

UC Merced WORLD CULTURES INSTITUTE

Prospectus

INTRODUCTION

The University of California will open its tenth campus, UC Merced, in fall 2005. UC Merced will enroll approximately 1,000 undergraduate and graduate students on opening day, growing to 25,000 students at build-out in about 2025. The initial three academic schools planned for UC Merced are: Engineering, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts; and the first professional school, a School of Management, will also be part of the early academic programming.

A World Cultures Institute (WCI) is proposed as an intellectual center for research that would particularly strengthen the humanities, social sciences and arts by bringing together faculty from all three schools for collaborative work. Through a broad range of research and public outreach programs, the WCI would be dedicated to the study and exchange of ideas about the range of peoples who have populated California, past and present, and the politics, economy, environment, arts, history, language and literatures of these cultures. The scope of WCI research is ambitious chronologically, geographically and methodologically. The WCI is expected to integrate methods and materials now found in California Studies, American Studies and International Studies with new computing and other technology-based tools. It is expected to bring comparative perspectives that range widely across time and space to bear on issues of local and topical importance. Research in the WCI is expected to take advantage of the array of heuristic tools and techniques from the humanities, arts and social sciences for analyzing culture, its products and discourses about it. The WCI is also expected to adapt to the study of world cultures such technological tools and approaches as GIS and informatics. The WCI would promote the development of an integrated, accurate understanding of the peoples of California as to place and location, nature and society, culture and identity, and cultural understandings of scientific issues.

What follows is a brief prospectus that outlines potential themes of importance within the WCI. However, the developmental role of the WCI in helping to shape and give distinction to the constituent disciplines at UC Merced will be in the hands of the faculty who found and affiliate with the WCI.

CALIFORNIA, MERCED AND THE PACIFIC RIM

Merced and the San Joaquin Valley are historically and today a crossroads for rich mixes of peoples from throughout the world. For millennia before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans developed an interdependent relationship with the Valley, foothills and mountain ecosystems. Today, the Valley is also part of a dynamic global economy, calling for a broad and deep understanding of many cultures and traditions. As a rapidly

evolving agricultural region, the Valley also offers a setting for understanding cultural differences in how environmental issues such as air and water quality are approached.

California's location and immigrant heritage have situated it within the Pacific Rim region as one of the greatest centers of trade, commerce and cultural exchange the world has ever known. The Pacific Region is defined by mobility and migration, and distinguished by traditions of cross-cultural cooperation, adaptation and hybridity that have resulted in new cultural practices and knowledge. The Pacific Region is an extraordinary combination of venerable local traditions and of new practices brought by immigrants from around the globe. The region is an unparalleled arena for the study of the changes rung in by rapid development of sophisticated technologies and for the study of the cultural effects of those changes.

The disciplines of the humanities, in collaboration with the arts, the social sciences and the sciences, have traditionally addressed the many topics that California and the Pacific Region offer for study. The history of migrations and diasporas must be complemented by studies of the impact of such changes on established peoples and resources. The ethical, cultural, linguistic and semiotic consequences of social and economic transformation require disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, literary and cultural studies, art, folklore and anthropology. In the Pacific Region alone, native peoples and their languages and cultures are so complex and diverse as to require the formal resources of a major university with strong commitments to such studies.

Therefore, some of the themes of particular significance to the World Cultures Institute would include:

1. Migration and displacement.
2. Histories and cultures of California and particularly the San Joaquin Valley.
3. Local, regional and national identities, boundaries and their crossings.
4. Economics, religion, the arts and ethnic identity in the formation of the individual and society.
5. Nature and culture: the relation of wilderness to the manmade landscape, with the role of technological invention affecting both.
6. Agriculture and society.
7. Evolving and competing images (artistic, literary, cinematic, architectural) of California.

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

In keeping with these themes, a great variety of projects might be affiliated or incorporated into the Institute, bringing a broader range of social science, artistic and scientific work into its humanities-oriented framework. The following are examples of possible affiliated projects.

Example 1: The theme of migration and displacement might find expression in the study of Japanese-Americans. Their unique experience would form the basis for a center within the Institute. From the Issei who endured significant hardships as they immigrated to the West Coast to the current generation of Gosei, the story of Japanese-Americans winds its way through the history of the Western United States. Japanese-Americans helped build the railroads and raise the produce, experienced discrimination and internment, yet nevertheless joined in fighting the wars, and now are helping develop the technologies that frame the 21st century. The artistic tradition of Japan as manifested through art and architecture in California could be another approach to understanding the Japanese-American experience. Sometimes dubbed the Silent Minority, the story of these Americans and their relationship to their heritage and their new home is still largely unexplored.

Example 2: The theme of histories and cultures of California might focus on the Hmong, the most recent wave of immigrants from Southeast Asia. The first generation of these communal peoples arrived in the United States well after the end of the Vietnam War. The culture clash experienced by this group as it tried to blend its agricultural and communal values with the technologically oriented and fast-paced culture of the United States offers many lessons for scholars from a range of disciplines. Because written language is a relatively new part of the Hmong culture, the arts have been a favored mode of expression and warrant attention in their own right.

