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Dear Colleagues,

Is the year over already? It seemed like only a few weeks ago I sent my welcome letter referencing one of our finest 80s rock bands. Yet it must be, as we just celebrated the achievements of our undergraduate and graduate students at commencement. For those of you who were unable to join us, I am delighted to report that both graduations were full of pride, energy and joy. Even the rain at the close of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts ceremony did not dampen spirits as many students, families and faculty continued to celebrate in the Lantern afterwards - a fitting place for closure, given its centrality on the campus and importance to our students. This year's commencement is also cause for celebration as it marked the largest graduating class ever. Go bobcats!

With the academic year behind us, I encourage us all to take a moment to reflect on our successes and savor the moment that is the start of summer. Summer means we will all have more time to focus on our projects, attend conferences, visit collaborators and, simply put, excel in our research. Our remarkable research achievements are reflected in our status as the youngest campus to reach R2, and this year we firmly set our collective sights on becoming the youngest to achieve R1. Critical to our maturation in this regard will be changes to how we plan and allocate resources in support of our R1 aspirations while maintaining our commitment to our students and our desire to diversify the professoriate. This year's academic planning effort was an important step down this path and one that will resume with the fall semester under the guidance of the Senate's Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation (CAPRA) and the EVC/Provost Camfield. With this transition in mind, the Academic Planning Working Group is currently in the process of addressing faculty and administrative feedback as it finalizes a plan to initiate school-based strategic planning this fall. The group will then dissolve.

Academic planning was just one of several multi-year, faculty-administrative projects that were initiated in 2017-18 and that this year's goal was to finish. Under the guidance of the Transition Oversight Committee, the role of Department Chair has been implemented and a plan for continued devolution of responsibility and authority to these important administrative roles has been drafted. Likewise, the Budget Working Group completed its review of key budget policy for the campus that impacts the faculty, and it too will be dissolving.

On the General Education frontier, Spark seminars were successfully launched and all but 13 first year students (many of whom were intending to transfer) were successfully enrolled. The General Education Executive Committee (GEEC) has also initiated the process of considering alternative models for Spark seminars, that will enable the high impact teaching practices demonstrated to improve first year student success, and is overseeing the rollout of the other requirements of our General Education program. A big thank you to the GEEC, the Undergraduate Council, and the GE Program Chair, Valerie Leppert, for their work to move this implementation forward this year.

Next year will be an exciting year for our campus, replete with new milestones. In the fall, many of us will be moving into new buildings, and building 2A will be dedicated to Sustainability so that it may serve as a hub for many contributing disciplines. To this end, I thank Maggie Saunders, the Executive Director of Space Planning and Analysis, for her 1,300 hours plus of faculty discussion to ensure that this new space best serves our instructional and research needs.

With respect to the Senate, we anticipate that its consultative role in campus decision-making will continue to expand as many of the planning activities previously undertaken by campus working groups are devolved to Senate committees, particularly to CAPRA. Toward this end, we thank EVC/Provost Gregg Camfield for his leadership and investment in shared governance, particularly as relates to the critical work of campus planning.

In addition to celebrating our successes and looking forward to next year, I wish to extend our gratitude to the Chancellor for her eight years of service. Under her leadership we have become a rising star in the UC System and the state more generally. She has advocated tirelessly for our campus, our students and our faculty and found solutions to some of our most vexing problems, changing the trajectory of UC Merced forever and for the very best. The next time you see the Chancellor, please be sure to thank her for all she has done for the campus; her legacy will resonate in our 2020 buildings and the campus's commitment to our mission.

I also wish to welcome Nathan Brostrom as Interim Chancellor. As many of you may know, Nathan participated in commencement, and he is clearly passionate about our campus and the students we serve. The Senate looks forward to working with him as the campus continues to create the conditions that will attract strong, visionary leadership for the next phase of our development, including by strengthening our financial footing.

Having served in Senate leadership for three years now, two as Vice Chair and one as Chair, it is a pleasure to look back at the work we have all done to strengthen the spirit and execution of shared governance on this campus. This is a success for the both the faculty and the administration as the alignment of our interests, and our collective efforts to see them met, will help us advocate successfully for, and garner the resources essential to, realizing our goals. As Oscar Wilde said, "some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go." It is my hope that for most of you the former sentiment outweighs the later as it has been an honor to serve the faculty. Although I will miss the Senate, I am delighted that, come August 21, Tom Hansford will be serving as our Senate Chair. His institutional knowledge and experience leave no doubt that the Senate will be in an even better place upon the completion of his term. I am also sure that Tom will continue to be supported by the excellent Senate staff who have helped us all meet our shared-governance goals; I thank you for all of your support.

In closing, I hope you will all take some time to enjoy what is special to you this summer. I wish you productive and restful summers and look forward to our continued success in the post-2020 project era.

Fiat Lux,



Kurt Schnier
Chair, Merced Division of the Academic Senate