

REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM  
CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW  
To the University of California at Merced

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Candidacy

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



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# **UC Merced Capacity and Preparatory Review Team Report**

## **SECTION I – Overview and Context**

### **IA – Description of Institution and Visit**

The University of California, Merced is the tenth campus of the University of California. Planning for UC Merced began in 1988. Its first graduate students were admitted for academic year 2004-05. In September 2005 the campus officially opened and enrolled its first undergraduates: 706 freshmen and 132 transfer students.

UC Merced currently offers nine baccalaureate programs through three Schools: Engineering; Natural Sciences; and Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA). General Education is under the authority of College One, with which all faculty and students are affiliated. The Graduate Division offers an Individual Graduate Program, leading to the master's and doctorate.

As a general campus of the University of California, UC Merced inherits the University's mission of teaching, research, and service. Under the California Master Plan for Higher Education, it will select its undergraduates from the top 12.5% of California High School graduates. In support of its missions in research and graduate education, it will work toward UC's long-range target of 20% graduate student enrollment.

UC Merced's founding Mission Statement (November 2005) inflects the UC mission with themes appropriate to "the first American research university of the twenty-first century": celebrating the diversity of its community members; meshing its graduate and research programs with high quality undergraduate education in a "student-centered" learning environment;

fostering interdisciplinary practice in research and experiential education; and reflecting its location in California's San Joaquin Valley.

This review is the first stage of a Candidacy review. The Commission granted Eligibility to UC Merced on May 22, 2003 for a period of three years. UC Merced submitted its Letter of Intent for Candidacy Review in March 2005, noting that the official opening of the campus had been delayed by one year from its original target of Fall 2004.

UC Merced submitted its Capacity and Preparatory Review Report in December 2005. Following the comprehensive model, it directly addressed the Standards for Accreditation and provided an extensive portfolio of supporting materials. The team visited the campus March 9-11, 2006. Given that the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report was of necessity prepared shortly after the campus opened, the team gave particular attention to how the institution was realizing its plans and responding to the emerging realities of its operation, pioneer students, and founding faculty.

Without exception, Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey and her colleagues welcomed the committee and were candid and forthcoming in their responses to our questions. All the documents that we requested were made available to us. We thank UC Merced for their hospitality and for the opportunity to see this nascent campus up close. The visit was a thought-provoking and inspiring experience for the members of the team.

### **IB – Quality of the Capacity and Preparatory Report and Alignment with the Proposal**

Following the guidelines for a Candidacy Review, UC Merced organized its capacity and preparatory report as a comprehensive assessment of its current plans and initial operations in relation to the four Standards and their Criteria for Review. The reflective essays directly address each of the Standards, relating the exhibits provided to the CFRs. These are introduced

by an overview of the history and planning context of UC Merced and concluded by discussion on its commitment to capacity and a preview of the issues that will serve as the focus of the Educational Effectiveness Review. The concluding discussion notes that the report of necessity provides “the details of construction in progress” and commits to providing additional evidence of implementation during the visit and the next stage of review.

The report is well organized, providing an excellent overview and conveying a clear sense of the mission of UC Merced. The data exhibits are effectively cross-referenced to the CFRs. They provide evidence of the formulation of the expected policies, include demographic descriptions of the students, staff, faculty, and administrators, as well as mapping the organizational structures that are in place. Some exhibits, such as the educational objectives for general education and the academic programs, are drawn from planning documents developed by the founding faculty. Others are the realia of the new campus, including its inaugural catalog, student handbook, and outreach materials.

The report and visit examine the institution at the intensive initial phase of institutional development, when the faculty has been intensively engaged in consultation and the articulation—indeed the invention—of the goals, policies, and procedures.

The team took as the foci of its visit the tasks of probing the extent to which the ambitions of the plans were being realized by actual operations and how effectively the institution was developing evidence that could form the basis of on-going reflection and revision in response to the emerging reality of the campus.

The institutional presentation that was submitted in December 2005 presented an accurate picture of the institution. During the visit additional materials developed in the interim were provided as part of conversations or at the request of members of the team. Among these were

general education requirements for the Schools, the Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation's guiding criteria for evaluation the Schools' 5-year strategic plans and 1-year academic resource plans, information about the Writing Program's assessment process, a positioning statement/brand promise document from University Relations, and a discussion draft on the assessment of general education. Also impressive were the Student Affairs summary reports from several units concentrating on student life and their plan for an end-of-year retreat. All of these reflected the values and objectives presented in the institutional presentation.

### **IC – Response to Previous Commission Issues**

The report of UC Merced's Eligibility Review (May 2003) conveyed ten areas of concern that were directly addressed in Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey's Letter of Intent (March 14, 2005). The Capacity and Preparatory Review Report also includes an appendix that updates the institutional response to December 2005.

In each area, substantial progress has been made so that the concerns are either fully resolved or brought to a level appropriate for UC Merced's point of development so that they are naturally subsumed in the scope of the current review.

### **SECTION II – Evaluation of Institutional Capacity Under the Standards**

In this section we review evidence drawn from the report and investigated during the visit that demonstrates that UC Merced meets the standards for accreditation at a minimum level (at least). We organize our comments around the WASC Standards and Criteria for Review (CFR), reserving findings, judgments, and recommendations to the next section. All reference to Appendices are to the institution's November 2005 Capacity and Preparatory Review Report; CFRs are referenced by number in square brackets.



As the first American research university founded in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, UC Merced is presented with an unprecedented array of opportunities and unique environmental conditions.