Example 3: The theme of social, cultural and economic interconnections could be explored in depth through the rich tradition and complex multiple connections between California and Mexico. Cultural and economic ties link the San Joaquin Valley and Mexico in ways that can be effectively studied through public policy and international business studies as well as through the humanities, social sciences, arts and sciences. In addition, joint research between the UC Merced World Cultures Institute and the UC Merced Sierra Nevada Research Institute on effective management of the natural resources of air, water and land, plus land use and preservation, would address a set of shared issues with Mexico. Collaborative relationships between UC Merced and Mexican social scientists, scientists, engineers and humanists can bring to bear sophisticated cultural understanding to research on land-use practices and the wise use of natural resources.

Example 4: The theme of cultural distinctiveness and cultural interaction might be focused through the phenomenon of maintaining cultural identity over time while creating a common culture with other groups. The San Joaquin Valley is an outstanding setting for studying this phenomenon, as groups as varying as the Portuguese, Armenians and Punjabi have maintained a sense of group identity and cohesiveness over generations while contributing to the unique common culture of the Valley. Newer groups with an increasing presence in the region such as the Hmong and Southern Mexico's Zapatecos, Mixtecos and Triqui indigenous populations represent another fruitful focus for the study of economic and familial migration and settlement patterns.

Example 5: The theme of agriculture and society embodies the history of the Central Valley of California and encompasses many cultures. Agriculture today is characterized by rising rural-urban and global interdependencies for labor, capital, food production and consumption, and features dramatic rural community growth and social change.

California agriculture is unusual for its increasing diversity and scale and its emphasis on technologically advanced specialty crops produced for export. California agriculture has become the exemplar of this form of agriculture, and is a model followed in many other regions of the United States and abroad. The Valley's agricultural communities are an especially valuable resource for study of the intersection of high technology and human culture. The Central Valley, therefore, can provide a living laboratory for a new rural studies focus at UC Merced, one that would yield lessons not just of local but also of global significance.

BACKGROUND OF INITIAL PLANNING FOR THE WORLD CULTURES INSTITUTE: PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIONS AND OTHER RESOURCES

The prospectus above is the result of advice and discussion that involved not only a range of UC faculty but also individuals in cultural and educational institutions outside UC. Research planning that would particularly strengthen the social sciences, humanities and arts began with discussions by two faculty groups. The first group consisted of directors of Multi-campus Research Units (MRUs) in the arts, humanities and social sciences who envisioned a set of key research areas -- immigration, migration, Mexico, California studies, new rural communities, business/agribusiness, policy studies, education, K-12 outreach and world cultures. A second group of distinguished faculty from inside and outside UC participated in two UC Merced Human Sciences Workshops. Participants at those workshops urged UC Merced to pursue discussions that might lead to a signature research organization for the new campus.

Discussions arising from this recommendation were led by UC faculty, joined by representative faculty from California State University and California Community College campuses in the San Joaquin Valley, Valley K-12 representatives and interested cultural institutions that included the Oakland Museum of California, UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, the Getty Museum Research Center, the Huntington Library, Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks, and the Multicultural Arts Center and County Historical Museum in Merced. This remarkable coalition represented a commitment to a UC Merced research center that not only conducts collaborative research of the highest quality, but also contributes to making that research accessible to the public. Their thinking and advice forms the conceptual framework for the World Cultures Institute, as described above. It also embodies a commitment to collaboration and partnership that should be a hallmark of the WCI.

A World Cultures Institute at UC Merced would be defined by collaborations with other universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, national parks, cultural institutions and, importantly, the UC multi-campus research units, whose expertise would be integrated into the enterprise to create a broad and diverse set of disciplinary interests and research foci. The WCI would also collaborate on projects of mutual interest with the Sierra

Nevada Research Institute and other UC Merced institutes as they are formed. The new Institute should clearly draw from and strengthen these partnerships as it builds a strong research identity. Potential UC multi-campus research partners include:

- Humanities Research Institute
- Pacific Rim Research Program
- Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS)
- Linguistic Minority Research Institute
- Institute for Research in the Arts
- Institute for Global Conflict and Cooperation
- Committee on Latino Research
- California Policy Research Center

In addition, a strong beginning has been made in building relationships with San Joaquin Valley schools, higher education institutions and cultural organizations. Cultural resources staff members at Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks (with which UC Merced has a Memorandum of Understanding for research and education) have expressed a strong interest in pursuing research of mutual interest and benefit. More recently, the Clark Museum of Asian Art in Hanford, California, has been in discussion with UC Merced on a formal affiliation. The Museum's remarkable collection of Japanese art and supporting scholarly facilities would be a resource for WCI scholars who focus on the role of Japan in the Pacific region. Yet another expression of interest in an affiliation has come from Heyday Books in Berkeley, which has featured the San Joaquin Valley and Sierra Nevada in a range of publications, particularly in its Great Valley Books imprint series.