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May 12, 2012

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UC Merced Celebrates Largest Graduating Class

The university honors more than 700 graduates as former Lt. Gov. and campus advocate Cruz Bustamante addresses an estimated crowd of 7,700 at Commencement 2012

MERCED, Calif. — A joyous throng of 776 degree candidates of the University of California, Merced, today marched through the Beginnings Sculpture and onto the campus' South Bowl to receive their prized degrees, marking the culmination of the newest UC's seventh academic year.

UC Merced celebrated its largest graduating class — 81 percent larger than last year's graduating class of 428 — with some 7,000 family members and friends present. The total number of UC Merced students with degrees is just above 2,000.

Chancellor [Dorothy Leland](#), presiding over her first UC Merced [commencement](#) since taking over on July 1, 2011, praised this year's class for their impressive accomplishments.

"The graduation class of 2012 will leave UC Merced as the beneficiaries of an education from one of the most highly regarded universities in the world — the great University of California, with its 10 distinctive campuses, both young and old," Leland said. "The degrees that we will confer tonight were earned through long hours of hard work, determination and persistence. You should be proud — and you clearly are — of your accomplishments."

Quick Facts

- Today (May 12), UC Merced held its seventh commencement exercise with its largest class to date.
- The campus conferred 750 bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees and 20 doctorate degrees.
- Former California Lt. Gov. and campus advocate Cruz Bustamante inspired the Class of 2012 with his keynote address.

Leland highlighted several students who she said exemplify the spirit and achievements of this year's graduates, including mechanical engineering major Janna Rodriguez.

"Janna not only launched a successful business as a UC Merced student; she also excelled in the classroom," Leland said. "This paid off big time. Thanks a prestigious Ford Fellowship, Janna will soon be attending graduate school at Stanford. Janna's achievements exemplify the entrepreneurial spirit and drive shared by many UC Merced graduates."

During his time at UC Merced, earth systems science major [Jesse Anaya](#) has earned acceptance into study programs at several of our nation's most prestigious academic institutions, including Harvard's Latino Leadership Program and Princeton's Public Policy and International Affairs Program.

"Jesse will soon add another feather to his hat when he joins Duke University as a Marine Laboratory Undergraduate Fellow," Leland said. "Jesse's accomplishments exemplify the 'can-do,' 'make-it-happen' and 'push-to-excel' traits of so many UC Merced students that we honor tonight."

Former California Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, who was at one time the nation's highest-ranking Latino elected official, delivered the commencement address to UC Merced's Class of 2012.

"Today, a goal was reached. One that was not easy to obtain," Bustamante said. "One that is not available to those without the ability to dream and the discipline to pursue an arduous course of action."

Bustamante urged the graduates to consider public service in their future aspirations.

"It is essential to a life; fulfilled public service is a great and noble calling," Bustamante said. "It is a service provided to a government by its citizens. Services so essential that it makes a moral statement on the reasons to provide it and it extends essential human rights for those who receive it."

Bustamante was awarded the Chancellor's Medal for his commitment to the campus' early planning and construction.

This year, UC Merced bestowed 750 bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees and 20 doctorate degrees. The undergraduates hail from 41 counties in California, eight other states and one other country — Malaysia.

Grecia Sanchez, a Merced native who majored in sociology and plans to attend law school, represented the Class of 2012 as student speaker. She shared a story about gaining perspective and encouraged her classmates to remain humble and appreciate the opportunities they have been given.

"Our graduating class is made up of innovators, hardworking individuals who are building a strong foundation for future students by embracing diversity and appreciation for what is unique," Sanchez said. "We might not be as established as our sister campuses yet, but we took what others expected to be an ordinary college experience and turned it into something extraordinary."

Since opening in 2005 with an inaugural class of 875 students, UC Merced has grown rapidly, with enrollment now up to 5,200 students. The campus has invested more than \$700 million in the San Joaquin Valley since limited operations began in 2000. Grants and awards totaling more than \$100 million have been received by UC Merced faculty to support critical research into the most challenging issues facing the Valley, the state and the world. Despite a sluggish state economy, student demand continues to grow, with enrollment expected to reach approximately 5,600 students this fall.

To read remarks by speakers at UC Merced's 2012 commencement:

- [UC Merced Chancellor Dorothy Leland](#)
- [Grecia Sanchez, Class of 2012](#)

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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.