



**FALL MEETING OF THE MERCED DIVISION OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025
4:00 – 5:30 PM
RUIZ-ADMIN 306**

I. CHAIR’S REPORT & ANNOUNCEMENTS – *Division Chair Kevin Mitchell*

- Division Chair Mitchell welcomed attendees to today’s meeting and thanked both faculty and the administration for their resilience and diligence this academic year.
- The UC continues to face challenges from the federal government, but they are being appealed. Additional challenges include a potential decreased indirect cost return rate from the NIH to 15%. Throughout these challenges, the UC must safeguard its principles and preserve its mission of research, teaching, and service. The UC must also engage collaboratively and with goodwill.
- Per the recent campus announcement, philanthropist MacKenzie Scott has bestowed a \$38 million gift on UC Merced. This is the second gift from Ms. Scott, the previous one being \$20 million. This is a vote of confidence in what UC Merced is accomplishing. While the funds will not eliminate UC Merced’s structural deficit, they will help alleviate some of the negative impacts from the budget cuts. Division Chair Mitchell thanked the Chancellor and External Relations for their role in this gift.
- The Senate is steadfast in upholding the principles of shared governance. Administrative guests regularly attend Senate meetings and Division Chair Mitchell thanked them for their engagement. The October 27 Shared Governance Retreat is another example of Senate-Administration collaboration. School Executive Committee chairs regularly attend Divisional Council meetings, as do the chairs of CFW, CAF, and LASC.
- The School Executive Committees nominated ten faculty members for early career awards provided by UCOP this fall: four from SSHA and three each from SNS and SoE. Each campus is guaranteed two winners. The awards are \$50,000 each.
- EDI and the VPDUE continue to work on issues tasked to the Climate of Respect Taskforce related to hate speech and bias in teaching evaluations.
- The EVC/Provost established an AI Advisory Council, and UGC and GC continue to work on issues related to AI in teaching and learning.
- The Senate opined on several systemwide and campus review items this semester. The recent campus review items include: UC Merced Alcohol Service and Sales Policy, UC Merced Regulations on Employee Organization & Representative Access to University Property, PROC's Proposal for the Periodic Review of Administrative Functions, and UC Merced Interim Policy on Micromobility Devices: Electric Scooters & E-Bikes.

- Division Chair Mitchell thanked Senate Executive Director Fatima Paul and the Senate staff for their good work.

II. **CAMPUS UPDATES – *Chancellor Muñoz & EVC/Provost Dumont***

Chancellor Muñoz provided the following updates:

- The UC is flat funded under the state budget. The multi-year compact between the UC and the Governor is still in place (a compact established in 2022 in which the Governor proposes annual base budget adjustments of 5% percent for the UC through 2026-27 in exchange for the UC accomplishing several student-focused goals) but the funding is not as reliable as originally anticipated. The state offered a zero-interest loan, but the UC's expenses are increasing. UC Merced only has two revenue streams and both are tied to enrollment.
- Given that the UC receives \$18 billion annually from the federal government, the challenges coming from the federal government continue to be a significant concern. Legal efforts are ongoing regarding the proposed decrease of the indirect cost return rate to 15%. The UC collectively would lose hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Enrollment was down this fall. These losses are compounded elsewhere, such as dining and other services that students use. 60% of UC Merced's students rely on federal aid and Pell Grants are currently being debated at the national level. But this fall, UC Merced had the largest ever percentage of students from the Valley which can be partly credited to the Merced Automatic Admission Program (MAAP).
- The MOU between UC Merced and UCOP is expiring at the end of this year. The campus needs to achieve certain benchmarks to receive the funding, and we have already reached two of the five. A new MOU could potentially bring \$130 million to the campus.
- This year, UC Merced earned two 2025 Carnegie distinctions, the Student Access and Earnings Classification "Opportunity Colleges and Universities" and the Institutional Classification by the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education. UC Merced is one of only 21 universities in the country and one of three in California to hold both Carnegie R1 and "Opportunity" classifications.
- Several capital projects on campus are ongoing: Medical Education Building, Promise Housing, COB3, and the Field Education Center. The students voted for a student union, and the Chancellor met with the ASUCM President to discuss the importance of such a venue for students to gather and to attract potential students to the campus.
- UC Merced is working on updating the campus strategic plan.

