COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH (COR)
ANNUAL REPORT
AY 2025-2026

To the Merced Division of the Academic Senate:

During the 2025-2026 academic year, the Committee on Research (CoR) held a total of 13 meetings in order to conduct business with respect to its duties as outlined in UC Merced's Academic Senate II.IV.5. Beyond these in-person meetings, some additional business was completed via electronic mail discussions.

Areas of Focus

Academic Senate Annual Faculty Research Grants Program
This academic year, CoR utilized funds from the Academic Senate's portion of the first and second MacKenzie Scott campus gift for the annual Senate faculty grants program. (See previous CoR annual reports for additional context.) Following several rounds of consultation between the Senate and administration, and memos between the Senate and the Chancellor, the grants program also benefitted from an additional infusion of funds provided by Vice Chancellor for Research (VCR) Wilson from the Office of Research and Economic Development's (ORED) share of the second MacKenzie Scott campus gift. The AY 25-26 call for proposals was electronically issued to all Academic Senate faculty members on February 27, 2026 with a submission deadline of March 30, 2026. Faculty were notified with award letters on April 15 and May 4, 2026. CoR received a record number of proposals. The committee funded 40 proposals from the 57 received: 10 from SoE, 14 from SNS, and 16 from SSHA.

MacKenzie Scott Campus Gift Funds

Throughout the academic year, CoR discussed various ways to allocate the campus MacKenzie Scott funds. In spring 2026, the CoR chair met with VCR Wilson, VC for Enrollment Hagg, and Vice Provost & Dean of Undergraduate Education Bergerson to discuss the idea of allocating MacKenzie Scott funds for undergraduate research scholarships to either boost enrollment or increase retention. CoR members generally viewed the idea positively, with some questions about the amount of funding covering PIs' laboratory expenses.

In spring 2026, the CoR chair consulted with the school deans and the Vice Provost & Dean of Graduate Education (VPDGE) on future partnerships with the Senate on the allocation of MacKenzie Scott gift funds to avoid duplicate efforts.

Proposal to rename and merge the Organized Research Unit (ORU) Sierra Nevada Research Institute (SNRI) with the Campus Climate Institute

CoR received an initial proposal in spring 2025 and responded to SNRI with a specific template to be resubmitted to the Senate in AY 26-27. (See last year's CoR annual report for more context.) In fall 2025, the Senate followed up with SNRI with instructions on resubmission.

In spring 2026, the Senate received a proposal to rename SNRI and integrate the campus Climate Institute and affiliated centers under a unified "UC Merced Earth Institute." As lead reviewer, CoR reviewed the proposal together with input from Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation (CAPRA) and the Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication (LASC). CoR found the proposal to be strong overall but identified several areas where clarification and strengthening were warranted prior to full endorsement. SNRI then submitted a revised proposal which CoR reviewed and agreed was mostly responsive to previous feedback. CoR recommended approval of the SNRI name change and merger.

Faculty Survey on NIH Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

In April 2025, NIH announced it is prioritizing human-focused research and reducing animal use in research. All new Notices of Funding Opportunity that relate to animal model systems (NOFOs) must now also support human-focused approaches such as clinical trials, real world data, or new approach methods. In fall 2025, CoR collaborated with ORED on a survey of all Senate faculty: "New Alternative Methodologies (NAMs): Survey of Needs and Inventory at UC Merced." The survey results were shared with Divisional Council and the administration.

Indirect Cost Return (IDCR) Policy Revisions

A faculty member raised an issue with CoR about the campus IDCR policy, specifically about the amount of funding going back to the PI on large grants involving ORUs. The Senate chair and CoR chair met with VC/CFO Schnier who agreed that the policy would benefit from revisions. It was agreed that CoR and CAPRA would collaborate on the proposed revisions.

