

## **UC Merced**

### **Introduction: Historical Overview of American Research Universities**

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**Academic Innovation and the American Research University  
Symposium**

University of California, Merced  
November 13, 2009

**Introduction: Historical Overview of American Research University**

[Mark G. Yudof, LL.B.](#)

President, University of California

**PRESIDENT,  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA,  
MARK G. YUDOF**

Steve, thank you. I have no audio-visual aids, I just want to tell you. It's a pleasure to be back in Merced. I do miss the Secret Service team that accompanied me last time. But I feel perfectly safe.

And today's Symposium on Academic Innovation obviously would not be possible without Regent George Marcus, and George, we thank you for sponsoring this and we hope the restaurant business is going well. And I want to thank you for your tremendous community spirit and all that you've done on behalf of this wonderful young campus.

I'd also like to thank the chancellors who are in attendance or will soon be in attendance, including Chancellor Block who's here. And thank you to Steve for hosting all of us.

I'm here today not only to listen but also to participate in the panel discussions. I think they're very important. This is a time in higher education when we need to think about innovation in a very serious way. Our attention has been

focused by our budgetary circumstances and the circumstances of the state. It's important, that as Steve said, we maintain the quality of our programs and serve our students as well as we possibly can but I think we have to begin looking at the alternatives. And also I'll be meeting with the Academic Senate today to learn more about their perspectives on the campus and what is needed and what they've perceived to be as problems and opportunities.

I'm very, very proud of all this campus has achieved and the tremendous potential that is to be realized and we're working hard with the chancellor and with people in the Office of the President. I won't go into the details to put you on a firmer financial footing which I think we'll be able to do.

I think it's very important--when I look across the spectrum of priorities, the success of this campus is really at the very top of my list. It just has to succeed. It will succeed. And you've got the strong leadership and the student body and the faculty to make that happen and we in the Office of the President and on the Board of Regents, we'll do our part despite the perplexing dysfunctional problems in Sacramento to get this, to get this done. You have wonderful students and that counts a lot with me. I saw them during Mrs. Obama's visit. I met them in other settings. They're creative, they're interesting--boy, are they tenacious! I will tell you, they are tenacious! And they have a strong sense of community, and something I really love about them is their commitment to this institution, is really just unparalleled. I mean, it is wonderful to be around people who are so absolutely devoted to the campus.

The faculty consists of hard-working scholars. Martha [Conklin] always reminds me how hard working they are. And, but the way I look at it, you have bravely chosen to participate in the birth of a new UC campus. And you're part of the founding

generation, and being part of a founding generation means that they're some challenges which maybe the faculty at UCLA or the faculty at Davis is not facing because you're really inventing the enterprise as you go along, in addition to carrying out your other faculty responsibilities. But you're doing it well and I think years from now you'll look back, as I think acting Chancellor Park would do, and say, "Boy, it was great. I was part of something that was really important, and we're making it work and serving the needs of this area of the state."

And I wanted to note a couple of things. You're all familiar with them, I'm sure, but the Sierra Nevada Research Institute has earned its place as the leading research station in the region. You recently completed construction on the solar power system. It's well becoming a model for sustainable energy for others across the state and country. The National Science Foundation has awarded two major grants that are contributing to the school's establishment of the Center on Autonomous and Interactive Systems. And the focus on interdisciplinary research, the primary focus today is brought together cognitive scientists and engineers, colleges, evolutionary biologists, computer scientists, social scientists, all of whom thrive in the creative multi-disciplinary environment here at UC Merced.

Having said that, in many ways the campus is still getting started. And as I mentioned, we feel that Merced will have its rightful place as a jewel in the crown of what is the greatest public university system in the world.

And when I wake up in the morning, I really only thinking about one thing in these economic difficulties and tax collections and all sorts of other things, you know, how do we preserve, protect, and defend the great University of California and even move it to the next higher level? That's what we all need to be thinking

about. Campus by campus and facility by facility and department, or division by division, to me, that's what's important.

Yesterday, I attended the second meeting of the UC Commission for the Future. As you know, this is a group and Chairman Russ Gould of the Board of Regents that I convened to find comprehensive solutions to some of the structural challenges facing UC in a time of diminishing resources and dramatically shifting demographics. And I know that the faculty and students and staff here at Merced will make contributions to those deliberations.

We don't know what the new paradigm will look like, but frankly, I would be shocked if we will have the same paradigm 10 or 20 years from now for delivering educational services and for supporting public universities as we do today. There's just too much changing in the world. And that's what we have to discuss.

