

OPINION JULY 22, 2016 4:26 AM

Building a path that other UCs can follow

HIGHLIGHTS

UC Merced partners with private industry to nearly double the size of the campus

By 2022, fast-growing campus will be large enough to accommodate 10,000 students

Economic impact could be \$1.9 billion for Northern San Joaquin Valley



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At UC Merced, we are proud of our status as trailblazers.

The first University of California campus in the San Joaquin Valley. The first to receive high-level environmental certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for every building on campus. The only campus with a research station based in Yosemite, conducting critical climate and water research in California's Sierra Nevada.

Now, we are ready to forge a new path to the future by expanding the entire campus through a cost-effective, innovative partnership with a single private developer – an ambitious plan we call the 2020 Project.

We've done all of this in an era of limits.

Our vibrant young campus is already bursting at the seams, with record numbers of student applications. Yet it became clear almost five years ago that we would have to find an alternative to state funding to grow. The severe economic downturn and its aftermath made the funding our sister campuses had received highly improbable.

So we rolled up our sleeves and went to work.

Now, I am extremely pleased to report that an old saying – “Where there's a will, there's a way” – still has meaning in this world. Thanks to the tireless efforts of campus planners, the UC Office of the President and the UC Board of Regents, we have a fully approved and funded path forward that will nearly double the physical capacity of our campus by 2020.

And we'll be using a creative development approach that UC President Janet Napolitano has called “a model for our other campuses” as the system seeks to make the most efficient use of available financial resources.

This outcome was assured on July 21 when the UC Board of Regents gave final approval to our proposal to build the next major phase of our campus as a single, fast-track development using a private development firm. Their strong support will allow us to add 1.2 million square feet of classrooms, research labs, student housing and recreational facilities more rapidly and cost-effectively than the traditional one-building-at-a-time method of developing.

When completed, the expansion will allow us to increase enrollment to 10,000 students, up from 6,700 today, by 2021 or 2022. At that size, UC Merced will become financially self-sustaining and can concentrate on becoming the next great research university in the world's most acclaimed



More than 10,000 jobs will be created locally during the construction phase. Many will be filled by local workers and all will be paid at prevailing wage. The total one-time economic investment in our regional economy during this period is estimated to be about \$1.9 billion (and \$2.4 billion statewide).

In just 11 years, UC Merced has earned a spot on the Carnegie Foundation's listing of the most prominent research universities in the country. Applications for admission are growing at the fastest rate in the UC system – more than double the system average. More than 6,000 students have already earned their degrees. Many are starting new businesses, taking positions in established companies, training for jobs in the public sector, such as education or health care, or pursuing their dreams in other ways – many right here in the Valley.

The new facilities will rise on land adjacent to and just south of our existing campus, making Little Lake the new visual centerpiece.

Buildings will be flexibly designed for multiple uses and create a living-learning environment that encourages routine interaction among students, faculty and staff. Importantly, the new facilities will complement the look and feel of current structures while maintaining our commitment to highly efficient, environmentally friendly facilities that make UC Merced a world leader in sustainable development.

This is why UC Merced was conceived nearly 30 years ago. We are extremely thankful for the opportunity to continue our growth, deepen our commitment to the region and help build a brighter future for our children through education.

Dorothy Leland was appointed chancellor of University of California, Merced, in 2011 and tasked to lead the next major phase of development for the campus, which opened in September 2005. She wrote this for the Merced Sun-Star.



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