

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

MC



MERCED COLLEGE



# Message from the President



In 2018, Merced College developed a five-year Educational Master Plan designed to guide our district into an exciting future, with a strong focus on student success and institutional effectiveness.

Developing and unveiling our Educational Master Plan (EMP) was only the beginning. It would have been easy enough to congratulate ourselves on a job well done while the EMP sat on a shelf and gathered dust for the next five years. Instead, we dug into the

**“...we’re taking a look back not just at the year 2023, but at the entire five-year span of our last Educational Master Plan.”**

plan and created a series of specific action steps to move us toward the strategic goals outlined in the EMP.

These action steps formed the Strategic Implementation Plan that directly guided much of our work over the past five years, and the results of all this planning have been nothing short of astounding.

In this year’s annual report, we’re taking a look back not just at the year 2023, but at the entire five-year span of our previous Educational Master Plan. New programs, new buildings, new events, new transfer pipelines, new student support services, new grants and major donations—even with a pandemic throwing a wrench into some of our plans, we continued

to find new and innovative ways to serve our students and our community.

The work hasn’t stopped. In 2023, we unveiled our new five-year Educational Master Plan, and it is even more aspirational than its predecessor. By Spring 2024, our new Strategic Implementation Plan will be in place, and the work of our incredible faculty and classified professionals will be well underway.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this brief look back at an amazing five years at Merced College. It is our great pleasure and pride to create opportunities for our students to improve their lives and build rewarding careers, and we are grateful for the support of our community.

Sincerely,

Chris Vitelli, Ed.D.  
Superintendent/President



Jill Cunningham  
Executive Director of  
Merced College Foundation

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| Joe Doyland      | Cary Yanagi      |
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| Vinton Thengvall | Priya Lakireddy  |
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| Emily Haden      | Nanette Villegas |
| Mary Robinson    | Kari Ross-May    |
| Bud Wallace      |                  |

## Message from the Foundation

I might be a little biased, but Merced College is without a doubt one of the best places to work in Merced, if not the entire Central Valley. Our mission to serve the students of this region and to respond to the needs of our community is inspiring, and we are fortunate to have a leader in President Chris Vitelli who truly cares about our employees.

Those employees routinely go above and beyond to serve our students. They work long hours, and they can always be counted on to collaborate on the challenges we face as a district.

Remarkably, more than half of our employees also choose to give back through our Employee Giving program. Through monthly donations large and small, our employees generate thousands of dollars each year that are used for student-focused projects that would otherwise have no source of funding.

In the past two years, the Merced College Foundation has disbursed nearly \$30,000 in mini-grants funded

by the Employee Giving program. These funds have gone to a wide variety of projects, including:

- New bicycles for campus police
- Athletics supplies and uniforms
- Food for students during Cram Week
- Student of the Month prizes
- Outreach to promote adult education and noncredit programs
- New Campus Advocate Office for sexual violence prevention
- Student field trips to Yosemite
- Campus tour giveaways for veteran students

We love to celebrate the major gifts we receive from our community, but we're just as proud to receive this kind of support from the employees who already work so tirelessly for our students. Thank you, Employee Givers!

Sincerely,

Jill Cunningham  
Vice President of External Relations  
Executive Director of Merced College Foundation

*The Merced College Foundation is a 501(c)3 incorporated, tax-exempt non-profit overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors. Our tax ID number is 23-7385578*



## Honoring a Legacy of Leadership

Photos  
Left: The Business Resource Center  
Right: Ben Duran

In tribute to a storied career that helped shape the fabric of higher education in the Central Valley, the Merced Community College District Board of Trustees voted in December to rename Merced College's Business Resource Center after President Emeritus Dr. Ben Duran.

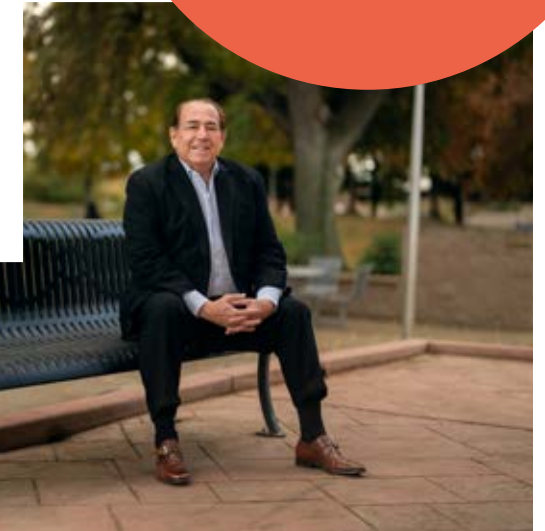
Established in 2008, during Duran's tenure as president, the Business Resource Center revitalized and enhanced relationships between the college and the business community, leading to partnerships that have created countless opportunities for local students and workers to gain valuable skills, knowledge and training to advance their careers. It will now be named the Dr. Benjamin T. Duran Business Resource Center.