The campus has articulated an inspired choice in defining itself as a student-centered research university. Within this mission, the campus has made a commitment to provide access to the UC experience to both first generation students and underserved students from the San Joaquin Valley. Each of these opportunities presents UC Merced with a rich and expansive arena for developing an exceptional organization in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs that could become a student-centered model for higher education both nationally and internationally.

UC Merced benefits from its membership within the UC system. The opening of a new campus and the building of an entirely new infrastructure allows for the best practices of others' experiences to be incorporated, while also providing opportunities to create its own distinct solutions, approaches, and traditions to serving students and the community. Staking a claim to a student-centered mission requires that the Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and other organizational divisions be mutually supportive and highly collaborative. Enrolling students from within the San Joaquin Valley and beyond will necessitate that UC Merced establish a distinctive profile within the UC system that will attract talented and highly qualified students.

## **1. Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives**

### *Institutional Purposes*

UC Merced's founding Mission Statement (Exhibit 1.1-2) realizes the University of California's mission with a particular focus on serving the students of the San Joaquin Valley [1.1]. From this focus, the institution derives its aims and values in celebrating diversity, building a "student-centered" learning environment, and building academic programs that

integrate undergraduate students into its research and service missions. These values are communicated widely and reflected in its publications. The conversations during the visit showed that these values are known and supported widely throughout the administration, faculty, and staff as well as the student leaders with whom we spoke.

The leadership has been effective in communicating a campus vision for its region. The staff, faculty, and student leaders understand the institutional goals and are experiencing the actual operations and process in becoming a student-centered university. A challenge the campus will face as it grows is determining how to sustain into the future the special focus on students (both undergraduate and graduate), meet the complex needs of research faculty, and maintain positive and mutually beneficial town/gown relations.

During the extensive and intense period of planning for the campus opening, faculty developed mission statements and formulations of educational objectives for the undergraduate academic programs established at opening as well as the general education component of the baccalaureate degrees [1.2] (Exhibit 1.2-2 and the *College One Handbook*.) The objectives developed for the programs in the School of Engineering anticipate ABET accreditation and provide more specific learning outcomes than those for the other two Schools as well as an assessment and evaluation plan. The objectives for programs in the School of Natural Sciences follow a model developed during a life sciences faculty retreat. Each program provides statements of learning outcomes, multiple means of assessment, and a statement about how assessment data can be used to guide improvements. The School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts provides statements for a “macro program” in Social and Cognitive Sciences and a program in World Cultures and History, within which there are disciplinary concentrations. No objectives for the concentrations were provided. The objectives and

suggested outcomes are stated very generally, leaving much to be determined as to how assessment could be implemented. Our conversations during the visit suggested that the faculty in SSHA were not as directly involved in the formulation of these statements as in the other two schools. The statement for the Management program will be developed when the initial complement of faculty for the program is in place.

The Schools have not yet provided these statements of educational objectives through their websites; we did not confirm whether they have been communicated to students in any form.

This review comes at a time when the faculty, staff, and administration of the campus are operating at extraordinary levels of effort and performance, each of necessity serving many roles which in other institutions would be parceled out among multiple individuals. In successfully opening the campus to a full complement of students this year, they have shown exceptional ability to work as a team around common purpose to overcome multiple challenges under effective administrative and Academic Senate leadership. During the visit their pride in their accomplishment was evident as was the need to find ways to move toward sustainable levels of effort.

The campus has in place the necessary administrative roles and structures appropriate for a University of California campus. In many cases, individuals fill multiple roles. Our observations during the visit show that the leadership structure created is highly motivated for success [1.3]. Our visit occurred immediately after the founding Chancellor, Carol Tomlinson-Keasey, announced that she would leave her position after the end of the academic year. The challenge of maintaining institutional momentum at this critical point during the necessary

period of transition to a new Chancellor will require attention from both the campus and the UC Office of the President.

### *Institutional Purposes*

UC Merced inherits from the University of California's Academic Senate public commitments to academic freedom [1.4], due process and appropriate autonomy [1.6]. The campus commitment to responding to and celebrating the diversity [1.5] of its communities is foundational. It has formulated and distributed widely a statement of Principles of Community. The report references relevant UC and UC Merced policies on diversity and commitment to affirmative action.

The report included UC Merced's inaugural catalog, interim student handbook, and a College One handbook. Together with the campus website these provide an accurate representation of the current state of its academic programs, goals, and services to students [1.7].

The University of California's Office of the President (<http://www.ucop.edu>) references the business policies and practices with which the campuses must comply and which guide the creation of local policies and practices to insure integrity in its operations [1.8].

The report contained a statement of commitment to WASC accreditation (Exhibit 1.8). The catalog (p. 121) reports its eligibility status. Through its report and the uniformly helpful and frank engagement with the team during the visit UC Merced shows its commitment to honest and open communication with the Accrediting Commission [1.9].

## **2. Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions**

### *Teaching and Learning*

UC Merced's founding undergraduate educational programs are comparable in content and nomenclature to degrees at other UC campuses. However the institution's orientation to

interdisciplinary inquiry and its attention to the academic goals of its student body has led to thoughtful variations on traditional majors (e.g. the distinct majors in biological sciences and human biology, the “macro-programs” in World Cultures and History and in Social and Cognitive Sciences, which have disciplinary concentrations but encourage interdisciplinary perspective) [2.1].

Graduate education is provided through a single Individual Graduate Program, approved under the aegis of the UC Academic Senate’s Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs, leading to Master’s (MA and MS) and Ph.D. degrees. Students in the program complete requirements defined for the various graduate group emphases, which involve the faculty in all of the schools.

