

Admissions and Financial Aid Committee (AFAC)

**Meeting Minutes
Friday, November 22, 2024
11:30am – 1:00pm**

Documents available in [box](#)
[AFAC Duties](#)

I. Consent Calendar – Chair Cleary – 11:30am – 11:35am

- A. Today's Agenda
- B. [October 25 Meeting Minutes](#)

Action:

- The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

II. Chair's Report – Chair Cleary – 11:35am – 11:45am

- A. November 4 and 18 Divisional Council Meetings
 - DivCo members continued their discussion on the proposed revisions to MAPP sections 2013, 2014, 2053, and 2054.
 - Chief of Police Her attended the November 4 DivCo meeting to discuss the role of the campus police. UC Merced campus police are collaborating with the Protest Oversight Group (POG) who are informing the faculty on expressive activities. There is a response team for handling de-escalation for any campus protest activity.
 - Chief of Police Her discussed military-grade equipment, which are being purchased by several campuses' police departments, including UC Merced. The most recent purchase of such equipment was not made in response to protest concerns but was intended for rare situations where there may be an armed and dangerous individual on campus. These weapons are only used in high-risk circumstances.
 - DivCo members discussed riding a bike around campus safely. Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) is conducting a circulation study to determine which roadways across campus are safe for bicyclists, as well as electric scooters.

Chair Cleary encouraged AFAC members to review the [State Legislative Analyst Office \(LAO\) report](#). The report includes the review of UC Merced nearing its 20th year and includes data related to the four-year graduate rate, which is around 50% compared to the UC average of 70%. This is attributed to factors like the high percentage of first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients, many of whom come from low-income backgrounds.

III. Vice Chair's Report – Joel Spencer - 11:45am – 11:55pm**A. October 30 Shared Governance Retreat**

Participants discussed strategies to increase enrollment, with a goal of reaching 15,000 students by 2031. Primary topics of discussion included improving financial reporting systems, which have been ineffective and have impacted both enrollment and retention. The importance of faculty involvement was highlighted, along with the need for collaboration with external groups to better support and retain students. Additionally, members explored ways to enhance faculty participation in events like BobCat Day.

Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management (VCEM) Scott Hagg reported that BobCat Day will provide more opportunities for faculty involvement. This year, new options will be offered, including mock lectures, demonstrations, lab tours, and department receptions. Admissions Director Noji added that it might be helpful for him and VCEM Hagg to discuss yield (number of admitted students who actually enroll) efforts and BobCat Day at a future AFAC meeting. They could showcase the strategies being implemented and highlight the different ways faculty can get involved.

A member suggested that the university might benefit from considering how other UC schools approach their recruitment events. Based on experience visiting several other UCs, it appears that prospective students were more interested in engaging with current students rather than staff or faculty. Events like Bobcat Day might no longer be as effective in attracting prospective students. The member added that recruitment efforts at UC Merced seem decentralized, with individual departments or graduate programs being held responsible for their own recruitment rather than the university or school as a whole. The burden of recruitment is being placed on specific programs, which leads to burnout and likely duplicated efforts. The member suggested that this issue be addressed in a broader conversation about how recruitment is structured and managed across the university.

Another member pointed out the differences between undergraduate and graduate enrollment management and emphasized the importance of better communication to the faculty.

B. November 1 BOARS Meeting

- At the California Joint Assembly Site Meeting, discussions were held regarding the Area C math requirements for UC admissions. The State Assembly would like public access to BOARS meetings and to become more involved in the UC system's admissions and requirements decisions.
- BOARS members continued their discussions on Cal-GETC.
- Enrollment management teams from each campus joined the call, including Director Noji and VCEM Hagg from UC Merced, to discuss enrollment and recruitment processes.
- There is increasing push by California State Universities (CSUs) to offer

doctoral degree programs. Participants discussed the roles of the UC versus CSU versus California Community College (CCC). UC Merced is working to expand its master's programs; however, there is concern that this could interfere with CSU standards. Conversely, CSUs are considering offering doctoral programs, which may conflict with the UC system. A working group is discussing these potential overlaps.

IV. Report from Office of Admission Director Noji – 11:55pm – 12:20pm

A. Update on Fall Recruitment Activities

Director Noji shared his PowerPoint slides, available [here](#), summarizing the several events that occurred from August 1, 2024 – November 18, 2024 to engage prospective students. Over 200 recruitment events took place, including college fairs, workshops, conferences, receptions, presentations, webinars, and yield visits. These events span the state of California, divided into four regions: Northern California, North Central Valley, South San Joaquin Valley, and Southern California. Director Noji explained that during admissions, two cycles are conducted simultaneously; there are always two overlapping cycles, spring and fall or fall and spring. This year, UC Merced expanded its international recruitment efforts, particularly in India and Southeast Asia, where there has been an increasing number of applicants.

UC Merced also hosts group tours as part of its recruitment strategy. These tours provide prospective students and their families with a chance to explore the campus and learn more about the university. From August 1, 2024 to November 18, 2024, UC Merced hosted 166 group tours and 285 family tours. This year's family tour numbers have shown an increase compared to last year, highlighting the growing interest in UC Merced. These tours are a crucial component of the recruitment process, as they offer prospective students and their families a firsthand look at the campus. UC Merced monitors these tours closely as a benchmark for how the recruitment cycle is progressing each year.