The son of migrant farmworkers in Le Grand, Duran built a distinguished life and career devoted to education. He served for nearly 14 years as Merced College's president before retiring in 2012, and is now executive director of the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium (CVHEC).

During Duran's time as president, Merced College's student enrollment increased by thousands, and the district passed vital bond measures that led to new and renovated buildings at both the Merced and Los Banos campuses, including the Business Resource Center.

"This honor, from my perspective, is a recognition of the many others who worked side-by-side with me over all those years to make

Ben and RoseMary Duran will be recognized by the Merced College Foundation at Merced College's annual State of the College event in April at the Business Resource Center.



Merced College and the region better," Duran said. "The existence of the Business Resource Center is a testament to the importance of community colleges not only to students, but to the business community. We were able to elevate the interactions between businesses and the college to the point where it truly became a partnership."

After being approached by the college regarding the naming of the Business Resource Center, Duran and his wife, former Merced City School District Superintendent Dr. RoseMary Parga Duran, decided to make a gift to Merced College of \$100,000 to support programs and services related to economic and workforce development in the region.

# Board of Trustees

The Governing Board of the District consists of seven members elected by residents in each trustee area. Elections are held in even years; terms of office are for four years.



**Carmen Ramirez**  
President



**Ernie Ochoa**  
Vice President



**Mario Mendoza**  
Clerk



**Sue Chappell**  
Trustee



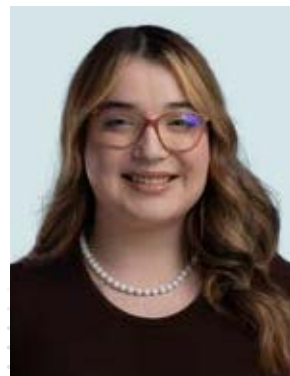
**Joe Gutierrez**  
Trustee



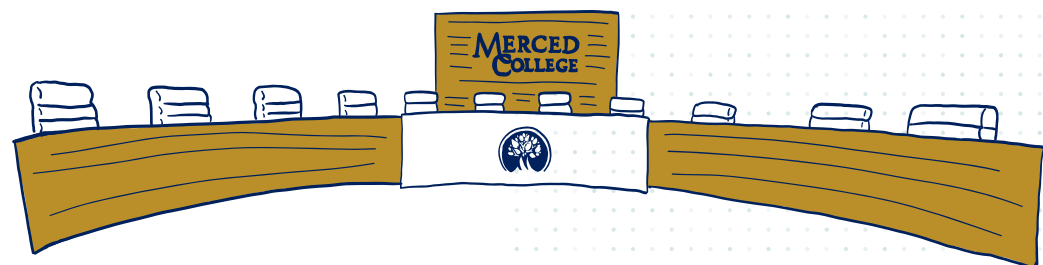
**Kory Benson**  
Trustee



**John Pedrozo**  
Trustee



**Johnni Cowie**  
Student Trustee



# Who We Are

An institution's mission, vision, and core values are its guiding compass, shaping its identity and influencing decisions. The mission defines its purpose, the vision outlines its future, and core values provide an ethical foundation. Together, these elements ensure a cohesive organizational culture, helping the institution navigate challenges and make strategic choices aligned with its fundamental beliefs.

## Mission

At Merced College, students are our focus, and we are known by their success. We transform lives through education and workforce development.

## Vision

Enriching our community through educational experiences and support services:

- Degree/Certificate Programs
- Transfer
- Career Technical Education
- Workforce Training
- Lifelong Learning
- Basic Skills
- Community Engagement

Merced College promotes student success through equitable access, continuous quality improvement, and institutional effectiveness, all with a focus on student achievement.