On March 31, 2026, CoR consulted with the faculty member who initially raised the issue together with ORU directors to obtain their feedback. Following that meeting, CoR members agreed that CoR will send a memo to CAPRA with recommended revisions to the IDCR policy. CAPRA would then review and respond to the memo as time permits in the current semester or in fall 2026. CoR and CAPRA's final recommended revisions to the IDCR policy would then be submitted to Divisional Council for review in fall 2026.

CoR submitted its proposed IDCR policy revisions to CAPRA on May 22, 2026.

Subscriptions Reimbursement
In May 2026, CoR submitted a memo to Divisional Council outlining a potential bottleneck in the research process at UC Merced, related to the implementation of a recent UCOP policy on software subscriptions. In the memo, CoR requested that Divisional Council share CoR's concerns with VC/CFO Schnier. Divisional Council will review CoR's memo in fall 2026.

Senate Awards for Distinguished and Early Career Research
Each year, CoR is responsible for the review of nominations for the annual Academic Senate awards for Distinguished Research (tenured) and Distinguished Early Career Research (untenured). In order to execute this duty, CoR formed two subcommittees, one for each award, and these subcommittees each selected one nominated individual for receipt of the corresponding award. The awardees were recognized at the May 1, 2026 Meeting of the Division of the Academic Senate.

Representation on Campus Committees
CoR had representation on the Joint Administrative/Senate AI Advisory Council, Campus Strategic Plan Updates Committee, Space Study Interview Groups, and the Periodic Review Oversight Committee.

Consultation

Consultation with VCR
Throughout the academic year, CoR members benefited from updates given by ex-officio committee member, VCR Wilson. The major topics included updates from the federal government and the impact on UC Merced faculty, staffing updates from ORED, updates on the processes of SPO/CGA, and allocating funds from the MacKenzie Scott campus gift. ORED also shared with CoR the results from ORED's summer 2026 survey of faculty and staff regarding SPO.

Consultation with the EVC/Provost
CoR consulted with the EVC/Provost on various issues related to the campus research mission.

Consultation with SPO
CoR consulted with the new SPO Executive Director.

Consultation with VPDGE Hratchian
CoR consulted with the VPDGE on various issues pertaining to graduate student funding.

Consultation with CAPRA Chair Beman
CoR consulted with CAPRA Chair Beman on proposed revisions to the IDCR policy.

University Committee on Research Policy Updates
The CoR Chair represented UC Merced on the systemwide University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP). He kept the CoR membership informed of UCORP's main topics of discussion throughout the academic year, including federal funding updates and their impact on the UC system,

IDCR rates, state budget, consultation with Interim Director of Innovation Transfer & Entrepreneurship Kimberly Jones-Ross on patents and federal reporting, discussion about requested revisions to The California Master Plan for Higher Education to allow CSUs to confer PhDs, and updates on Senate Bill 895 (Wiener) - California Science and Health Research Bond Act which, at the time of this writing, is still being formalized to appear on the November 2026. ballot.

Campus Review Items

- COR reviewed and commented on:
    - PROC's Proposal for the Periodic Review of Administrative Functions
    - UCM Interim Policy on Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct
    - Generative AI Educational Policy

Systemwide Review Items

- COR reviewed and commented on:
    - Interim report of the Academic Senate Task Force on UC Adaptation to Disruptions
    - Presidential Policy on Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct (UC Research Misconduct Policy)
    - Presidential Policy on Anatomical Donation Program and Anatomical Materials

Respectfully submitted:

COR members:
Ramendra Saha, Chair, SNS, UCORP representative
Rowena Gray, Vice Chair, SSHA (PROC representative)
Brad LeVeck, SSHA
Michael Thompson, SNS
Dustin Kleckner, SNS (Spring 2026)
Eva de Alba, SoE
Sachin Goyal, SoE
Jennifer Lu, SoE
Martin Hagger, SSHA
Beth Scaffidi, SSHA (Fall 2025)

Ex officio, non-voting member:
Gillian Wilson, Vice Chancellor for Research

Staff:
Simrin Takhar