

**DIVISIONAL COUNCIL
MERCED DIVISION OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026**

The Divisional Council (DivCo) held a total of 19 meetings during AY 2025-2026 in fulfillment of its responsibilities under [Merced Division Bylaw I.IV.3](#). The AY 25-26 DivCo membership is available [here](#).

Overview

AY 2025–26 was marked by significant institutional challenges and opportunities, including budget reductions, enrollment management efforts, research sustainability concerns, evolving federal and state policy environments, and the growing impact of artificial intelligence on teaching, learning, and research. At the same time, the campus continued planning for long-term growth, academic innovation, and institutional resilience.

Within this context, DivCo served as the principal forum for faculty consultation on matters of academic policy, institutional strategy, resource planning, and shared governance. Through regular engagement with campus leadership, Senate committees, and systemwide Academic Senate bodies, DivCo worked to ensure that faculty perspectives informed institutional decision-making. The Council's deliberations focused on advancing academic excellence, supporting research and student success, strengthening shared governance, and promoting the long-term sustainability of the university.

Major Actions and Institutional Priorities

During AY 2025–26, DivCo:

- Reviewed and provided feedback on numerous campus and systemwide policy proposals, including the Generative AI Educational Policy, Five-Year Planning Perspectives, academic program proposals, and revisions to campus administrative policies.
- Led planning for the annual Senate–Administration Governance Retreat focused on artificial intelligence, enrollment, research sustainability, institutional efficiency, and fiscal strategy.
- Advocated for transparent budget planning, meaningful faculty consultation, and strategic approaches to institutional resource allocation.
- Supported the strategic investment of MacKenzie Scott gift funds in research infrastructure, graduate education, faculty scholarship, library resources, and other transformative institutional priorities.
- Reviewed and endorsed recommendations related to governance and oversight of extension and continuing education programs.
- Endorsed equity-related DEI self-statement guidelines and participated in discussions concerning faculty recruitment, retention, and inclusive excellence initiatives.
- Supported development of a campus Artificial Intelligence Educational Policy grounded in academic freedom, instructor autonomy, and shared governance principles.
- Endorsed the Pathway to Degree Scholarship initiative and reviewed enrollment and student success strategies.

- Addressed concerns regarding teaching assistant support and instructional capacity through consultation with campus leadership.
- Strengthened communication and coordination among Senate committees through expanded committee participation in Divisional Council discussions.

Consultation and Shared Governance

Senate leadership met with the Chancellor, Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost, Vice Chancellors, Campus Counsel, School Executive Committee Chairs, and the CFO to discuss a broad range of institutional priorities, including budget reductions, enrollment management, student success, research sustainability, artificial intelligence, and long-term strategic planning.

Consultations with the EVC/Provost included updates on institutional capacity planning, TAS funding, allocation of MacKenzie Scott gift funds, research sustainability resources, labor contingency planning, and efforts to strengthen long-term strategic and budget frameworks. Additional discussions addressed instructional continuity and course evaluation processes following the Canvas/CatCourses outage, as well as operational matters including faculty workload, commencement planning, and academic infrastructure priorities.

The Council also reviewed a proposal for the HelioCampus analytics platform. While acknowledging its potential value for institutional planning, members raised concerns regarding data interpretation, comparability across units, workload implications, and governance safeguards.

Across these consultations, DivCo consistently emphasized transparency, meaningful faculty participation, and shared governance as essential to effective institutional decision-making.

Strategic Planning, Budget, and Institutional Sustainability

Strategic planning, financial sustainability, and institutional resilience remained central priorities throughout the year. DivCo played a leading role in planning the annual Senate–Administration Governance Retreat, which focused on artificial intelligence, enrollment trends, research sustainability, institutional efficiency, and fiscal planning.

The Council devoted substantial attention to multi-year budget reduction planning and its implications for instructional capacity, faculty hiring, graduate education, scholarly productivity, and UC Merced's future trajectory, including the maintenance of R1 status. Members consistently advocated for transparent fiscal modeling, early Senate consultation, and evidence-based approaches to budget reductions rather than across-the-board cuts.

DivCo also reviewed enrollment management strategies, recruitment and retention initiatives, transfer pathways, financial aid programs, and student success efforts. Discussions emphasized accountability, transparency, and ongoing assessment of outcomes.