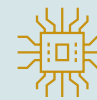
## Core Values



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT



TRUST & COMMUNICATION



INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY



CRITICAL THINKING



COLLABORATION



INCLUSIVITY



WELL-BEING & HAPPINESS



# Demographics

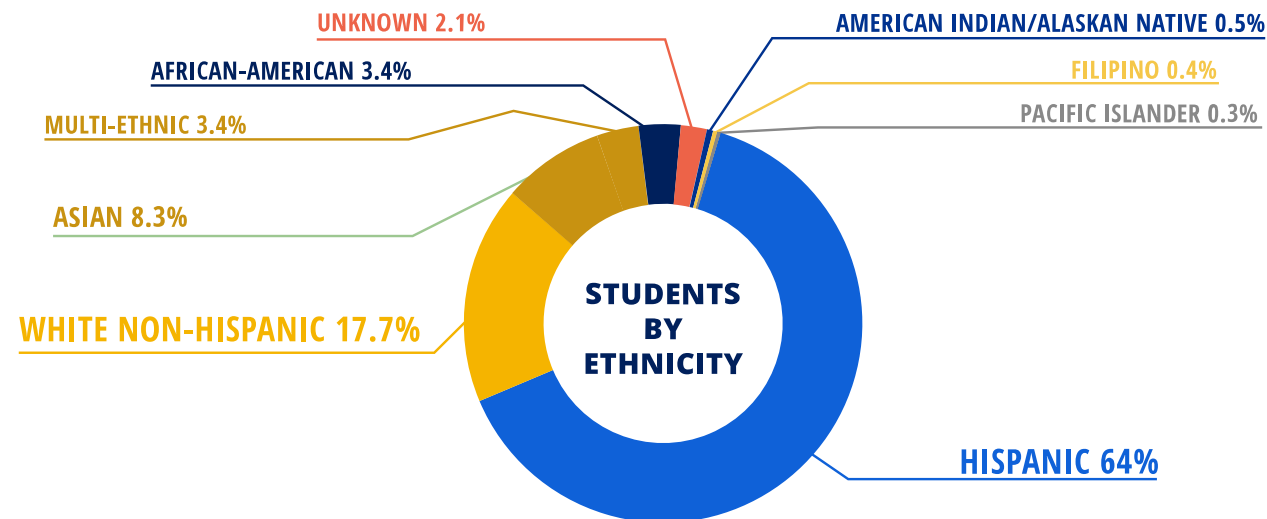
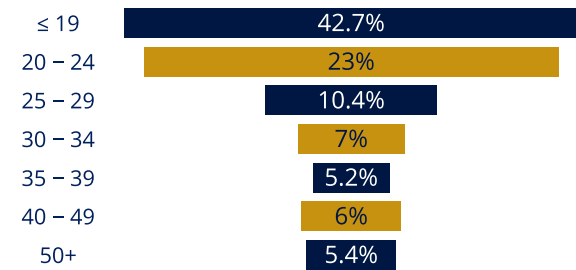
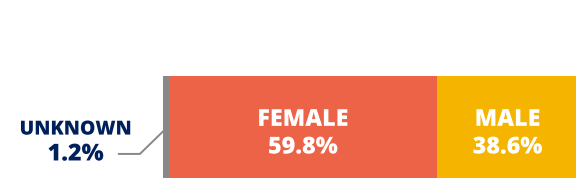
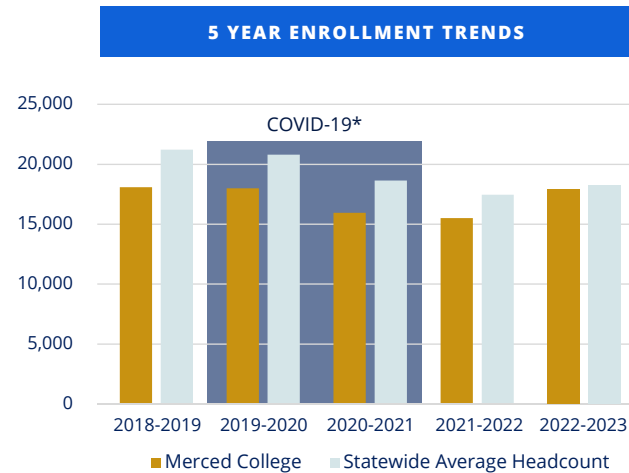
## 2022-2023

TOTAL STUDENTS

# 16,625

### POST-PANDEMIC REBOUND

COVID affected enrollment numbers in community colleges statewide. Despite the setback, our students have been eager to get back on campus, and our enrollment has returned to pre-pandemic levels.



