Polish and Shine

Between semesters and during breaks, master custodian Jose Robles strips the old wax from the floors in the cafeteria, removing a semester’s worth of scuff marks and other grime. With new wax applied, the cafeteria will be ready for students after they return from the spring break. Keep on shining, Jose!
Crowd Enjoys State of the College Address
President Taylor Highlights the Past Year for Guests of Foundation Event

By Dr. Ron Taylor
Superintendent/President

Editor's Note: Following is President Taylor's State of the College address, which was given to the public during the Merced College Foundation-sponsored event on April 11.

What a beautiful day we’ve been given! The weather, the campus, all of you who come together because you value what Merced College does for people in this community. Thank you for being here today.

Merced College Foundation: Thank you for sponsoring this day of celebration, when we recognize how much good comes from giving. You’ve given the college some new traditions, and rekindled some old ones. There was the 50th Anniversary celebration that led to this annual luncheon. Also, you’ve given us an athletic Hall of Fame for college alumni and friends. You’ve expanded employee giving and initiated a budding mini-grant program to provide assistance for academic programs. Thank you so, so, so much. Thank you all for your tireless work and your love for the college.

And help me, please, in thanking the Merced College Board of Trustees. Few people realize the incredible amount of time the Board gives to this college. It’s a hard job, unsung and unpaid! Their love and service for Merced College is exemplary. Words aren’t enough.

Student leaders! You are here as well. Know this: what you do for your fellow students is greater than you know. Your leadership is profound for its results and for the inspiration you seed in others. You lead us into the future.

Finally, faculty and staff: What you do for the college, I know you do for the students, that they can learn and grow as individuals. They say people who love people are the happiest people. In your hearts, I know you are happy, because your love for people, for student success, is daily evident.

At Convocation in August, I laid out nine tasks. Nine Big Hairy Audacious Tasks. It is due to the giving nature of faculty and staff, and to their dedication and focus, that we have made progress on all nine tasks. Thank you. You give and you give and you keep on giving. Never doubt whether you are making a difference. You are.

Now, a few numbers to quantify the work of Merced College in the past year: 15,000 individuals educated (in one format or another); 800 associate degrees granted; 150 certificates conferred; 600 transfers to 4-year institutions; $30 million in financial aid passed to our students; $300 million in economic impact to the region overall.

But it’s more than these numbers. Merced College students touch the lives of many other people: in their families, their churches and workplaces, everyone they rub elbows with. The quality of education our students gain here contributes to everyone they engage with, into the future. That’s the power of what the faculty and staff do. That’s the impact the Trustees and the Foundation make. That’s what we do here. We help individuals improve themselves.

I’m very proud. Across the institution, employees pull together in energized relationships to get things done. Let me share just a few details of their work.

The Student Services division has been working on ways to better support student success. Responding to the Student Success Act of 2012, they are implementing specific steps designed to improve student degree completion—such as individual education plans required of each student. This is a big change. To accomplish it, Student Services has partnered with Information Technology Services to build a new web interface. It is a mark of pride for me that Merced College is three steps ahead of our sister institutions on these implementations! Go Team!

Our Business Resource Center and Workplace Learning Resource Center continue to partner in meaningful ways with businesses. This is how, together, we enhance the skills and grow the talent that our region can then put to work. I was very proud of our career technical representatives when they made a presentation recently to community leaders about Merced College’s potential to assist in regional economic development. And a statewide award was given to our Center for International Trade Development, which serves the entire Central Valley. Not sitting on their laurels, they brought to Merced the United States Small Business Administration for a workshop on exporting—graced by the presence of our inimitable Congressman Jim Costa. International trade! The Small Business Administration! Merced College is apparently no small town school!

I’m very happy to report that as of last July Merced College has addressed our accreditation recommendations. We were able to resolve the recommendations to the satisfaction of the Commission. Since then, we have produced a Midterm Report and submitted our regular Annual Report to the Commission, thanks to the able leadership of Dr. Susan Walsh and the efforts of many other faculty and staff. Accreditation is a cyclical oversight process. It is designed to keep us at a sustainable level of institutional effectiveness, that is, a high quality school. And we are. We expect to be working on institutional effectiveness for some time to come. Our next signpost with the Commission will come in July, when they respond to our Midterm Report.