The specific content and character of the degree programs at UC Merced will undergo further development and elaboration as new faculty are added. Initial academic planning has been strategic and thoughtful in deciding the range of inaugural undergraduate programs. Our conversations with the chairs of the Academic Senate’s Undergraduate Council and Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation and with the Deans of the Schools indicated that curriculum support is an important factor in planning decisions for staging new hires. Each of the inaugural programs and graduate groups has defined requirements that are appropriate for this stage of campus development. They are presented in the catalog and websites along with statements of philosophy and advice for students pursuing the programs [2.2].

The founding faculty has devoted a good deal of attention to the matter of undergraduate general education, framing it in terms of educational experiences and outcomes that all graduates of the campus should attain. The University of California requires attainment of an entry-level English writing requirement (assessed by standard examination or portfolio review) and an

American History and Institutions requirement. UC Merced has defined general education requirements at both the campus level and the School level.

The campus has lower division requirements in English writing and mathematics or quantitative reasoning in addition to requiring the two-semester core course sequence (Core 1 and Core 100 “The world at home—planning for the future in a complex world”), which is delivered through College One. This course is designed and delivered by an interdisciplinary team of faculty with a problem-oriented syllabus. Entering freshmen enroll in the course during their first term and complete the upper-division course in their third year. Entering junior transfer students are required to enroll in the upper-division course, thereby engaging with the campus’s philosophy of general education even when lower division general education requirements are met through prior work at community college. The faculty intends that entering junior transfer students be enrolled in Core 100 alongside the “native freshmen” resuming their engagement with the issues and projects first raised for them in their first year in Core 1. It will be two years before faculty are able to assess the effectiveness of this imaginative solution to the orientation of junior transfers to a campus culture of general education.

All three Schools define general education requirements for students completing programs that they offer, with courses designed to shape the appropriate lower division preparation for work in the majors while achieving the goals of general education. The character of the College and School requirements is shaped by the eight Guiding Principles for General Education (catalog, p. 44) articulated by the faculty: scientific literacy, decision-making, communication, self and society, ethics and responsibility, leadership and teamwork, aesthetic understanding and creativity, and development of personal potential. The intention is that the

college core courses should engage all of these objectives and that the courses approved as general education requirements in the schools be assessed against these objectives.

The curriculum offered during this first year resulted from thoughtful deliberation by founding faculty. The syllabi, course descriptions, and statements of educational philosophy that we saw reflected appropriate objectives and outcomes for the institution. The decision to do midterm assessment of students' programs through letter grades reflected the faculty's interest in assisting the students to meet course expectations. We heard several reports from faculty of how the pedagogy of a course was revised or learning support structures were created in response to this assessment. One particularly impressive example was the reworking between the end of the fall term and the start of the spring term of the Math 5 (Pre-calculus) course from a large lecture format to a more studio-based small group format including required assessments during the first three weeks to determine mandatory tutoring [2.3]. In the preliminary stages of these programs it was not feasible to assess the other aspects of this CFR in this phase of the review.

The co-curricular components of the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report are well presented and are continuing to develop as the students experience and complete their first academic year of campus life. Starting a new campus takes immense energies from everyone to shape future growth and to determine how existing services and programming should be modified. Granted, starting a new university leaves one with little time for engaging in much beyond what has to be solved in order to open. This review and the anticipation of the review for initial accreditation to follow should provide both an opportunity and a stimulus for the campus to reflect intentionally on their effectiveness in planning for the future.

The philosophy and structure of its programs have grown out of recent and on-going intense discussions among faculty. It was clear from all of our conversations with faculty that

they are deeply invested in the development of their programs as a collaborative and collective activity [2.4]. The next stage of the review will provide an opportunity to view how these initial discussions have resulted in stable descriptions that are effectively distributed to wider audiences.

Active learning and co-curricular and service learning are themes that run through the statements of philosophy and design of courses (e.g. Core 1, Engineering service learning) [2.5]. The decision to do midterm grading in the first semester and the response to that assessment indicate that the faculty are committed to supporting student learning. The material provided by the Writing Program on assessment of student work and the inclusion in the revised Mathematics 5 course of systematic assessments and interventions at the beginning of the course for “pre-Precalculus skills” are specific examples.

Before UC Merced begins to graduate the students who entered this year as freshman, the faculty should review how they ensure that their students consistently achieve the faculty’s stated objectives for learning [2.6]. There were indications in this report that the faculty understand that indicators other than course grades should be found to assess the outcomes of their programs.

UC Merced has developed guidance for future program reviews. Looking forward to ABET accreditation, the School of Engineering’s assessment plan includes evidence from post-graduate outcomes and external constituencies. The campus should take the review for initial accreditation as an invitation to make certain that the realization of its program review process ensures that the faculty’s initial attention to clarity of objective and focus on student learning are maintained and reinforced [2.7].



*Scholarship and Creative Activity*

During our visit we found indicators that the institution values and promotes scholarship and curricular innovation [2.8]. The academic personnel process follows University of California Academic Senate guidelines and faculty experienced in personnel review on other UC campuses have been involved in the initial hiring decisions to ensure standards for evaluation of scholarship and teaching. The design of the academic programs of the Schools and the core course of College One shows many indications of creativity in the institution's formative stages. We heard from one of the Deans about her effort to mentor junior faculty. Our observations during the visit suggested that the faculty is actively engaged and innovative in effective teaching and productive scholarship.

