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Aug. 23, 2012

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## **Academic Year Begins with Sharper Focus on Emerging Fields of Excellence, Graduate Programs and Flexible Growth**

*Total enrollment reaches new high as record numbers of freshmen, graduate students choose to matriculate at newest UC campus*

MERCED, Calif. — The University of California, Merced, begins its eighth academic year today with record enrollment of approximately 5,600 students, a 23 percent increase in graduate-student enrollment and 26 newly hired faculty members to teach and conduct advanced research that may someday change the world.

Such signs of progress, despite one of the most challenging economic climates in decades, instill great pride and satisfaction in the 1,200 faculty and staff members\* at the University of California's newest campus, conceived more than 20 years ago to bring the UC formula for intellectual and economic contribution to the San Joaquin Valley, the fastest-growing region in the state.

But for Chancellor Dorothy Leland, now entering her second year at the helm, the campus's most important and rewarding work is just beginning.

### **Quick Facts**

- UC Merced begins its eighth academic year with more than 5,600 students.
- Graduate student enrollment has increased by 23 percent.
- A campus-wide initiative will be launched this fall that will help define the university's emerging strengths and sharpen its focus on the campus's research competitiveness.

"We're delighted with our initial growth, the caliber of our students, faculty and staff, and the overall quality institution that's rising here in the heart of the Valley," she said. "Now it's time to take the next step – identifying and strengthening our most promising areas of academic and research excellence in order to make the greatest long-term contribution to the region, the state and the world.

"We're very excited to get started on this phase of our development."

To expedite the process, Leland said a campus-wide initiative will be launched this fall that will help define the university's emerging strengths and sharpen its focus on the campus's research competitiveness. The recent hiring of former National Science Foundation executive Thomas W. Peterson as the university's new provost, announced last week, and the influx of new faculty members from leading universities around the country will add considerable depth and perspective to the planning exercise she envisions.

Aggressive faculty hiring this year boosts the total size of the UC Merced ladder-rank faculty to more than 150, compared with just 60 when the campus opened in 2005. Additions in all three schools – Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts – reflect areas of rapid enrollment growth, greatest potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, research potential and other factors aligned with the university's strategic academic vision and long-term mission.

Similarly, the large increase in graduate-student enrollment supports the university's ambition to rank among the top public research universities in the country. Top-quality graduate programs attract significant research funding from a variety of government and private sources and bring distinction to the institution and the researchers whose breakthrough discoveries and inventions enable societal progress.

"UC Merced has already established a number of graduate programs that show enormous potential and will scale successfully as we grow," Leland said. "The sharp increase in graduate enrollment this year will accelerate this process and help build capacity in selected research areas where important future contributions can be anticipated."

With levels of state funding for higher education likely to remain uncertain for some time, the university is also stepping up efforts this year to secure private funding and

find imaginative, cost-effective ways to sustain its rapid growth and development. The recent hiring of the Urban Land Institute to develop alternative growth scenarios for the campus, which expects to reach 10,000 students within eight to 10 years, illustrates the flexibility of campus officials to try new approaches while budgets remain tight.

UC Merced's incoming freshman class – also a record at nearly 1,500 students – hails from all parts of the state and is the university's most diverse, with Hispanic students alone representing approximately 47 percent of this year's freshmen.

Two new students, Katherine Chwa, of Arcadia, and Carina Garcia, of Gilroy, sat in the Dr. Lakireddy Auditorium waiting for a presentation to begin about how to succeed in college. Both were wearing their "Let the Journey Begin" shirts.

The two are living together in a residence hall and said they appreciate the campus's intimate atmosphere, which will allow them to work closely with faculty members.

"You can actually interact with the professors," Garcia said. "You get more help and get to learn more things than being in a class with 400 people."

Cognitive science Professor Anne S. Warlaumont is among the new faculty members hired this year. She studies speech development, the evolution of communication, vocal motor control and neural networks.

"UC Merced has already earned a great reputation in the cognitive science community," Warlaumont said. "I was enticed by the friendliness and productivity of the Cognitive and Information Sciences group, with its strengths in neural modeling, dynamical systems and language, and a record of recruiting really strong students. I also thought it would be cool to join a brand new campus, but at the same time be part of the well-established UC system."

*\*Not including student employees.*

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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.*