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Campus' Ties with Community Continue to Increase

UC Merced's multidisciplinary research arm continues to grow and address issues that challenge the San Joaquin Valley, the state and the world

MERCED, Calif. — The bond between the San Joaquin Valley and the University of California, Merced, continues to strengthen.

This past year, UC Merced's ongoing research endeavors produced new knowledge that serves the San Joaquin Valley's community and economy, while the university's burgeoning athletics program became another source of pride for the community.

Additionally, the campus' continued development serves as major source of economic investment during a difficult economy.

"UC Merced was built on the promise to improve lives and bring economic prosperity to the San Joaquin Valley," Chancellor Dorothy Leland said. "Despite unprecedented economic challenges, this young and innovative campus has made substantial progress toward these goals, and it is poised to continue on this path through 2012."

Quick Facts

- UC Merced professors have been conducting research that addresses important issues facing the San Joaquin Valley.
- UC Merced's athletics program took a major step forward when it joined the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.
- The campus is poised for more growth and success in the coming year.

Research Vital to the Valley

The campus' research takes many forms and shapes, from engineering to natural sciences to literature. In some cases, the research directly involves issues confronting the San Joaquin Valley.

UC Merced's Sierra Nevada Research Institute continues to study how the Sierra and the San Joaquin Valley are affected by climate change, population growth, pollution and the scarcity of natural resources. Researchers with the institute were [awarded](#) a \$2 million grant this year from the National Science Foundation to expand on a prototype system that uses a network of wireless sensors to track snowpack depth, water storage in soil, stream flow, and water use by vegetation in the Sierra. This information is key to efficient usage of water, a scarce resource that is vital for the San Joaquin Valley's agricultural industries.

Additionally, Roger Bales, a professor and the institute's director, was part of a research team that [proposed](#) thinning forests to historical conditions in order to enhance water runoff from the mountains.

Another way the campus' research is benefitting the community is through the focus on community-engaged scholarship. The Chancellor's Task Force on Community Engaged Scholarship was awarded a grant from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative to strengthen the collaboration between the campus and community.

As part of the collaboration, the task force organized a conference on campus that drew about 180 people who were interested in learning about successful programs that could be used to improve the lives of San Joaquin Valley youth.

Athletics Build Community Pride

Athletics at UC Merced took a major step forward in April, with the campus gaining membership in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).

With the approval, UC Merced's Golden Bobcats began playing in the NAIA's [California Pacific Conference](#) in Fall 2011 in four sports: men's basketball, women's volleyball and men's and women's cross country. Plans for future sports include women's basketball and either men's or women's soccer to begin in Fall 2012 and the other soccer team in Fall 2013.

David Dunham, the campus' director of recreation and athletics, said with the campus projected to eventually grow to a student enrollment of 25,000, UC Merced's goal remains to compete at the NCAA Division II level. UC Merced's cross country and women's volleyball teams have already completed their inaugural seasons and are recruiting talented athletes from throughout the Valley. The men's basketball team has been making strides against strong nonconference opponents and will begin its first Cal Pac season on Jan. 7.

Campus Continues Growth

With nearly 5,200 students, the campus' footprint is growing to accommodate more students and provide additional services. The campus has three construction projects underway and another major one set to begin next year.

Near the entrance to campus, two new student housing buildings are under construction. Set to open in fall of 2013, they'll have 364 built-in beds and will be part of The Summits complex. Also, a second building is being added to the Joseph Edward Gallo Recreation and Wellness Center. The addition will provide much-needed recreation space and meeting rooms for students. Both buildings are being constructed with non-state dollars.

In 2012, construction is scheduled to begin on Science and Engineering Building 2, which will add important laboratory space for innovative research and more classrooms. Also, a student services building will be built to provide space for staff members who help students in their academic career.

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UC Merced opened Sept. 5, 2005, as the 10th campus in the University of California system and the first American research university of the 21st century. The campus significantly expands access to the UC system for students throughout the state, with a special mission to increase college-going rates among students in the San Joaquin Valley. It also serves as a major base of advanced research and as a stimulus to economic growth and diversification throughout the region. Situated near Yosemite National Park, the university is expected to grow rapidly, topping out at about 25,000 students within 30 years.