On the other hand, you never should tinker with something that's going well. And I look back over 141 years, the University of California executed better or did something better or had better, more visionary leadership or a more talented faculty or more movie stars or something that enabled it to succeed. So I think we have to be very balanced in our approach, knowing that probably our future is not exactly like our past but, at the same time, you don't want to jettison things that have really brought greatness to the universities.

Now here at UC Merced, I think you have a number of advantages, and I've spoken about a couple of them. But one is you don't have as many legacy systems to overhaul. You know, when I sit at my desk, and when I speak to the students I frequently say, "Now, let's suppose you were appointed president. What would you do?" That's a conversation starter.

But there's no doubt that these systems are built up over long periods of time and people are vested in them and, for the most part, they're working very well. The problem is not with them. The problem is with the context in which they do their work and attend their classes and the like.

But you have the ability to innovate in a way, I think, being such a young university, which is more difficult or the more established campuses, and I would just encourage you to continue down that line. And interdisciplinary collaboration, the more efficient use of resources, it's never easy. But these are things which I think perhaps have fewer obstacles here at Merced than you would elsewhere on many of the campuses.

We also look to Merced as an indicator of future trends and public higher education. And the Commission will consider that in terms of the demographics of your campus, in terms of the brilliant diversity that's been achieved here. You know, in many ways you are a portent of the future, perhaps certainly for California, probably for the University of California system and for much of the nation. So it's a very important enterprise here and it brings people, families, and jobs to the Valley, and that's all critically important.

Now I wanted to tell you one short story. [UC Merced] Chancellor [Steve] Kang and I recently had the privilege of seeing for ourselves the tremendous potential in the Valley when we visited the Sunnyside High School in Fresno. This was a couple of weeks ago. We were there to announce the launch of a program called, "Project You Can" which is a 10-campus, one-billion dollar scholarship campaign, all income adjusted over a four-year period of time. And we also announced that the Blue and Gold Program which says students, families making less than \$60,000 pay no education or registration fee that I was going to propose to the Board if you can all convince Regent

Marcus to raise it from 60 to 70 thousand dollars.

There are 3,000 youngsters in that school. They are primarily Hispanic. You probably have been to Sunnyside. But there're also Hmong children, African American children, children of various parts of Latin America and so forth. The principal estimated out of 3,000 students, 2,980 would qualify for the Blue and Gold Program. Twenty-nine-hundred-and-eighty would qualify.

Now, they still need to work hard, study hard, they need to be admitted or to go to a community college and transfer. That's fine. But all but 20 students at this enormous public high school in Fresno would qualify for this scholarship of assistance. Or put it differently, she estimated only 20 families had incomes over \$70,000 a year in the populations that they serve.

So it's very inspiring to see them. And they were very enthusiastic. They received the message very well because I think they saw the door of opportunity opening to them. Because, though we read scary headlines about fee increases and other things, but they understand this program. And dozens of them are enrolled in something called Doctors Academy that prepares students for careers in the health profession. And their college-going rate is 100% in the Doctors Academy. And I can't remember, it's two, three, four years old, something like that. Their mentor is Dr. Katherine Flores. This physician who grew up working in the fields, working the fields, next to her migrant farm working grandparents. That's what she did. That's how she started. And she's the director of the program.

So what I would say to you today is that we don't quite have the physical plant in Merced where we want it, although we're working on the problem. We certainly don't have the resources we want, and we're trying to work on that problem. And I invite

all of you to become part of our advocates group which is 200,000 strong. But we are aiming for one million people, a million and a half people, actually, who will be able to reason with our betters in Sacramento.

So we don't have all the resources. We don't have all the physical plant, we haven't hired as many faculty as we would like, but we sure have the young people. You have an absolutely dynamic group of young people, the first to go to college. They're tenacious just like the students who are already here. They're smart, they're tenacious, they get it. And they're working hard to get to UC Merced and to other University of California campuses.

So what I think you have here most of all, is you are rich in human capital. You are rich in human capital. We could use more of the cash capital, but we are rich in human capital, and that to me is the great strength of UC Merced moving ahead. So I'm delighted to be here, delighted to have the opportunity to talk to you and to discuss education innovation. And all I can say is for those of you who are here as supporters of the university, staff members, faculty, students--I just want you to know I really do appreciate all that you do day in and day out, and every day. Thank you. [*applause*]