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OFFICE OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
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September 4, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the 2018-19 academic year. I hope that you all had productive and restorative summers and are ready for the coming year. On August 15th I began my term as the Senate Chair of the Merced Division of the Academic Senate. The next day as I drove onto campus “Welcome to the Jungle”¹ came on the radio, as if on cue. I had to laugh as it coincided with the beginning of my time as Senate Chair. Personally, and perhaps there are others on campus who share this sentiment, I have occasionally felt that the *title* of this song can reflect life at UC Merced. At the same time, the song brought to mind how much UC Merced has achieved in such a short period of time and how honored I am to be a part of this progress. It is my hope that we can all take some time to reflect on the contributions we have made as a faculty to this exciting enterprise. It is a select few who can say they are part of building the newest research university in the country.

As we begin the new academic year, faculty research achievement is chief among the things to celebrate. As the new UC Merced Daily Briefing makes abundantly clear, UC Merced faculty are publishing in the highest tiered disciplinary and interdisciplinary outlets, increasing the campus’s level of grants success, and becoming the go-to thought leaders in our disciplines. In August, the campus unveiled Phase I of the 2020 project, which added much needed student residential space, classrooms, and a beautiful new dining facility. Additional dining options will invariably increase faculty productivity (as food lines will hopefully be shorter), and the new dorms and classroom space will help us increase our student retention rates. We have also launched a new GE program to better serve our students, as well as an interim governance structure that will provide the faculty leadership essential to managing the program’s implementation and evaluation and the curricular revisions to follow. After several years of discussion and planning, the restructuring of our schools has begun, redefining what it means to be a department chair, as well as a dean. In addition, for the first time our schools have budgets and, via the new academic budget planning process, we will know our budgets for the coming year before it begins. Finally, the 2020 space plan will soon be shared, and departments will learn how space is being allocated in support of their research and teaching missions. Informed by the faculty’s academic planning efforts, the space plan reflects over 1,200 hours of faculty consultation. Academic planning will also continue this year as we focus on finalizing plans to take us beyond one-year decision-making cycles.

Faculty and administration collaboration has been central to all these impressive achievements, and I am pleased to report that, much as our “shield is strong” (those of you new to campus will soon understand this reference), so is shared governance at UC Merced. This year the Senate will continue to strengthen its efforts to work collaboratively on projects of importance to the success of the campus. This includes continuing the three initiatives that were launched last year - School Restructuring, Academic Budget, and Academic Planning. New initiatives will also be launched. For instance, for the first time our campus will be engaged in the establishment of a new school, the Gallo School, a process that will set precedent for the development of future schools. In addition, we anticipate reviewing proposals for new programs that will broaden our ability to serve the students of California, the nation and the world, participating in systemwide discussions of issues that directly affect the faculty (e.g., diversity and inclusion, the faculty salary gap), and advocating

¹ Guns N’ Roses. 1987. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welcome_to_the_Jungle

for additional campus resources that will benefit our faculty and improve our recruiting and retention efforts (e.g. health care clinic).

I look forward to serving as your Senate Chair as we continue our forward progress and excel in our research and teaching mission. The recent shared governance retreat hosted by the Chancellor, the Interim Provost EVC, and me highlighted a number of key principles to guide our work together as faculty and administrators. These principles are to communicate clearly, embody trust, be respectful, prevent surprises, be inclusive and have clearly defined process, roles and assumptions for the work we undertake together. A more detailed description of these principles, as well as a brief description of the retreat and last year's initiatives, has been provided to each of your school Executive Committees for broader dissemination.

Again, welcome to the new academic year. Take some time to reflect on our successes and the exciting progress that will be made this upcoming year. What we have all achieved here at UC Merced is remarkable and everyone is to be congratulated. If at any time you would like to discuss anything relating to the Senate, please feel free to reach out to me at senatechair@ucmerced.edu. I will be happy to meet with you. I look forward to our future discussions.

Fiat Lux,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kurt Schnier', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kurt Schnier, Chair
Merced Division of the Academic Senate