Of course there’s also our budget gap, but we have whittled it down and we will continue to do so.

Here, I want to thank our collective bargaining unions. They have been significant in helping the college address both the budget and accreditation. They are to be credited and praised for being team players.

So, what makes a successful team? Knowing the rules. Knowing how everyone’s roles fit into the big picture of the game. Constantly improving the skills of...
Hundal Farms Establishes New Endowment
Couple’s Gift Will Provide Scholarship Awards for Future Teachers

Thanks to a long-time Merced College professor and her husband, students who are pursuing future teaching careers will have extra help in the form of scholarships.

History professor Amerjit Johl-Hundal and Par Singh Hundal, joint owners and trustees of Hundal Farms Inc., have established a $10,000 scholarship endowment through the Merced College Foundation.

“We are very grateful for this generous gift, which Par and Amerjit have provided,” said Foundation Executive Director Robin Shepard. “The Hundal Farms Scholarship Endowment will provide scholarships for students wishing to pursue careers in teaching. This is a wonderful investment in our students, one that will produce lasting benefits for our society.”

Based in the Central Valley and Monterey County (Pebble Beach), Hundal Farms Inc. has been involved in the agricultural business for that past 25 years, mainly in the almond and pistachio production industry. The business presently encompasses several thousand acres and employs 30 full-time and 15 seasonal workers.

Hundal Farms Trust has been involved in philanthropic endeavors for the past 10 years, including endowments established with UCLA. Professor Johl has been teaching at Merced College since 1992. While she has educated local students, Hundal Farms Trust has been a major contributor to our local economy. Together, the couple has made the local community a better place in which to live.

“This is our way of giving back to the Merced community,” Professor Johl said. “With this gift, we hope to encourage and motivate our students and benefit the people who live here.”

With a heart to change lives and make their community a better place, Par Hundal and Amerjit Johl will be pleased to know that their philanthropy will do just that.

Students Ready for Annual Siege Weapons Competition

Project Combines Physics with Fun

The campus community, as well as local citizens, are invited to witness the annual Siege Weapons Competition on April 30 from 12:30 to 4 p.m.

The event, which will be held on the practice soccer fields, is part of Professor Lana Jordan’s Physics 4A and 4B courses.

Students are required to build full-scale trebuchets, or catapults, which must launch a basketball 15 meters. The students perform this task while earning a grade.

The construction of the trebuchets must not use elastic, springs, chemical reactions, or electricity, so the machines can be very ingenious. There is a $100 limit for materials.

The event, which draws about 100 participants and observers, is always entertaining and many of the designs are quite imaginative.

Come on out and encourage our students!
MC Aggies Earn Top Honors at National Competition

Students from Merced College’s Landscape Horticulture, Mechanized Agriculture, and Agriculture Business programs earned top honors at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition held March 21-23 at Colorado State University.

Sponsored by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), the competition was composed of students from 67 different colleges and universities from across the United States. Competitors must have demonstrated the knowledge and skill sets they have developed in 28 different categories within landscaping, horticulture, business, and equipment repair and operations.

“Merced College students took part in 10 of the events at this national competition and their results were astounding,” said Dean Jim Andersen.

In Small Engine Repair, Andrew Ornelas placed 1st out of 43 competitors. In Excavator operation James Palmer placed 2nd out of 46 competitors as well as 2nd in Loader Backhoe Operation out of 48 competitors. In the Annual and Perennial Plant Identification category, Elias Armenia placed 5th and Elaine Valladao placed 7th out of 96 competitors. In Leadership Skills, Sarah Baskins placed 13th out of 53 competitors and Elaine Valladao placed 20th out of 80 competitors in the Plant Problems competition.

In the team Competitions, Merced College teams placed 7th in Wood Construction, 14th in Truck and Trailer Operation and 17th in Hardscape Installation. Each of the aforementioned team competitions has nearly 50 college teams.

“Congratulations to the students who took part in this event,” Andersen said. “And a special thanks, and congratulations, to instructors Bryan Tassey and Darol Fishman for an outstanding job in sharing their expertise with our students and for their dedication to maintaining a high degree of student success.”