EVC/Provost Dumont provided the following updates:

- EVC/Provost Dumont prioritized meeting with departments and she thanked them for allowing her to attend their meetings.
- EVC/Provost Dumont thanked the faculty for their efforts to bring the campus to R1 and rising in the national rankings.

- EVC/Provost Dumont stated that she heard several common themes resulting from her engagement with departments: concerns about the TAS budget, faculty workload, maintaining R1 status, loss of faculty, lack of efficiency of campus administrative processes, equitable distribution of resources across campuses, and the lack of faculty hiring outside of Accelerating Campus' Evolution (ACE) programming. (ACE funding was a \$21 million temporary investment made by UCOP to help UC Merced jump start approximately 20 new undergraduate majors that were projected by IRDS to contribute substantially to campus enrollment growth.) EVC/Provost Dumont stated that the campus prioritizes remaining an R1 institution. The campus is paying careful attention to the graduate student population which is one of the criteria for R1 status, and added that she will work with CAPRA on a faculty hiring process. She has already met with the deans and their staff on her faculty hiring proposal. EVC/Provost Dumont also emphasized the need for budget stabilization and asked that the campus keep thinking of the goals in the strategic plan when making difficult budget decisions.

III. CONSENT CALENDAR

- A. Today's Agenda
- B. May 7, 2025, Meeting Minutes
- C. Committees' Annual Reports AY 24-25
 - Divisional Council
 - Admissions and Financial Aid Committee
 - Committee on Academic Personnel
 - Reserve Committee on Academic Personnel
 - Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation
 - Committee on Research
 - Committee on Rules and Elections
 - Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
 - Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom
 - Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication
 - Graduate Council
 - Undergraduate Council

Action: The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

IV. BUDGET Q&A WITH VC/CFO SCHNIER, CHANCELLOR MUÑOZ, AND EVC/PROVOST DUMONT

Attendees were encouraged to view the December 2 Financial Transparency town hall materials in advance. The link to the recording and presentation were linked on today's agenda.

Prior to this meeting, faculty submitted questions for VC/CFO Schnier to address. In answering the question about the rationale for the 7%, 5%, and 3% campus budget reduction plan, VC/CFO Schnier shared information on the campus's projected cash balances which total approximately \$180 million. But he clarified that there are already commitments on some of that money, and most of the amount is the UCOP loan. He added that the campus tries to use as little of that funding as possible. Based on the funds the campus knows it has and the reserves, the proposed

budget cuts are the most prudent option. He also stated that campus leadership and the deans have been preparing for budget cuts for a few years, as it was already known that the structural deficit needed to be reduced.

Another previously submitted question asked if the proposed, multi-year budget reduction plan was predicated on the baseline enrollment model. VC/CFO Schnier affirmed this, and pointed out that Project 2020 was based on an enrollment target that the campus never achieved. This was a costly miscalculation.

In response to a question about whether the campus aims to reduce the structural deficit to zero, VC/CFO Schnier confirmed that if the campus wants to make investments, the structural deficit has to be eliminated.

Another previously submitted question inquired, in the budget reduction planning, what model is assumed for the state allocation to the UC? VC/CFO Schnier responded that in a letter from UCOP about the allocation, it was stated that UC Merced was budgeted for a particular number of students and the campus may get re-budgeted next year. Merced was the only campus specifically named in the letter. Similar language was not included in previous UCOP allocation letters. Chancellor Muñoz stated that the previously issued report from the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) on UC Merced's perceived lack of growth was damaging.

VC/CFO Schnier emphasized that the recommendation to reduce budgets by 7% was collectively made by campus leadership to the Chancellor.