A significant focus of Council deliberations involved the use of the MacKenzie Scott gift. Senate leadership consulted with campus leadership regarding investments that would advance

institutional priorities, including research infrastructure, graduate education, faculty scholarship, library resources, undergraduate research opportunities, and emerging initiatives in artificial intelligence and data infrastructure. DivCo consistently advocated for transformative investments that would strengthen the university's academic and scholarly mission.

Research Sustainability and Faculty Support

Research sustainability remained a core institutional priority. DivCo emphasized that maintaining UC Merced's research trajectory and R1 status requires sustained investment in research infrastructure, facilities, administrative support systems, graduate education, and faculty scholarship, particularly amid uncertainty in the federal research funding landscape.

The Council advocated for continued support of Senate-managed funding programs, faculty seed grants, graduate student support, and other initiatives that strengthen research productivity and competitiveness. DivCo also reviewed systemwide research integrity policies and emphasized the importance of maintaining stable and sustainable support structures for faculty research.

Academic Programs and Governance

DivCo continued to strengthen shared governance and faculty participation in academic decision-making through its review of academic programs, governance structures, and institutional growth initiatives. The Council reviewed and endorsed multiple academic program proposals while emphasizing the importance of early and systematic faculty consultation, cross-school coordination, and alignment of new programs with available resources.

Particular attention was devoted to governance and oversight of Professional and Educational Continuing Education Programs (PACE). The Council supported the establishment of a workgroup charged with strengthening governance structures, clarifying Senate authority, improving communication, and enhancing review and approval processes for extension offerings. The PACE workgroup developed preliminary recommendations to strengthen governance clarity, improve communication, and enhance review processes for extension programs. A comprehensive set of recommendations will be presented for future Senate consideration.

The Council also engaged in discussions regarding long-term institutional growth, including planning for a School of Management, campus expansion, instructional and research space needs, and broader infrastructure planning.

Artificial Intelligence and Educational Policy

Artificial intelligence emerged as a significant institutional priority during AY 2025–26. DivCo reviewed and commented on a proposal for a campus AI advisory structure and provided feedback on a Generative AI Educational Policy jointly advanced by the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils.

Council discussions focused on balancing innovation with the university's core academic values. Members emphasized the importance of preserving academic freedom, instructor autonomy, disciplinary flexibility, student choice, and meaningful learning outcomes while recognizing the rapidly evolving role of AI technologies in higher education. DivCo also highlighted the need for broad faculty involvement, including graduate education perspectives, in the development and implementation of AI initiatives. Through these efforts, DivCo sought to ensure that the campus's approach to artificial intelligence remains pedagogically sound and consistent with the principles of shared governance.

Faculty Advancement, Hiring, and Equity Initiatives

DivCo reviewed revisions to CAP's AROs guidelines, focusing on clarity, consistency, recognition of disciplinary differences, and transparency in personnel evaluation processes.

The Council discussed faculty recruitment strategies, including developments related to the President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program and Target of Excellence waivers. Members expressed concern regarding proposed changes that could affect faculty recruitment pipelines, diversity initiatives, and inclusive excellence efforts.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion remained important considerations throughout Council deliberations. DivCo received updates on the Senate's external anti-racism review and supported continued implementation planning and faculty/administrative engagement. Discussions also addressed campus climate, faculty recruitment and retention, and evolving external policy environments affecting diversity initiatives.

Campus Infrastructure, Accessibility, and Operations

The Council received updates on campus space utilization and infrastructure planning. Discussions addressed allocation of instructional and research space, classroom utilization, workplace practices, facilities planning, parking, safety, and coordination among administrative units.

Operational matters included implementation of digital accessibility requirements, Senate governance structures, committee compensation policies, and broader questions related to institutional effectiveness. In collaboration with OIT and campus leadership, DivCo helped facilitate accessibility compliance and implementation approaches, emphasizing the need to balance regulatory requirements with instructional flexibility and faculty workload considerations.

Campus and Systemwide Engagement

Senate leadership participated regularly in Deans' Council, Extended Cabinet, Joint Council, Assembly, and Academic Council meetings addressing budget planning, enrollment trends, research infrastructure, faculty support, and policy development.

The Council reviewed a broad range of systemwide initiatives and policies, including research

integrity, curricular collaboration, student conduct frameworks, preparatory education policies, sustainability initiatives, and efforts to strengthen public confidence in higher education. Across these engagements, DivCo consistently advocated for faculty consultation, transparent implementation processes, and preservation of Academic Senate authority.

