

Merced College President's Message

July 16, 2007



Welcome back for the 2007-08 academic year. As we enter our 45th year, we at Merced College are experiencing one of the most exciting and challenging years in our history. As a result of a combination of local and state bond dollars, we were able to open our new Learning Resources Center this spring. This has been a long needed and anticipated addition to our college.

I am happy to announce that this summer, our new Los Banos Campus opened to students. We were able to offer summer school classes at the new campus and are looking forward to a grand opening ceremony for the local community on September 7. Residents on the west side of our county made this campus possible by the passage of our bond measure in November 2002. We are very grateful for their support and look forward to serving them in our new campus for years to come.

We are also benefiting from the support of local voters who helped us pass an east side bond for Merced campus in November 2002. As a result of that support, we look forward to the completion of the Science Building remodel in late July and plan to move into it as soon as logistics allow. This remodel, also long anticipated, will provide a state-of-the-art facility for our students and staff to deliver the best instruction possible. In addition, the old Leshner Library is currently being remodeled to provide a one-stop facility for student services and should be completed in April 2008.

At our downtown site, the Business Resource Center is scheduled to be completed in January 2008. This facility will allow us to interface more efficiently with the business community and will house many programs that we currently have located in rented spaces throughout the City of Merced.

As for new construction, Merced College will break ground on a new Allied Health complex this September. It is anticipated that this complex, which will house all health related programs, will be completed by December 2008. Also in late 2008, Merced College looks to secure funding for the construction of a new Agriculture and Industrial Technology Center. This facility will be funded by both state and local dollars.

We are delighted by all of the new construction that will allow us to serve our students well into the future. However, there are other priorities that we are working to deal with this year. Meeting the academic challenges of a changing California requires us to continuously look at our programs and the way that we deliver them to our students. In addition to providing expanded distance education opportunities to our students provided by on-line internet courses, we also are taking on the challenge from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to revamp our basic skills programs to better serve the changing demographics in our community.

I would also like to share with you an exciting initiative that will appear on the February 5, 2008 California ballot. This initiative, crafted by community college trustees, administration

and faculty groups, promises to provide additional funding to California Community Colleges without increasing taxes for California residents. In addition, it lowers student fees to \$15 per unit and increases fees annually only in small increments, generated by a formula. The initiative will go a long way in serving California Community Colleges and our students. I encourage you to learn more about it.

Finally, following the tragedy at Virginia Tech this last spring, we are reviewing the security measures in place at Merced College and are working with a college-wide committee of students, staff, and faculty to take a hard look at the best way for us to provide a safe and secure place to work and study while maintaining the type of climate that is imperative for an institution of higher learning.

We look forward to another great year of serving the Merced College Community and its residents.

Sincerely,

Benjamin T. Duran, Ed.D.
Superintendent/President