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UC Merced Sends Off Class of 2013 with Twin Ceremonies

*More than 1,000 students will turn their tassels at commencement this weekend;
most graduates in the campus's history*

MERCED, Calif. — This year isn't the first time Maxine Umeh-Garcia has walked across the commencement stage at the University of California, Merced. She was part of the campus's graduating class in 2010.

But this time will be markedly different. Umeh-Garcia is receiving a master's degree in quantitative and systems biology, and she will represent the Class of 2013 at one of two commencement ceremonies scheduled for May 18 and 19.

This year's conferral of degrees marks a significant increase for the university as 1,008 graduates are expected to participate in the campus's eighth [commencement](#) exercises — the most degrees awarded in its history and 48 percent more than last year.

This year, UC Merced is expected to bestow 957 bachelor's degrees, 10 master's degrees and 41 doctorate degrees compared to 641 bachelor's degrees, 23 master's degrees and 19 doctorate degrees in 2012.

Quick Facts

- UC Merced will hold two commencement ceremonies on May 18 and 19, honoring more than 1,000 candidates.
- The campus is expected to confer 957 bachelor's degrees, 10 master's degrees and 41 doctorate degrees.
- Retired astronaut José M. Hernández and acclaimed author David Mas Masumoto will deliver keynote addresses to the Class of 2013.

Chancellor Dorothy Leland, who presides over her second commencement at UC Merced, shares in the excitement of the weekend's festivities.

"We are extraordinarily proud of our graduates and their accomplishments," Leland said. "So many of them are the first to graduate from college in their families and they hold great promise as they go out and engage in the world as UC Merced alumni."

As a result of growth, this year marks the first time the university will hold two ceremonies. Each ceremony will start with a procession from the Beginnings Sculpture — a campus tradition — down Scholars Lane Bridge to the ceremony site.

Retired NASA astronaut José M. Hernández will speak to candidates in the schools of Natural Sciences and Engineering on May 18, and award-winning author David Mas Masumoto will speak to candidates from the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts on May 19. Both events begin at 9 a.m. in the South Bowl on campus.

Since joining the campus in 2007 as a transfer student, Umeh-Garcia has watched the university blossom first-hand.

"Look at where we started and where we are now in just eight years," said Umeh-Garcia, who is from Sacramento and initially received her bachelor's degree in biological sciences. "And we plan on continuing to grow and better every aspect of our school."

While obtaining her master's, Umeh-Garcia worked in Professor Michael Cleary's lab studying nervous system development and stem cell biology. Next fall, she is heading to UC Davis to earn a doctorate in biochemistry, molecular, cellular and developmental biology. She said her experiences as an undergraduate encouraged her to pursue her graduate education at UC Merced.

"Students are given a one-of-a-kind experience that they wouldn't be able to get anywhere else," Umeh-Garcia said. "UC Merced is known for small class sizes, one-on-one time with professors, and an entire staff and faculty team that genuinely cares about your future and does everything they can to help you succeed."

This year's graduates hail from 42 counties in California, four other states and four other countries — China, India, and Japan and Malay.

Brian Grauman, a psychology major from San Jose who plans to attend law school, will represent the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts as student speaker at Sunday's ceremony.

"Every student here has the chance to impact the school, whether by participating in student government and making their voice heard, by working in a research lab in their field of interest, or by establishing ties with the community through service and involvement," said Grauman, who finished his degree requirements in three years. "Being selected to serve as the student speaker at commencement is a great honor."

Two graduates will sing the national anthem: Valeria Aguirre, a literature and cultures major from Woodlake at the Saturday ceremony and Arianne Barreras, a biological sciences major from San Francisco major, at the Sunday ceremony.

More information about commencement is available [online](#).

[View Class of 2013 videos.](#)

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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. Situated near Yosemite National Park, 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, a model of sustainable design and construction, and a stimulus to economic growth and diversification throughout the region.