\*Statewide community college enrollment declined during COVID-19.

Source: [https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/Student\\_Term\\_Annual\\_Count.aspx](https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/Student_Term_Annual_Count.aspx)

# Top Degrees & Certificates 2022-2023

CSU General Education Breadth (CT)	Certificate requiring 30 to < 60 units	610
Psychology for Transfer (AAT)	Associate in Arts for Transfer (A.A.-T) Degree	196
Social and Behavioral Science (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	189
Psychology (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	132
Sociology for Transfer (AAT)	Associate in Arts for Transfer (A.A.-T) Degree	92
Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (CT)	Certificate requiring 30 to < 60 units	90
Health Sciences (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	74
Welding Technology (CN)	Certificate requiring 16 to < 30 Units	72
Nursing Assistant (CO)	Credit Award, Under 6 semester Units	68
Business Administration (AST)	Associate in Science for Transfer (A.S.-T) Degree	58

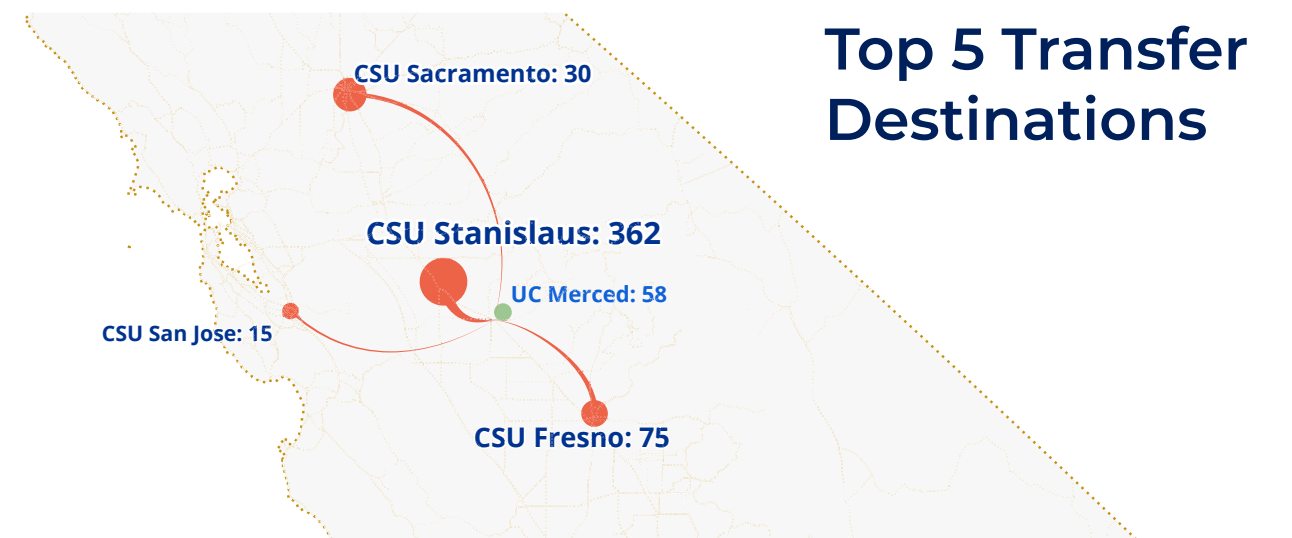
SOURCE: INTERNAL MC DATABASE COMPILED BY OIE