One previously submitted question expressed concern that while the Senate has authority over undergraduate and graduate curriculum, the proposed budget cuts are effectively asserting a monetary and administrative control over what curriculum is taught. EVC/Provost Dumont acknowledged the Senate's authority, but pointed out that she has to set a budget. It is up to the faculty how they want to work within the budget framework.

A Q&A session was held, and the following issues/questions were raised:

- A faculty member stated that classes are being cancelled to meet the TAS budget. She and her colleagues looked at systemwide statistics and found that UC Merced spends a smaller proportion of its budget on instructional expenses than the UCs. But UC Merced faculty keep being told that the campus spends too much.
 - VC/CFO Schnier responded that UC Merced has more debt and fewer revenue sources than other UC campuses. He recommended looking at per capita data which UCOP provides.
- A faculty member asked how campus leadership will engage instructors on budget reductions.
 - EVC/Provost Dumont replied that she empowers the deans to handle their Schools' budgets and expects the deans to engage with departments and Executive Committees.

- A faculty member pointed out that several faculty have expertise in relevant fields and could have been consulted and engaged by campus leadership early in the budget reduction planning processes. He recommended that faculty have an iterative role.
 - EVC/Provost Dumont acknowledged that there is more room for engagement but she must balance this with respecting the autonomy of the deans.
- A faculty member asked how the new, \$38 million MacKenzie Scott gift can alleviate the negative impacts of the budget reduction. For example, faculty do not have funds for GSRs and have had to limit TA slots which led to the cancellation of some classes.
 - VC/CFO Schnier acknowledged that this is the largest gift in UC Merced's history but cautioned that the funds cannot fix all the campus's challenges.
- A faculty member asked what process will be used to allocate the \$38 million in funds from the MacKenzie Scott gift and how the Senate will be engaged in these conversations.
 - Chancellor Muñoz replied that he plans to begin this process in January. He anticipates that the funds will partly be used for long-term investments and to soften the impact of some budget reductions.
- A member of the administration advocated for improved communication in general which VC/CFO Schnier acknowledged.

V. **STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS REPORTS**

A summary of Senate Committees' Fall 2025 business was linked on today's agenda.

AY 25-26 Senate Leadership:

- Admissions and Financial Aid Committee – Joel Spencer
- Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation – Michael Beman
- Committee on Academic Personnel – Ajay Gopinathan
- Reserve Committee on Academic Personnel – Lin Tian
- Committee on Academic Freedom – Patti LiWang
- Committee on Committees – Victor Muñoz
- Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Sean Malloy
- Committee on Faculty Welfare – David Rouff
- Committee on Research – Ramen Saha
- Committee on Rules and Elections – Jeff Yoshimi
- Graduate Council – Irene Beattie
- Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication – Christopher Ojeda
- Committee on Privilege and Tenure (P&T's report is not included) – Christopher Viney
- Undergraduate Council – Susan Varnot

VI. **SENATE AWARDS – *Division Chair Mitchell***

Division Chair Mitchell and Chancellor Muñoz announced the following winners of the AY 24-25 Senate awards and presented those in attendance with personalized, engraved medals:

- Dr. Fred Spiess Award for Distinguished Service to the Academic Senate
Jay Sharping (Physics)
- Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award for Senate Faculty
Lei, Yue (Applied Math)
- Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award for Non-Senate Faculty
Angela Winek (MWP)
- Distinguished Graduate Teaching/Mentorship Award
Paul Almeida (Sociology)
- Distinguished Early Career Research Award
Anil Menon (Political Science)
- Distinction in Research Award
Nancy Burke (Public Health)
- Distinguished Scholarly Public Service Award
Asmeret Asefaw Berhe (Life and Environmental Sciences)
- Excellence in Faculty Mentorship Award
Sarah Depaoli (Psychological Sciences)
- Senate Award for Contributions to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Michele Nishiguchi (Molecular and Cell Biology)

VII. PETITION OF STUDENTS

None were received.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business was raised.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.
Attest: Kevin Mitchell, Division Chair