Director Noji noted that he also has a report that goes further into detail about who the Admissions Office visited and how often. The selection of schools, events, and target groups plays a major role in how effective the visits are in engaging potential applicants.

Chair Cleary inquired about how financial aid messaging is communicated at recruitment events and how it helps students and families understand the affordability of attending UC Merced. Director Noji responded that financial aid messaging is a key part of the application workshops and presentations. During these workshops, students are encouraged to apply for financial aid, including submitting their FAFSA or California Dream Act (CADAA) application, with the goal of getting them to apply to UC Merced. Students and families are informed of the several financial aid options, including the Blue and Gold Program, Middle

Income Program, Native American Opportunity Program, and scholarships. VCEM Hagg added that his team is shifting their focus to improving the yield. While building a strong applicant pool is important, the focus now is on converting those accepted students into enrolled students. A member noted the importance of offering targeted events that specifically cater to underrepresented or specific student populations, to which Director Noji confirmed that UC Merced actively hosts such events as the Central California Black Leadership Conference and the Growing Health Leaders Conference. Members also discussed the California Academic Decathlon and how, due to transportation issues for many prospective students and their families, it might be beneficial for UC Merced to visit schools and districts to present content. Director Noji confirmed that he will discuss the idea with his team.

V. Report from Deputy Director Heather Nardello – 12:20pm – 12:40pm

- A. An overview of financial aid sources available to UC Merced students (Federal, State, UC-wide, campus-specific) and the corresponding numbers of students receiving such aid.

Director Nardello shared a PowerPoint presentation, available [here](#), summarizing several key points.

Financial aid is any money that is given, paid, or loaned to a student to help them pay for their education. There are several types of aid and programs, including Federal Aid, State Aid, Institutional Aid, and Outside Aid. This is broken down further into grants (largest source), scholarships, work-study, loans, and departmental. At UC Merced, 90% of all enrolled undergraduate students have applied for financial aid, and 85% of them have received some form of aid. 61% of students are Pell-eligible, 36% come from families with an income of less than \$40,000, 24% have borrowed a loan, and 56% are eligible for Cal Grants.

UC Merced administers the Bobcat Grant, which is the largest program primarily funded through a portion of undergraduate tuition and student service fees. On average, about 33% of these fees go back into the grant program. The allocation of funds for this grant is determined based on the needs of the undergraduate student population across the entire UC system. Because UC Merced has a significant number of first-generation, low-income students, the campus often requires more funds than it generates locally. To address this, UC Merced receives additional funding from other UC campuses to meet student needs.

Director Nardello further explained the financial aid process, which is an annual process, requiring students to fill out the FAFSA application, or for undocumented students the CADAA. These forms must be completed every year while they are enrolled at UC Merced. This academic year, a new financial aid process was implemented, known as the “Better FAFSA”. The main change was the reduction in the number of questions on the FAFSA application from over 100 to just under 40,

significantly simplifying the application process for students. While many challenges were encountered this year, the process is expected to improve over time and should make it easier for students to apply for financial aid. UC Merced launched a comprehensive outreach and communication plan to assist students with the transition. Despite a nationwide decline in application numbers, UC Merced saw an increase in students filling out their FAFSA or CADAA forms.

The Financial Wellness Center is also an important service available to support students by offering them coaching, giving presentations, and conducting workshops. Director Nardello also noted that her team must verify student academic activity to ensure that students are attending the courses they are enrolled in each semester, which is required to ensure their financial aid is maintained. Faculty can help by assigning work through CatCourses to confirm student participation, which will be automatically tracked, making the process easier. Failure to verify participation can result in a reduction of students' financial aid.

Chair Cleary inquired about the average cost of student tuition, room & board. Director Nardello responded that the total cost of attendance may be around \$35,000 to \$50,000, depending on residency status and housing choices; however, the net price can be significantly lower due to various forms of aid, such as Cal Grants and Pell Grants.

VI. Campus Review Item – Siddaiah Yarra – 12:40pm – 12:50pm

A. [School of Engineering Electrical Engineering Minor Proposal](#)

The policy governing the review and approval of Undergraduate Degree Programs is available [here](#). The policy governing the review and approval of minors is available [here](#).

Lead Reviewer: Siddaiah Yarra

Lead reviewer's draft memo is available [here](#).

Member Yarra summarized his assessment noting that the proposal is well-structured, feasible, and aligns with both student needs and institutional priorities. He emphasized that the program will not need any new courses nor additional faculty to deliver the existing courses. Since the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) does not evaluate minors as part of their accreditation process, member Yarra included a recommendation for the proposers to establish an advisory board and implement a plan for periodic review and adjustment to ensure the minor remains responsive to student feedback and evolving industry needs.

Action:

- AFAC members unanimously endorsed the draft memo.
- AFAC Analyst transmitted the final memo to the Senate Chair on November 22, 2024.

VII. Any Other Business – 12:50pm – 1:00pm

No other business was discussed.

VIII. Informational Items will be regularly uploaded on the “Informational Items” AFAC Box Folder [here](#).