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CONTACT:

Scott Hernandez-Jason, University Communications

Office: 209-228-4408 | Cell: 209-756-2368 | Email: shernandez-jason@ucmerced.edu

Campus Humanities Center to Expand Mission with Private Gift

The UC Merced Center for the Humanities will explore a thematic topic using four different lenses — literature, digital technology, creative arts and public humanities.

MERCED, Calif. — With the help of a \$2 million gift, UC Merced's humanities center will support scholars in conducting interdisciplinary research, engaging the public and addressing issues critical to the San Joaquin Valley and California.

In keeping with developing an innovative 21st century learning environment, UC Merced has re-envisioned a humanities center's role within a university. The UC Merced Center for the Humanities will serve both the campus and the San Joaquin Valley community, and be structured so its interdisciplinary thematic focus changes every two years to respond to the concerns of the campus and region.

Faculty members will select the first theme this semester.

"Humanities at their core explore the human condition, and play a crucial role in preparing students for the challenges of citizenship," said Dean Mark Aldenderfer of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. "This center will prepare students,

Quick Facts

- UC Merced's Center for the Humanities will support research, create discussions about important topics and prepare students for careers in and out of academia.
- The center will explore a different theme every year using four different lenses.
- The private \$2 million gift is a testament to the important role humanities play in a global society.

expand research and, perhaps most importantly, serve as another link between the campus and San Joaquin Valley."

The generous private support of this center is a testament to the humanities' crucial role in preparing students for the challenges of social responsibility, both at home and in a global society. More than ever, California, the nation and the world need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, values and histories of other cultures.

"Universities increasingly need the support of private donors to fulfill their mission," Chancellor Dorothy Leland said. "This generous gift enables UC Merced to build distinctive approaches to connecting students to the humanities and the humanities to the broader society."

UC Merced's humanities center's theme will be studied through four different lenses — literature, digital, creative arts and public humanities.

"With this gift, we have the opportunity to create a center with an innovative structure that will support intellectual creativity among faculty and graduate students, as well as reach out to the San Joaquin Valley community," said history Professor Susan Amussen. "The work of this center will have enormous significance both in the near term and for many years to come."

Amussen will serve as director for the UC Merced Center for the Humanities, which will take the place of the Center for the Research on the Humanities and Arts. The new name reflects the center's expanded mission. Amussen also oversaw the Center for Research on the Humanities and Arts.

The center will fund research projects, create interdisciplinary collaborations, invite guest speakers, support seminars and assist graduate students who want to take their skills into new areas, such as research firms, economic "think tanks" and other organizations that will help move the state and nation forward. Additionally, the center will develop programs that reach out to the community.

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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.