In articulating a campus mission that involves undergraduates as well as graduate students in the research and service missions of the university, the institution recognizes the value of linking scholarship, teaching, student learning and service [2.9]. The Engineering service learning program can be cited here as a particularly well developed example.

*Support for Student Learning*

Several of their academic programs and institutes as well as specific interventions designed to help students are admirable [2.10]. The multi-disciplinary approach promises to become a point of excellence in the distinct early formation of institutes, such as the Sierra Nevada Research Institute, World Cultures Institute, and the Energy and the Systems Biology Institute.

The question of sustainability for some student interventions may emerge in the near future—notably the Student Success Workshop. Currently, any student receiving a D or F midterm grade must complete a one-hour workshop; submitting mid-term grades may become impractical considering faculty workloads. A student's enrollment in the following semester is

held until the workshops are completed. The campus is high-touch now but what planning is in place for maintaining this focus when enrollments increase? The Student Affairs Division shared a wealth of descriptive data that has been collected by each of the Division's student service units on the experience of students in the first semester. This information is guiding the development of co-curricular services, and will be the quantitative basis for a discussion in a planned retreat this summer reflecting on the first year experience.

Strategic enrollment planning and meeting enrollment targets will play a pivotal role in the initial perceptions of success for the campus. For various reasons, the yield of admitted students fell short of first year targets. (This was true for all but two of the UC campuses.) Admittedly, the serious opening obstacles may have prevented the campus from meeting its target, including the inability to show prospective students and their families the actual campus, the limitation on the number of majors available, and a shortage of on-campus housing. Each of these concerns will be somewhat ameliorated for next admissions cycle, and the hope is that the campus will yield a higher take rate of admitted students.

We saw in the report and during the visit many indications that there is effective collaboration between Student Affairs and faculty and academic leaders to develop co-curricular programs [2.11] that are integrated with the goals of academic programs and campus mission. In particular, the service learning program in Engineering is working closely with the career center regarding community placements and corporate relations. Student Affairs will launch the first summer bridge program for entering students in collaboration with the Management program. The Center for Educational Partnerships located in Fresno is an exemplary model for engaging faculty in academic preparation and relations with schools.

The student handbooks and catalog included in the report and the campus websites show attention to the need to provide sound information for students on the requirements of their academic programs in support of effective academic planning [2.11, 2.12]. Academic advising for undecided lower division students is provided through an integrated advising and learning support center administered by Student Affairs. Academic advisors in the three Schools are intended to provide guidance for undergraduates once they have selected a major. The materials provided now appear to be effective. During the Educational Effectiveness Review the team should investigate how the campus plans to insure that academic advising is coordinated so that students receive seamless attention as they develop their goals and prepare plans to pursue them.

The campus has an advantage in adopting information technologies in the development of support systems for learning [2.13] in that it does not have the problem of legacy computer systems. UC Merced has successfully implemented the Banner Student Information system and on-line registration, statement of legal residence, grade submission and posting, and transcript and enrollment verification. In addition the campus has already implemented a campus card for housing, campus dining, and the bookstore.

The co-curriculum is well integrated with academic advising, in large part because academic advising for lower division students reports to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. However, as the campus develops, particular attention should be given to effective collaboration between these advisers and the academic advisers provided by the Schools. The campus has also established a one-stop shop that includes Admissions, Financial Aid, and Registrar's offices all located in a prominent entry to the campus. The Engineering Service Learning Program is also working very closely with the Career Center.

UC Merced inherits a focus on serving transfer students from its mission to serve the students of the central valley [2.14]. The conceptualization of the College One core course so that it can serve to integrate junior transfers into the educational culture of the campus is creative and an indicator that this intention receives practical attention in the design of the programs. A Generalized Transfer Agreement brokered by UC Merced and the region's four-year higher education institutions with the local community colleges is a good beginning to strengthen the student transfer pathway. The campus may also benefit by examining the availability of advanced introductory classes of their own academic programs designed to meet the needs of entering transfer students.

### **3. Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability**

#### *Faculty and Staff*

UC Merced's leadership has been strategic in building an administrative and faculty cohort capable of opening the campus and planning for its further development [3.1, 3.2]. Successful completion of the first semester of full operation can serve as evidence that these criteria for review were minimally met while acknowledging the critical importance of bringing the on-going faculty and staff recruitments to successful conclusions to provide sustainable operation.

UC Merced was advised early in the planning process that "hiring a stellar faculty is the best academic plan." In the appointment of the founding faculty a team of UC faculty who had chaired the Academic Senate Committee on Academic Personnel at other UC campuses assisted the Chancellor and Executive Vice Chancellor. This allowed UC Merced's administration and faculty to benchmark their assessments of prospective faculty against the standards at other UC campuses for teaching, research, and service. We were told that some of the team members

continue to work with the campus as it transitions to autonomy in the academic personnel process [3.3]. Virtually everyone involved in the hiring process that we spoke with during our visit said that teaching evaluations and other evidence of teaching interest and performance were collected and utilized in making hiring decisions. Teaching is clearly claimed as a value of UC Merced; the initial appointments and the candidates for current searches support that claim. “Clear documentation of ability in teaching must be included in all advancement and promotion cases.” (Exhibit 3-3.5) Plans for evaluation are clearly thought out and examples are given. They include criteria, what will be evaluated, and how. The emphasis currently seems to be more on accountability. However, attention should also be paid to using the process formatively, to assist faculty in improving teaching and learning.