Calendar of Events

- May 1-3—The Bald Soprano, 7:30 p.m., Theater
- May 3—Sports Hall of Fame Banquet, 6-9 p.m., ‘On the Green,’ Stadium ’76
- May 4—The Bald Soprano, 2 p.m., Theater
- May 7—Student Art Exhibit Reception, 6-7:30 p.m., Art Gallery
- May 7-15—Student Art Exhibit, Art Gallery
- May 9-10—Chorale, 8 p.m., Theater
- May 14—Guitar Ensemble, 7:30 p.m., Theater
- May 16—Night of Jazz, 7:30 p.m., Theater
- May 18—Scholarship Sunday, 4 p.m., Theater
- May 22—Concert Band, 7:30 p.m., Theater
- May 23—Commencement Exercises, 7 p.m., Stadium ’76/Don Odishoo Field

County Notification System Alerts You to Emergencies

Merced County has a citizens alert notification system very similar to the College’s Alert U emergency notification system. Should there ever be a threat to your health or safety, you can receive these notifications. There is no cost to register for this service.

Messages can be sent to all standard voice and text communication devices, including landline phone numbers, cellular phone numbers, faxes, and email.

Please refer to the Merced County Emergency Notification System website for instructions. To learn more, place the website address below into your internet browser: http://www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=1922.
At the California Collegiate Livestock Show held in Porterville March 7-8, Merced College’s animal science students, along with Animal Science professor Jaime Farao, took several of the best offspring raised from all three species produced on the College farm laboratory and competed with colleges and universities from all over California. The results were remarkable, according to Professor Farao.

Merced College produced livestock received the following honors: Grand Champion Market lamb; Grand Champion Marker Boer Goat; Grand Champion Boer Goat Doe; Reserve Grand Champion Boer Goat Doe; Champion Lamb Showmen; Grand Champion Boer Goat Showman; Reserve Grand Champion Boer Goat Showman.

The college farm serves instructional needs in several areas, such as crop and seed production, forage crop production, onion seed production and almond production. In addition, the farm provides irrigated pasture acreage for livestock, which includes a sheep flock, a Boer goat herd, and beef cattle herd that the animal science students utilize within the instructional lab components of their classes.

“Over the past 15 years, Professor Farao has done an extraordinary job converting the livestock program into not only an impressive instructional lab environment, but one that boasts a history of producing championship livestock as well,” said Dean Jim Andersen.

As part of Merced College’s animal science program, students utilize artificial insemination practices in the cattle herd that allow them to match specific traits of both the sire and dam to produce superior quality calves that can be used within other animal science instructional lab areas, according to Andersen.

“As for the sheep flock and Boer goat herd,” Andersen said, “Professor Farao and his students have, through selection and breeding management, developed one of the top market sheep flocks and goat herds in California.”

Four MC Students Receive AGS Honor Society Scholarships

Alpha Gamma Sigma (AGS), the national honor society for California community colleges, has announced its scholarship awards for 2014, with four Merced College students among the recipients. The awards were made during the 88th Annual AGS Convention in San Jose on April 5.

Ayesha Nunes and Chuck Bradshaw received awards recognizing outstanding community service. Ignacio Martinez received scholarships that recognize academic excellence, and Firdavs Abdunazarov received a scholarship that recognizes academic excellence, community service, and leadership.

AGS holds an annual convention each spring. This year’s convention had 526 attendees representing 39 college chapters. A total of $40,000 in scholarship awards were made available to 55 community college students.
Students Tour Yosemite Park

Food Services

By Michelle Pecchinino
Professor of Foods and Nutrition

Students in the Foods and Nutrition program recently visited Yosemite National Park’s Hospitality Department to learn about internship and employment opportunities.

According to program graduate Bhakti Naik, “We were introduced to the executive chef of the Ahwahnee Hotel. He gave us a brief tour of the huge kitchen. It was fun to see a commercial kitchen live with so many chefs and kitchen staff working together. They were busy making salads, decorating the pastries and rushing with dishes to be served in the dining room.”

Students were able to put their classroom knowledge into place when noticing the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, a food safety practice) being practiced in the cold foods section where the seafood was placed on cold ice to prevent it from getting spoiled. The kitchen also had a small bakery room where they baked cookies and different breads.

The entire kitchen is run by two head chefs, four sous chefs, and few other kitchen staff. Students asked Chef Bob about career opportunities in the kitchen, and he said they would like to hire new college graduates without any experience because they train their employees. Every year they receive 800-1,000 job applications.