**2,938 Total Awards** were granted in the 2022-2023 year.

**1,422 Awards** were Certificates that helped our students jump start their careers.

**746 Associates for Transfer Degrees** helped our students continue on their journey.

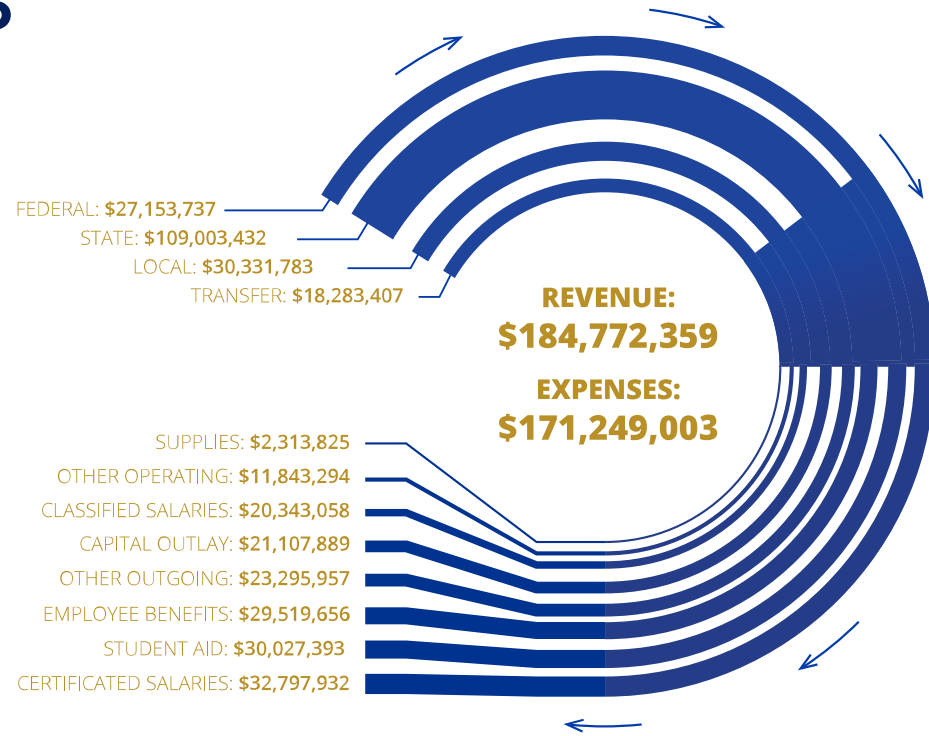
**770 Associates Degrees** were awarded to our talented students.



# 2022-2023 Finances

## Budget

We regularly monitor our budget throughout the year and continue to maintain a stable fund balance above the recommended minimum prudent level of 5%.



# Reaching Out to the Community

After a brief but significant downturn due to COVID-19, Merced College student enrollments surged in Summer and Fall 2023, returning to pre-pandemic levels. Much of that growth can be attributed to the work of the Outreach team, which travels to high schools throughout the district to provide hands-on support to students looking to continue their academic journeys at Merced College.

That work led to across-the-board increases from 2022 to 2023 in applications, orientation attendance, the development of education plans, and enrollment and registration among high school students.

## Summer Roundup

Incoming students for the Fall 2023 semester were invited to the new Summer Roundup, in which they could take customized tours of campus, visit the bookstore, sign up for support services, and get help with financial aid.

## Extreme Registration

The popular one-stop shop event for students to enroll, register for classes, sign up for financial aid and more is held prior to each new semester at both the Merced and Los Banos campuses.

## CTE Day/ Open House

In March, the college held an open house for hundreds of high school students to learn about Career Technical Education programs and offerings.

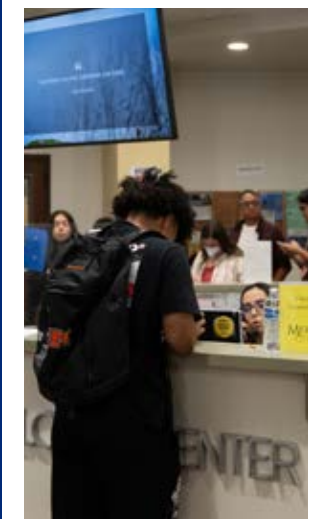
## Community Outreach

Through events like the Christmas Parade, Veteran's Day Parade, Merced County Fair and more, Merced College is reaching out to new students of all ages.



## Welcome Week

At the start of each semester, the Outreach team leads Welcome Week activities, organizing staff volunteers to be present at key locations on campus to greet and guide students in their first week of classes. Welcome Week activities are now being held on the Los Banos Campus.



# 2022-2023 Financial Aid

It's important that our students receive the financial help they need. Multiple sources go into meeting that need.





**Lindsay Roe**  
Registered Nursing Program Assistant Director



**Sam Samra**  
District Director for Rep. John Duarte



**Felicia Jones**  
Manager of Student Services, Los Banos Campus



**Dyana Delfin Polk**  
Peralta Community College District Board of Trustees



**Johnny Bega**  
UC Merced Water Polo Coach



**Samuel Rashe**  
Senior Planner with Madera County

# Made in Merced.

Photos:  
Left: Alumni  
we've highlighted  
throughout the  
year. To read more,  
check out previous  
issues of our Blue  
Devil's Advocate:



Right: Sam  
Samra receives  
a recognition of  
service from CHP.