For a new campus creating a distinctive culture, the process of faculty orientation to student learning and teaching effectiveness is especially important. The planning for the inaugural academic programs has provided an intense experience for founding faculty in engaging with questions about their educational objectives and the way in which their students will learn [3.4]. It is now important to put into place processes that will orient new faculty appropriately and ensure that all faculty remain engaged with improvement in teaching and learning. These responsibilities will presumably fall under the aegis of the new Center for Teaching and Learning. The recruitment for a director for this center is currently underway. The job definition of the director is detailed and somewhat idealistic. It seems important that the person appointed should have experience with direct assessment of student learning in order to support UC Merced’s intentions in assessing educational effectiveness. The conception of this Center, its relationship to other campus units, its scope with respect to faculty support and development on the one hand and student study skills on the other, need to be defined and

clarified during the appointment of the director. But the definition and role of this Center represents a unique and unusual opportunity for creative thinking. The job description for the director of the Teaching and Learning Center says that the Center will “participate in the development of a comprehensive orientation program for new faculty and teaching assistants....”

While a good deal of data from and about students is being collected and planned for at the institutional level, it remains to be seen what support, encouragement, and reward faculty will receive for engaging in their own classroom research and assessment. It is not clear at this time how UC Merced will interpret the growing national interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Will classroom research and the scholarship of teaching and learning in one’s own discipline be encouraged and supported?

#### *Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources*

The budget and facilities of UC Merced appear to be well aligned with campus programs and priorities [3.5]. Reductions from planned levels for library acquisitions are proposed for restoration in 2006-07. As a campus of the University of California, UC Merced has access to sufficient funding to ensure delivery of quality instructional programs and support services to students. However, the 2005-06 operating budget anticipated a shortfall of \$4.8 million. Further, the under-enrollment of about 160 students is expected to result in a reduction in fee revenue to the campus of about \$300,000 in the current budget year. The University’s Office of the President has agreed to advance the campus up to \$5 million as a line of credit to be used during the next two to three years and repaid over a longer period of time. In addition, budget managers anticipate saving about \$2 million or more from budgeted levels in 2005-06.

Expenses for 2006-07 will be increased due to the hiring of about 40 additional faculty. However, budget managers expect that one-time expenses will be about \$3 million less in

2006-07 than in the current year. If the enrollment target (now estimated between 1,600 and 1,800 students for fall 2006) is reached and anticipated state funding increases for the University of California are realized, the campus expects that it will be able to continue operations without using the full amount of the line of credit. Campus leaders further anticipate that the enrollment of about 2,500 students in fall 2007 will permit the campus to stay on course for its faculty hiring and operations before exhausting the line of credit. (However, this anticipates that not all faculty positions will be filled in that year. Budget managers noted that the University of California's other campuses average about 25% of faculty positions not filled by ladder faculty in any given year.)

The financial plan for the campus is very dependent on reaching enrollment targets. Campus leaders note that achieving these goals is dependent on the availability of on-campus housing. Bids will soon be sought for the construction of another 416 beds of student housing, slated to open in fall 2007. Another housing project of 600 beds is being pursued but has not yet received full approval. If authorized and on schedule, this last project would open in fall 2008. The connection among enrollment, the budget, and these housing projects is an area that demands careful attention to ensure the overall fiscal health of the campus. The synchronization of construction efforts with enrollment, research, and faculty hiring is critical. This is particularly relevant given the importance of supervised residences to yielding students from the campus's target population.

The quality and size of the new campus buildings seem appropriate. Of some concern is the extension of the infrastructure (power, water, sewer, road, etc.) to future buildings beyond the initial Phase of campus development. The next increment of funding that would be needed to complete all infrastructure on the Phase 1 campus, and to begin infrastructure for Phase 2 of

campus development, is estimated to be about \$10-\$15 million. The California construction market is a cause for concern regarding future academic buildings, including the second science and engineering building. The campus should be proactive during programming for this facility to keep the project on budget and on schedule. The use of facilities at the Castle site will ameliorate this problem, but the campus leadership must continue to be aware of the need to find funding for future site development and infrastructure. Further, the Army Corps of Engineers permit needed for full build out of the campus has not yet been secured. Preliminary indications are expected this spring and final decision within a year or so. This should not affect campus plans for the next five years. Attention should be paid to the impact of enrollment shortfalls on construction project schedules or approvals.

Overall, the campus would appear to be able to sustain its operations but must take great care and must meet enrollment targets.

The reduction in the planned level of library holdings in order to meet budgetary shortfalls gives cause for some concern [3.6]. This is mitigated by plans to restore a more robust library acquisition budget for future years and by the availability of the resources of the entire University of California system library holdings through the California Digital Library. In addition, the campus has committed to Tier One status within the University of California library system, dedicating \$500,000 per year for on-line journals available through that system—offering about 10,000 journals to faculty and students. The library also has committed to purchasing any book requested by a faculty member. It utilizes a bibliography service that matches the campus programs, offerings, and research interests with available publications and provides materials to the library ready for shelving. Faculty expressed no concerns about library



holdings. Library staff pointed to the ease and speed of interlibrary loan from other University of California collections.

The library provides assistance to freshmen and to transfer students in using current technology to access information and even to “browse” on line. This helps ameliorate concerns that students will be unable to acquire needed information due to their relative inability to browse stacks due to the fact that so few books are yet on the shelves. If this approach proves ineffective, the library staff is committed to finding other ways (including ordering more materials) to make information accessible for users.

The library’s automated check-out system (slated to become operational later this spring) is tied into a collection management feature that will allow it to assess the utilization of each book (check-out and even use within the library). This should allow active and effective collection management. It is consistent with a philosophy of using contemporary technology to ensure access to materials and sophisticated management of the information resource.

