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UC Research Resource Center to Serve San Joaquin Valley

New center aims to improve the lives of the San Joaquin Valley's most underserved residents by empowering them to engage in research that supports their community's issues

MERCED, Calif. — An innovative community-university partnership to empower San Joaquin Valley residents to analyze and communicate their most pressing challenges launches in Fresno this month.

The Participatory Action Research Resource Center (PARRC) will strengthen residents' skills in using research to improve their lives. It will also promote research collaborations between the University of California and other higher education institutions and communities.

UC Merced Professor [Robin DeLugan](#), UC Davis Professor Jonathan London and Rey León, director of the San Joaquin Valley Latino Environmental Advancement Project ([Valley LEAP](#)), are collaborating to establish and grow the center.

"The PARRC will highlight the value of research for grassroots and community-based problem-solving efforts," said DeLugan, a leader in community-engaged scholarship at

Quick Facts

- The Participatory Action Research Resource Center (PARRC) will open Feb. 14 in Fresno.
- The center builds on a five-year effort to create a strong relationship between higher education and the community.
- The center will train community members to improve the San Joaquin Valley through asking and answering strategic questions about their lives.

UC Merced. "Accordingly, we hope it will motivate new community-university research collaborations."

León, a leading environmental justice advocate in the region, said the center fills an important void within the San Joaquin Valley.

"This provides an awesome popular education opportunity for the Latino community, farmworkers and low-income families to effectively engage with government leaders and to improve the quality of life for everyone," León said. "The goal is to achieve equity."

León, DeLugan and London are also founding members of Community University Research and Action for Justice (CURAJ), a network of academic and community leaders from throughout the region. CURAJ was awarded last year a nearly \$15,000 grant to establish the center from the new [UC Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California](#).

The researchers want the center to become a regional resource that can meld research and action for social justice with meaningful community engagement to improve the lives of the San Joaquin Valley's most underserved populations in part by empowering community residents to engage in research that supports their community's issues.

"This new center responds to the drive of the region's most vulnerable residents to increase their power through building knowledge and to become critical consumers and also producers of research," said London, who also directs the UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

A key focus of the center is teaching community members how to ask probing questions and identify important issues at the intersection of health and the environment.

Some initial research topics will include: youth-led action research with rural youth in Huron, a small city near Fresno; community-based environmental health workers; and community-based environmental justice research.

The grand opening of the PARRC will be from 3 to 5 p.m. Feb. 14 at the center, 2502 Merced St. in Fresno. A reception will follow. The organizers said everyone interested

in this center is welcome to come and celebrate this valuable university-community partnership.

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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.