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UC Merced and Fresno Unified Leverage Resources to Increase Rate of Valley Grads Going to College

Partnership helps high school students realize their dream of postsecondary education

MERCED, Calif. — The Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) at the University of California, Merced, has teamed up with the Fresno Unified School District to support an important mission — helping more high school students graduate and get accepted to college.

Through a unique partnership, full-time coordinators from the CEP will work with high school counseling teams at every Fresno Unified high school in an effort to increase college-going rates.

“We are committed to helping students achieve access to higher education and to become leaders in their communities,” UC Merced Chancellor Dorothy Leland said. “Preparing students for success in college is an extension of our mission to serve the region.”

Pairing high school counselors with CEP academic coordinators will enable the high schools to further develop activities to promote a college-going culture in the fourth-

Quick Facts

- UC Merced and Fresno Unified School District are partnering to help better prepare students to graduate from high school and get into college.
- Coordinators from UC Merced’s Center for Educational Partnerships will work with students at each high school in the district to provide academic, college and financial aid counseling.
- The partnership is made possible through state, federal and private funding sources, including a recent \$1.15 million Talent Search grant from the Department of Education.

largest school district in California, which serves more than 73,000 students. The collaboration is intended to increase the number of low-income and first-generation students who complete high school and enroll in and complete a postsecondary education, with a goal of increasing the college-going rate in the Fresno Unified district from 22 to 40 percent.

“We are truly fortunate to have this level of UC presence on our high school campuses, the level of which we have not seen before,” FUSD Superintendent Michael E. Hanson said. “Our students stand to benefit greatly from this significant partnership.”

The partnership will enable CEP coordinators to guide students with academic, financial aid and college counseling, broadening the depth of services on-site counselors can provide. Coordinators will help students complete college admissions applications, sign up and prepare for college entrance exams and provide financial aid information. They will also assist reentry students who want to get back on track to pursue postsecondary education.

One expected benefit of the partnership is immersing UC Merced’s CEP coordinators in the same equity and access philosophy training that Fresno Unified has implemented for decades, ensuring that upon graduation, students will have the greatest number of opportunities available to them.

Another potential outcome is creating a pipeline for high school counselors.

“Studies show that high school is the ideal time to generate awareness and interest in career fields,” said Orquidea Largo, interim director for the CEP. “School counselors are among the top resources that students turn to when seeking advice about choosing their career, so it seems natural that providing more guidance support may ultimately lead to recruiting students into the counseling pipeline.”

The partnership with UC Merced bolsters Fresno Unified’s existing collaborations with California State University, Fresno, and Fresno Pacific University, which also exist to increase the number of students applying for and being admitted to college.

State, federal and private funding have made the partnership between UC Merced and Fresno Unified a reality.

The CEP was recently awarded \$3.4 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Education, and \$1.15 million will be directed to its Talent Search program with two Fresno Unified School District high schools — Fresno and Roosevelt. The five-year grants are expected to support about 1,500 students per year throughout the Valley.

Approximately 600 students are benefiting from the first four-year grant CEP received from the Department of Education in 2006 to launch the Talent Search program at Delhi, Le Grand, Orestimba, El Diamante, Strathmore and Corcoran high schools.

Talent Search participants must meet federal eligibility guidelines, which include being a citizen or national of the U.S., a permanent resident of the U. S., and being considered low-income and a potential first-generation high school student (neither parent completed a bachelor's degree).

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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.