One concern is that there do not appear to be ways for community members to easily check out materials. Given that one of the hallmarks of the campus is to connect with the community, the university should take steps to ensure that community members can get library privileges.

The campus has a chief information officer responsible for all computing, network, and telecommunications [3.7]. It has a campus network and campus-wide internet access, both wired and wireless, serving all facilities, including resident halls. It is connected to CALREN. SAKAI is used for course management, web-based instructional information, and grading. The campus modified the version of the SCT BANNER SIS from the University of California, Davis instance and is served for its financial and payroll systems from the University of California, Los

Angeles. The campus has developed its own web-based job applicant system. Financial aid is managed locally via BANNER, currently under the auspices of UC Davis.

UC Merced has implemented single card identification and security system and a single ID approach (with single sign-on) for users of all systems.

Overall, the campus appears to have implemented both the approaches and the technical infrastructure to successfully support its educational purposes, both instructional and administrative, and has the network capability to support research activities.

### *Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes*

The policies and practices of the University of California and its Board of Regents [3.9] as a whole have shaped the organizational structures and decision making processes of UC Merced in ways that insure effective operation from its beginning [3.8]. While its administration has “a thin bench,” all of the major divisions are in place with leadership who collaborate effectively with each other and with their counterparts on the other UC campuses. The faculty has been granted the status of an independent division of the University of California’s Academic Senate and have all the critical structures in place for effective governance and consultation with the administration.

Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey has provided effective strategic vision and developmental guidance since her appointment in 1999 as the founding chancellor [3.10]. Shortly before the visit she announced her intention to step down from the chancellorship at the end of August 2006. The UC Office of the President will manage the process of locating a successor to be appointed by the UC Regents. This transition will provide both a challenge for the campus at this critical point and an opportunity to show that momentum in carrying out the mission of UC Merced is sustained by the shared vision of its faculty, staff, and students.

During the visit, members of the team had several opportunities to meet with the leaders of UC Merced's Academic Senate and confirm that UC Merced has established an effective culture of faculty governance and advice [3.11].

#### **4. Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement**

##### *Strategic Thinking and Planning*

As a new institution, the University of California, Merced, has not yet had either the opportunity for or the necessity of self-review [4.1]. However, the ending of the first full year of operation provides an appropriate time for such reflection. It is recommended that the campus community engage in such an effort and that all stakeholder groups be involved in that reflection.

The campus has in place some of the committee structures for reflection and planning and has given thought to assessment. Attention might be paid to drawing together the best thinking on the campus about lessons learned in this first year and about the learning outcomes for students and the policies and practices of the campus. Particular focus could be placed on institutionalizing policies and practices for a growing campus so that the enthusiasm and student-success focus of the first year is continued in a sustainable and replicable manner. Care must be taken in the planning process to make certain that the student focus in a research university is maintained.

Due to the mission of the Merced campus to connect to the community in the Valley, consideration might be given to formal outreach mechanisms to involve business, community and educational partners (especially community colleges) from the Valley in planning and review.

The discussion of the CFRs under Standard 3 above provides evidence that UC Merced's planning processes define strategic objectives and align the efforts of the faculty and administration with them [4.2].

As UC Merced transitions from initial planning to reflection on its operations, its planning processes will be informed by the work of the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis [4.3]. The next stage of this review and the campus's response to the recommendations of this report will provide evidence of how attention to educational effectiveness will be sustained in their planning and how the data being collected are used through intentional inquiry to support planning for the future.

#### *Commitment to Learning and Improvement*

There was evidence in several places that the institution has devoted a good deal of thought to building effective assessment processes and feedback loops to support institutional improvement. Schematics were provided for assessment schemes, for example in Student Affairs and the general education system. Draft program review processes and the regular review and approval processes inherent in the committee structure of the University of California's Academic Senate also show evidence that the institution employs a deliberate approach to quality assurance [4.4].

The institution is already developing extensive data on student demographic characteristics [4.5]. However it is important to realize that the data, while relatively easy to collect, require interpretation and relation to institutional questions to be useful in stimulating improvement. Some of this data will provide indirect evidence of effectiveness. UC Merced should also develop methods that more directly analyze student work as evidence for improving learning. (As noted above, this is an area where the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning can facilitate good institutional practice.) Nevertheless, proposals to develop

extensive tracking of retention, time to degree, and graduation are admirable and, if appropriately used, should help in meeting requirements of Standard 4. There was some indication that the Schools are already using assumptions about retention rates in their planning for curriculum capacity and program development.

There were many posters around campus encouraging students to participate in NSSE, the National Survey of Student Engagement, in Spring 2006. This survey will provide self-report information about student experiences and engagement. Currently UC Merced plans to administer NSSE every two years, which enables continuing comparison of data with similar institutions. Proposed analyses of the data plus plans for reporting back to administration and faculty appear appropriate. Plans for developing surveys of alumni, employers, recruiters, etc. is commendable, albeit ambitious, and much depends on feedback procedures and usefulness of the data.

The conceptual plan for the assessment of General Education, provided during the visit, appears sound. The design is ambitious and needs more consideration if it is to serve as a practical guide to evaluating the outcomes of the general education courses. Nevertheless, it serves a useful purpose in calling attention to the elements that might be considered. The Educational Effectiveness Review should probe on how the proposed learning outcomes will be measured.