Campus Review Items

A summary of campus and systemwide review items considered by DivCo during AY 2025-2026 is provided on Appendix A.

Conclusion

Throughout AY 2025–26, DivCo remained committed to advancing shared governance, promoting academic excellence, and ensuring that faculty perspectives informed institutional decision-making at both the campus and systemwide levels. Through its consultations, policy reviews, strategic planning efforts, and engagement with campus leadership, the Council helped position UC Merced to address immediate challenges while advancing its long-term academic and research mission.

Appendix A

Campus Review Items

- Reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed Generative AI (GenAI) Educational Policy.
- Commented the 2026–2031 Five-Year Planning Perspectives and associated institutional planning priorities.
- Evaluated PROC's Proposal for the Periodic Review of Administrative Functions.
- Reviewed and endorsed the proposed merger of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute and the Campus Climate Institute.
- Endorsed the establishment of a B.S. degree program proposal in Artificial Intelligence
- Endorsed the establishment of a B.S. degree program proposal in Computer Science
- Commented on the Interim Policy on Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct.
- Reviewed revisions to the Policy on Philanthropic and Honorific Naming of UC Merced Properties.
- Reviewed proposed revisions to:
 - MAPP 016 – Discipline
 - MAPP 2012 – Recruitment
 - MAPP 6001 – Endowed Chairs and Scholarships
- Reviewed the Interim Policy on Micromobility Devices (Electric Scooters and E-Bikes).
- Reviewed the Regulations on Employee Organization and Representative Access to University Property.
- Reviewed the Alcohol Service and Sales Policy.
- Offered comments and endorsed the UCM Guidelines Concerning Scheduling Conflicts with Academic Requirements.

Major Actions and Institutional Priorities

- Approved the inclusion of the Chairs of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) and Library and Scholarly Communications Committee (LASC) as permanent guests of Divisional Council meetings, strengthening coordination among Senate committees.
- Endorsed equity-related DEI self-statement guidelines for academic personnel review processes.
- Transmitted numerous campus and systemwide policy review responses to Academic Council and campus administration.
- Continued to advocate for robust faculty research support and sustained investment in the campus research enterprise.
- Expanded Senate engagement in budget planning, resource allocation, and long-term institutional strategy discussions.
- Advanced discussions regarding the strategic use of MacKenzie Scott gift funds, emphasizing investments in research, graduate education, faculty support, and academic infrastructure.
- Continued efforts to strengthen shared governance, transparency, and meaningful faculty consultation in institutional decision-making.

- Endorsed the administration's proposal to transition from separate fall and spring commencement ceremonies to a single expanded spring commencement ceremony.
- Reviewed and endorsed the Pathway to Degree Scholarship initiative designed to improve enrollment yield through earlier financial aid offers to prospective students.
- Emphasized the importance of ongoing assessment, equitable implementation, and careful monitoring of program outcomes.
- Discussed enrollment growth strategies, student success initiatives, and institutional efforts to strengthen recruitment and retention.
- Highlighted concerns regarding the impact of staffing shortages on instructional quality, student learning, and faculty workload.
- Advocated for additional instructional support resources to maintain educational quality and student success.

Systemwide Review Items

DivCo reviewed and offered comments on the following systemwide proposals:

- Proposed Revisions to Senate Bylaw 192 and Senate Regulations 636 and 761
- Tribal Lands Workgroup Report
- Presidential Policy Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students (PACAOS) 100.00 and PACAOS-Appendix H
- Proposal to Establish a Systemwide Academic Senate Committee on Climate Change and Sustainability
- Presidential Policy on Anatomical Donation Program and Anatomical Materials
- Presidential Policy on Sustainable Practices
- Presidential Policy IMT-1300 Information Technology Accessibility
- Proposed Revisions to Senate Bylaw 140 (Affirmative Action, Diversity, and Equity)
- Presidential Policy on Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct
- Proposed Revisions to the Academic Personnel Manual (APM) Section 036, General University Policy Regarding Academic Appointees/Employment
- UCAD Interim Report
- Presidential Interim Policy for the University of California's Use of Online Program Management Companies
- Interim Systemwide Guidelines on Faculty Discipline and Revisions to APM - 015 and 016
- Proposed Presidential Policy on Education Loan Practices
- Proposed Presidential Policy – Systemwide Policies Applying to UC Police Department (comments forthcoming)
- Presidential Policy BFB-BUS-43-Purchases of Goods Services; Supply Chain Management (comments forthcoming)