Student Cynthia Russo reported that they are focusing more on hiring local people.

“They hire year round, both part-time and full-time,” she said. “They give paid training and offer meal plans and housing to employees. Job promotions are available and if one shows a good work ethic it gets noticed and rewarded.”

Hospitality positions are expected to continue to grow throughout California. For more information on Merced College’s Foods and Nutrition program, call 209.384.6120.
National Poetry Month

George Oppen’s Vision of Clarity in a Banal World

By Robin Shepard
Public Information Officer

Among American poets, few have had a more unorthodox career than George Oppen. After all, he stopped writing poetry for 28 years, years which he spent engaged in leftist political activism and eventual exile in Mexico.

There are enough tragedies and personal traumas in Oppen’s life to satisfy a psychoanalyst’s morbid curiosity. While his life is a great subject for study, we finally must arrive at his poetry and measure its importance against the great stream of 20th Century American verse.

Oppen’s reputation has grown significantly since his death in 1984, due primarily to his highly fused and sparse language and his severe aesthetic. He, more than any of his contemporaries, employed a poetic language shorn of most discursive elements. His jagged images flash momentarily on the page, taken up by further, seemingly unconnected thoughts. Critics have commented on Oppen’s distrust of language, which resulted in a very bare line and a completely elliptical pattern of communication. Reading an Oppen poem is like watching a stop motion Kinetoscope, the images appear linear and connected, but in reality they are iniolate and unaffected by common syntactical constructions.

I first read Oppen’s work in the American Poetry Review while a student at Merced College in the late 70s. His poems were strangely disjunctive. I didn’t know where to stand inside of them. His images flashed brilliantly, then disappeared. Energy flowed past the edges of the page. Something was happening here, but I didn’t know how to respond. I knew I was reading a poet of unusual power and perception. His voice was calling out to me, but it was nothing I had ever heard before.

Oppen’s poetic ambitions rest in his phenomenological observation of concrete reality. According to poet and critic Paul Zweig, Oppen’s poems “are tightly wrought meditations which do not so much define as surround their subject with tentative thrusts of meaning. Abstractions and carefully observed details mingle to produce a line that is almost sculptural in its precision.”

Critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis comments: “I remember with attentiveness the poetry and example of George Oppen, who wanted to look, to see what was out there, evaluate its damage and contradictions, to say scrupulously in a pared and intense language not what was easy or right or neat or consoling, but what he felt when all the platitudes and banalities were stripped away.”

Though his poems may seem obscure, Oppen described his whole poetic career as a search for clarity. Arriving at the heart of the thing was his desire yet, ironically, he employed language with its inherent ambiguities and contradictions, to serve as the palette from which the world was painted. His was an heroic mission, but one perhaps better suited for Gnostics and lunatics.

One particular poem of his, a beautiful piece titled “The Forms of Love,” has always impressed me with its primordial sensibility of the blurred boundaries between the physical world and the mind which observes it. It remains for me, an extremely approachable poem, one that I would introduce first to readers unfamiliar with his work. Here it is in its entirety:

The Forms of Love
Parked in the fields
All night
So many years ago,
We saw
A lake beside us
When the moon rose.
I remember
Leaving that ancient car
Together. I remember
Standing in the white grass
Beside it. We groped
Our way together
Downhill in the bright
Incredible light

Beginning to wonder
Whether it could be lake
Or fog
We saw, our heads
Ringing under the stars we walked
To where it would have wet our feet
Had it been water

“The Forms of Love” amply displays Oppen’s powers of observation and his unyielding quest for clarity amidst the banalities of contemporary life.

In 1977, his wife Mary assisted him in the completion of his last book Primitive. During this time, Oppen was beginning to exhibit confusion, a failing memory and other tangible signs of Alzheimer’s. Once a poet’s short-term memory weakens through age or illness, it is the most tragic of outcomes. For a poet so fully dedicated to expressing “the world out there,” this was completely devastating.

George Oppen, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, died at the age of 76 from pneumonia in a convalescent home in Pleasanton.
the players. Happily, we have two new programs for team improvement.