At the time that the institutional report was prepared, the first term of classes was still under way. At the time of the visit, only one term's classes had been evaluated under the draft policy for the evaluation of teaching provided in the report [4.6, 4.7]. There is a recommendation that "every course should be evaluated by students each time it is offered" with reasonable exclusions for new teachers and first-time offerings. The current policy regarding

teaching evaluation shows signs of having been drawn together from documents from other institutions. It deserves critical examination to develop a coherence appropriate for UC Merced. Despite commendable claims that evaluations “should be supportive and encouraging rather than investigative or punitive,” the tone is clearly toward accountability and investigation. For example, Deans and chairs are encouraged to meet with faculty “whose ratings are significantly below average.” Why not give equal encouragement to meeting with outstanding teachers?

The initial course evaluation forms adhere to the observable and objective. They appear more designed to “rate” the teacher than to report on the learning of students. It might be well to incorporate more NSSE-like items (i.e. self report on engagement in learning) in the form. This could have the advantage of encouraging students to reflect more on what they have learned rather than how “good” the teacher is. There is an extensive list (7 items) of aspects of teaching that “may be” evaluated in personnel review. Few seem to require knowledge of pedagogy/learning. The list has a rather old-fashioned lecture mode orientation about it—presentation, command of subject, etc. More attention to teaching methods such as promoting active learning, engaging students in problem solving, etc. would be appropriate.

Conversations during our visit suggested that the faculty is aware that there is room for improvement in both the procedures and content of the course evaluation forms. We heard that too little time was allowed for the administration of the forms, and there appears to be a general recognition that this process was rushed and needs revisiting. This is a task that should be undertaken before the next visit. Attention to how teaching was evaluated in the spring semester and the plans for the fall should be a high priority for the Educational Effectiveness Review visit. Attention should also be paid to clarifying the dual roles that these assessments will play as

indicators of educational effectiveness in courses and programs as well as evidence for effective teaching by individual faculty.

At this early stage of its development, it is not possible for UC Merced to provide evidence of how its alumni and their career outcomes will provide evidence in the assessment of the educational effectiveness of its programs [4.8]. However there are already indications in the drafts of program educational objectives and outcomes, particularly in those of the programs in the School of Engineering, that the faculty understand that this is an important issue. As the programs mature and gain experience, they will hopefully develop more fully articulated goals that are described with greater specificity and tailored to the particular learning expectations of the various programs and disciplines. The campus's investment in service learning programs may provide an early opportunity for feedback from external stakeholders in this period before UC Merced acquires a significant population of graduates.

### **SECTION III – Major Findings and Recommendations**

The team appreciates the opportunity to have seen UC Merced campus up close at this early stage of development. The visit was successful in its purposes of examining UC Merced's commitment to institutional capacity under the WASC standards. It was also a thought-provoking and inspiring experience for the members of the team. The visit was well organized and welcoming. All of the materials we asked for were provided and the individuals that we met with were helpfully candid and forthcoming in their responses to our questions. In this section we provide our major findings, commending some and expressing concerns about others. We have made recommendations that are focused on the near term, the six months that will elapse before the Educational Effectiveness Review visit. We have also made suggestions for the period between this Candidacy Review and the review for Initial Accreditation.

## **Commendations**

During the visit several points emerged in our view of UC Merced that we wish to commend as showing thoughtful engagement with the design of their programs and educational practice.

We believe UC Merced has thought well about its identity and the special role it can play in expanding higher education in the San Joaquin Valley. The signature research foci represented by the Sierra Nevada Research Institute and the World Cultures Institute are both areas in which UC Merced can quickly move to distinguish itself and give substance to the intended mission of the campus.

The focus on first-generation college students (and their parents), as well as on transfer students, is to be commended. Our conversations during the visit showed that this focus is real, uniformly shared across the campus, and that campus practices are seriously engaged with efforts to succeed with these groups of students. The fact that 33% of Merced's initial undergraduate cohort came from the central valley, that 16% are transfers, and that 51% are first generation college students suggests that they will be successful in achieving their goals. The increase in UC participation rates of central valley students in the first year, despite the challenges of recruiting students to a campus that did not really exist, should be acknowledged as a critical indicator of success.

The fact that 25% of the enrolled undergraduate students identify as Latino is also very encouraging. We commend the campus's status as a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and are encouraged that it appears that UC Merced will be the first UC campus to be federally acknowledged as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

The team was particularly impressed by the campus commitment to service learning and the thoughtfully designed program in the School of Engineering, which will not only serve the



educational goals of the school for its students but also provide a valued profile for the campus in the local community.

Members of the team were impressed with the materials provided by the Writing Program during the visit. These showed deep engagement from the beginning of the program in providing well designed and seriously assessed pedagogy in an area critical to the success of UC Merced students.

We commend UC Merced's proactive intervention during the first semester to assess the degree to which students were succeeding in the inaugural curriculum. That action and the intelligent responses to the results of that assessment that we heard about during the visit were evidence of a serious engagement with student learning and indicators of a culture of concern and adaptation.

The students we were able to speak with during this visit were enthusiastic about the quality and dedication of faculty and staff. They feel simultaneously supported and challenged.

We commend the strong, synergistic relation that has been built during the start-up of the campus between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Experience in other institutions suggests that there may be pressures that undermine that partnership as the campus matures. The team encourages the faculty and administration to work diligently to keep this collaboration strong. We see it as essential to maintaining the effective student-centered focus that has been built into the DNA of UC Merced.

Finally, we commend the community of Merced and residents of the Valley for their mighty efforts to bring UC to Merced and their philanthropic support that has been so important to this emerging campus. The campus leadership is mindful of the role that good relations with

the local community and ties to the region will play in the future success of the university's mission.

