our campus's finances, it also stimulated development of a campus financial simulation model that will be of ongoing utility to the campus (Appendix 22: Campus Financial Simulation Model Assumptions & Overview). This model, which simulates the impacts of various factors, including for instance, enrollment, retention and graduation rates, state appropriations, philanthropy, etc., on campus financial well-being, was used to target savings as the campus responded to the pandemic-induced fiscal crisis. It also provided the foundation for the campus's MOU discussions with UCOP. The campus anticipates continuing to use this model in its financial planning going forward.

Leadership Transitions

Since our 2018 reaffirmation of accreditation a number of leadership transitions have taken place. Following retirements or other personnel transitions, in July 2020, [Juan Sánchez Muñoz](#) became the campus's fourth chancellor; in December 2018, [Gregg Camfield](#) became the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, following a six-month interim appointment in this role; in March 2020, [Jeff Gilger](#) became the Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, after a one and one-half year appointment as interim dean; in July 2020, [Sarah Frey](#), assumed the role of Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education; and in August 2021, Stella Ngai joined the campus as its Chief Council (Appendix 23: UCM Executive Leadership Org Chart).

Several members of campus leadership are also serving in an interim capacity following retirements or departures over the last year: [Marjorie Zatz](#) as the Interim Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development; [Kurt Schnier](#) as Interim Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer; Patrick Lenz as Interim Vice Chancellor for Physical Operations, Planning and Development (VC POPD), and Chief Operating

Officer; and [Christopher Kello](#) as Interim Vice Provost and Dean for Graduate Education. A search for the VC of POPD is currently underway. (Appendix 23: UCM Executive Leadership Org Chart).

Finally, since 2018, the campus has added two new senior leadership positions. In July 2019, Dania Matos, J.D., joined UC Merced as the inaugural Associate Chancellor and Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) before assuming the role of Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion at the University of California, Berkeley in August of 2021. In September 2021, [Mr. Cecil Howard](#), J.D. joined the campus as the Interim CDO. [A search](#) for a permanent Vice Chancellor and CDO is underway. In November 2019, [Thelma Hurd](#), M.D., M.P.H., joined UC Merced as its inaugural Director of Medical Education to lead UC Merced’s medical education initiative and related programs.

Growth of Academic Programs

Since our reaffirmation of accreditation, UC Merced has added 14 onsite degree programs: a B.A. in Economics²⁵ (2020), a B.S. in Civil Engineering (2021), and graduate degrees in Bioengineering (M.S. and Ph.D., 2018), Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (M.S. and Ph.D., 2018), Management of Innovation, Sustainability, and Technology (Master of Management, 2018), Materials and Biomaterials Science and Engineering (M.S. and Ph.D., 2018), Management of Complex Systems (M.S. and Ph.D., 2019), Cognitive and Information Sciences (M.S., 2020), and Economics (M.A. and Ph.D., 2020). Through University Extension, four non-degree, certificate programs have also been implemented, although the latter two are currently inactive: the Multiple Subject and Single Subject Preliminary Credential Preparation Program (publicly known as the Teacher Preparation Program; onsite and distance), and the Certificate in Child Development and Care (onsite and distance).

VI. Concluding Statement

Instructions: *Reflect on how the institutional responses to the issues raised by the Commission have had an impact upon the institution, including future steps to be taken.*

The foci of this Interim Report – learning from the 2020 Project, ensuring tutoring is structured to best serve our students, formalizing our plans for UC Merced’s next decade, and ensuring our financial sustainability - align directly with our own priorities as a growing and developing research university in service to the historically underserved. As a result of the work described in this report, tutoring services are significantly more well organized in support of student access and success. The UC Merced Strategic Plan 2021-2031 provides the campus with the framework to guide its continued growth to research university of 15,000 students by 2031, and the new MOU with UCOP the financial means to realize this plan while establishing a path to financial sustainability. Finally, the reflection on the 2020 project has generated lessons learned that are already informing planning for new capital planning projects.

Our ongoing commitment to this work is reflected in the next steps outlined for each of the areas addressed by this document. The Learning Support Leadership Team will guide ongoing development and refinement of tutoring support as informed by the results of regular assessment. Implementation of the strategic plan is underway and there is energy around this work and the opportunities it provides for collaborative, integrative planning in support of our mission. Finally, the campus is focused on enrollment growth as a foundation to realizing our ambitions and broadening the university’s contributions to teaching, research, and service in the San Joaquin Valley, California, the nation, and the world.

In sum, in the three years since reaffirmation, we have made important progress on issues of critical importance to the future of UC Merced. We look forward to discussing our findings, progress, and future plans with the panel of representatives from the WSCUC Interim Report Committee.

²⁵In addition to the existing B.S. in Economics.

VII. List of Evidentiary Appendices

The Appendices listed below are referenced by number throughout the report narrative above. They are available via the hyperlinked Appendix name below.

- Appendix 1: Interim Report Planning Update PROC 1.16.2020 Final
- Appendix 2: 2020 Project Reflections & Lessons Learned
- Appendix 3: 2020 Reflection Request
- Appendix 4: Email Announcing New STEM Center
- Appendix 5: Tutoring Campus Email to Students
- Appendix 6: Tutoring Services Flyer
- Appendix 7: Tutoring Principles
- Appendix 8: DUE Learning Support All Tutor Meeting
- Appendix 9: UC Merced Strategic Plan 2021-2031
- Appendix 10: Academic Plans
- Appendix 11: Email Announcing Strategic Plan 10.8.2021
- Appendix 12: SAC Oct 14 Slide Deck
- Appendix 13: Communications and Engagement Team Charge
- Appendix 14: Merced MOU 2021
- Appendix 15: UCM First MOU w_UCOP
- Appendix 16: UC Merced UCOP MOU - 2014
- Appendix 17: 2014-15 UCM Financial Report
- Appendix 18: 2019-20 UCM Financial Report
- Appendix 19: Enrollment Growth Strategies
- Appendix 20: 2020-21 Assessment Synopsis
- Appendix 21: HEERF Funding Summary
- Appendix 22: Campus Financial Simulation Model Assumptions & Overview
- Appendix 23: UCM Executive Leadership Org Chart