First, we’ve rolled out an “on-boarding” program for new employees, called “Merced College Traditions.” It helps new folks acclimate into Merced College more smoothly, so they can be great team players sooner, making a difference for students, and the people they work with along the way.

Also new is a pilot program called the Emerging Leaders Institute. Promoting professional development opportunities for staff and faculty, this program will help us be a strong, informed, highly skilled and well-networked educational community. Thank you Jonae Pistoresi for spearheading these two programs.

Now, I promise I won’t get political on you, but, in truth, elections do keep coming around, like taxes, and birthdays. In 2012, Prop. 39 passed, providing funds for upgrading energy efficiency. We are glad, this year, to be able to put those funds to use, primarily at the Los Banos campus.

Looking to this year’s elections, we have been updating our facilities plans in hopes of a state facilities bond for education appearing on November’s ballot.

If there is a facilities bond, Merced College would be able to build a new instructional facility for Agriculture and Industrial Technology. Eventually, with enough money, we will also renovate our Vocational-Technical building, a sore need.

I’ve spoken with Senator Canella and Assemblyman Gray about funding education, making sure they know the facts, and our reasoning. I also work with lots of educational groups at the state level. Engaging with each other is very important in shaping the future. I had sessions with State Chancellor Harris a few weeks ago. He is talking with the Governor’s office, pushing for a good funding structure for community colleges. So have heart! There are many people just like you who understand the importance of education, who understand how education ripples into the economy and improves our quality of life. We hope for the best. You might even consider writing a letter to the senator or assemblyman to put in your own words what you want to see for students. When there is more support for students, we all win. We’re all students at some time in our lives—often more than once!

But let’s face it. We all realize that education is changing. The signs are there. The public now looks at higher education as a service they pay for, and they expect specific results. And modern students want their education to fit into their complicated lives. Ours is the era of the cell phone. Translated into the world of higher education, this requires us to be ever more responsive—fluid, flexible, effective.

Merced College’s mission is to serve as a gateway to the future, providing accessible, affordable, and relevant education and workforce training for students in our richly diverse region.

Merced College aims to fulfill this mission, and we will. We must! We can adapt to modern expectations while holding firm to quality.

I often turn to folk wisdom to help me through transition. In this swirl of 21st Century change, there is a bit of advice that helps me. It actually came from a comic strip! This is how it goes: “All you need to be happy is someone to love, something to look forward to, and something to do.” At Merced College, we do have someone to love—that’s our students. And we look forward to their successes! We also have something very important to do. And it’s our highest priority at this time. Let me explain.

The Merced Community College District Board of Trustees has drafted five broad goals. These particular goals are not required of us by the state; they are ours. The Board generated these goals as a team, based on their vision for the future. They are very good goals:

- Establish excellence in institutional effectiveness and accreditation.
- Focus on student learning and learning opportunities.
- Meet long-term resource needs in support of student learning and institutional effectiveness.
- Increase outreach into the community.
- Improve governance, leadership, and communication.

Guided by these goals, and responding to the latest data and input, our Strategic Planning Task Force has put together the following draft priorities for the next two years.

- Assure student access and success.
- Foster a culture of positive communication and effective collaboration throughout the district.
- Assure continuous enhancement of technology and systems integration.
- Partner with the community
- Promote a sustainable, supportive, and safe learning environment.
- Improve institutional effectiveness and establish a culture of excellence.

The college community is currently reviewing these draft goals. We would very much like input from the community at large. That’s you. There will be an online review and comment process going on for the next few weeks. Please, use the card provided at your table to express your willingness to participate in the online community review. Once ratified by our esteemed Board, these goals will guide decision-making and prioritization of activities and resources throughout the college.

You’ll see that these draft goals embody an emphasis on institutional effectiveness that is organized not around the bottom line, but around student learning, the workplace of the future, and the blended lives we are all living. If we move solidly in this direction, Merced College will flourish. There is no reason we could not be recognized nationally for the excellence of our work. We just have to keep our love and dedication to student success strong and productive.

The Vision Statement for Merced College is succinct. It speaks of “transformational and empowering educational experiences.”

“Merced College will provide transformational and empowering educational experiences to meet student and community needs.”


Let’s do it! Go Blue Devils! Go Team! And now I believe it is time to honor one of our most generous, giving, and loving partners.

Thank you.