### **Concerns**

The leadership and faculty of UC Merced have had a unique opportunity to invent higher education at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We hope that they will not be so caught up in the chaos and exuberance of their inaugural year that they will have no time to learn the rich lessons implicit in their work. It is important that they consciously make time for reflection and learning, that they capture this fleeting opportunity for genuine creativity – and not just for inventiveness.

The team is concerned that the campus has not yet hired a Director for the envisioned Center of Teaching and Learning. It is already clear that this will be an important position. The faculty need and deserve support from this Center and the leadership that will assist them in developing and delivering effective courses and assessing student learning, especially during this formative period. We expect that the Director will be in place by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review visit and that the evidence of the Center's work will be manifest and stable by the time of review for initial accreditation.

The team strongly encourages the institution to devote some time to thinking about the questions that should be asked at this point in their development, and to not just scramble for *ad hoc* answers. Those questions would be the levers of creativity. UC Merced has shown a commendable willingness or intent to build assessment into many levels of the educational program. Much assessment is already under way. To turn this initial activity into meaningful inquiry that yields actionable lessons for improvement, the questions to which the assessments are supposed to give the answers must be articulated and clarified.

In addition, we are concerned that they establish a clear and effective “feedback loop” to ensure that the results of their many assessments are provided to the relevant individuals to inform action, which in turn would guide further assessment.

We noted some disagreements among faculty with regard to the appropriate semester unit equivalence of various types of courses. While perhaps not surprising on a new campus, it is a fundamental matter of academic policy with which UC Merced faculty must wrestle. In the end, they must articulate a general position for the campus that makes sense: that is reasonable and fair for students in the various disciplines, and, importantly, that is defensible beyond the walls of UC Merced. Their decision will be interpreted against the practice of the University of California and national research universities as well as in the accreditation process.

The initial year of operation has brought complex challenges of serving both freshman and junior transfer students in a limited but growing range of academic programs. We heard some students express a concern that in some programs there were not enough upper division courses available for the entering transfer students. We assume that the faculty will take steps next year to address the need to balance their offerings across the needs of their lower and upper division undergraduates as well as their graduate students.

The team notes that UC Merced has some significant challenges ahead. Given the fiscal constraints on the campus, success in managing enrollment—in yielding sufficient numbers of freshman, transfer, and graduate students—will be critical. It must insure that the growth in its physical plant will keep pace with the needs of new faculty and students. It must continue to design a residential life program and housing community that will enrich the culture of the campus and the educational experiences of its students. It must build an infrastructure and implement a support model in information technology that will meet the complex needs of a

research university with a critical mission in providing access to undergraduate education. Finally it will shortly undergo its first transition in leadership. Given the track record of the campus so far, we found no reason to believe that they are not up to these challenges. But they are daunting ones.

Finally, the team points out that everyone at UC Merced is wearing many hats and working at 150% of capacity. That is made possible by the adrenalin rush of designing and opening a new campus; but it is not sustainable. We recommend that they exercise their considerable creativity further to devise ways to preserve the remarkable level of involvement and innovation that they have already shown while bringing their Herculean workloads under control.

## **Recommendations**

Mindful of this last point, the team has shaped their recommendations to maximize the value we think that this review can have for the campus while minimizing the additional burden to the faculty and administration. We make three specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The director of the Center for Teaching and Learning should be appointed as soon as possible, in any event before the Educational Effectiveness Review. The Center should provide support and leadership as the institution fashions an evidence-based environment for supporting the faculty in their teaching and assessing the students' learning.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the leadership facilitate a conscious process for broad-based reflection and analysis of the experience of the first year of operation. We hope that they will consider a formal retreat, perhaps toward the end of the summer, with the objective of capturing the lessons of the first year to inform the work to be done in the coming year and

solidify a culture of engagement and intentional inquiry that will sustain UC Merced's educational mission.

Recommendation 3: Based upon the evidence examined in this review, the team finds that UC Merced meets the criteria for review under the standards at the level appropriate for this Capacity and Preparatory Review and recommends that WASC proceed with the Educational Effectiveness Review as scheduled.

#### **SECTION IV - Preparations for the Educational Effectiveness Report and Review**

UC Merced's report for this review describes its approach to the Educational Effectiveness Review. They list several foci for the next review, each of which seems appropriate based upon our experience in this visit. The discussion in the report suggests that UC Merced understands that the focus of the next stage of the review will be on how effectively the processes and programs being examined are actually working to ensure that their students are learning what the faculty intend for them to learn, and that the institution is intentionally inquiring about student learning.

In the six months that elapse between this visit and the next, there is little time for them to undertake additional studies beyond the ones that are underway. Above we recommended that the leadership facilitate a broadly based reflection and analysis that will at least capture the "to-do's" that will help make UC Merced successful in the future while still allowing the faculty and staff to catch their breath before beginning their second year.

We noted above our expectation that a director for the Center for Teaching and Learning should be appointed and the Center's work be effectively integrated into the work that is already underway. This Center, along with Institutional Planning and Analysis, are critical to providing

the conceptual and practical infrastructure for supporting the faculty and administration in their attention to educational effectiveness.

Finally our sense is that the students are eager for more transparency and engagement with the faculty and staff in participating in the development of UC Merced. We hope that the institution will find effective ways of incorporating student perspective into its summer reflections and ensure that the structure of the visit in the fall allows the team to engage with students, both directly and through evidence of their work and achievements.