Students who graduate from Merced College don't just leave with a degree or certificate. They are truly "built for the world," with the knowledge, skills and motivation to make a difference in their community.

Merced College alumni can be found all over Merced County and beyond. They are our teachers and nurses, our leaders in business and agriculture, and our elected officials and public servants, to name a few. Many of them are right here at Merced College, in rewarding careers that enable them to directly support the next generation of Blue Devils.

Here are just a few examples of Merced College alumni who are making a difference in the world.

## Michelle Esquivel

Michelle Esquivel was among the first to jump into action when Planada was struck by devastating flooding in January

2023. Desperate to help, she filled and delivered sandbags, and eventually showed up at the Planada Sacred Heart Catholic Church to start giving out supplies in the days after the storm.

After graduating from Merced High School, Esquivel went on to study and play softball at Merced College and then Stanislaus State. She began substitute teaching in the Planada Elementary School District, and 30 years later, she's now the longest-serving employee in the district.

"I'm doing something I absolutely love," she said. "It's my heart. It's in my blood."

## Samuel Rashe

When Samuel Rashe enrolled at Merced College in 2013, it was his second attempt at a college education, following successful careers with the U.S. Air Force and as a deputy sheriff in New Mexico.



Rashe said the support from the 1st Lt. Peter J. Gallo Veterans Resource Center at Merced College helped him ace his reboot. "Going back to school after the military can be intimidating," he said. "I can't speak more highly of the Veterans Resource Center."

He went on to earn a B.S. from San Jose State University in 2018, then worked as a planner with the City of Atwater, projecting the city's housing, transportation and safety needs over the next 20 years. Now a senior planner with Madera County, Rashe is digging into the planning centered around two new developments in southeast Madera: Riverstone and Tesoro Viejo.



Photos:  
Left: Michelle Esquivel teaches in her Planada classroom.  
Top Right: Johnny Bega at the UC Merced pool.  
Bottom Right: Felicia Jones.

**Dyana Delfín Polk**

Dyana Delfín Polk’s first experience with advocacy came as a Merced College student. When a course she needed in order to transfer was set to get cut due to low enrollment, her mentor, former Merced College history Professor Amerjit Johal, encouraged her to fight for it.

Delfín Polk appealed to the administration and saved the course, then went on to earn her bachelor’s degree at UC Berkeley and her master’s at Mills College. Her passion for community colleges turned into a new calling in politics, and she was elected to the Peralta Community College District Board of Trustees. She now serves as the board’s president.

“There is no way I’d be here without the support of Merced College administration, faculty and staff,” she said. “Merced College did everything for me.”

**Johnny Bega**

As a water polo standout at Atwater High School, Johnny Bega opted to stay local and save money by starting out at Merced College. After an All-American season in 1993, Bega earned a scholarship at Long Beach State, and then began coaching at San Jose State and at UC Berkeley.

Bega went on to coach for club teams and youth national teams, and overseas, then heard about a new water polo program starting up back home,

at UC Merced. In a few short years, he’s led the UC Merced women’s team to a first-place in the Collegiate Water Polo Association’s Club Sierra Pacific “B” Division Championship and third place in the NAIA Water Polo Finals, and the men’s team also finished third in the NAIA.

“To come back now and coach in this area is a dream come true,” he said.

**Felicia Jones**

Felicia Jones faced a daunting reality when she lost her job at AT&T due to staff cuts six years ago. She had never been to college. She had two children to raise. She hadn’t been in the job market in 20 years.



Jones found a position at Merced College. She worked at the front desk for a year before filling an open assistant position in President Chris Vitelli’s office, then worked under Vice President Mike McCandless before taking a management position at the Los Banos Campus.

Along the way, Jones resumed her educational journey, earning her A.A. in Administrative Office Management in 2020 and she’s pursuing a bachelor’s degree.

“The encouragement I have received from everyone at the college makes me want to keep going,” she said. “The sky is the limit.”

**Lindsay Roe**

Lindsay Roe graduated from the registered nursing program at Merced College in 2007, then earned a Master’s in Nursing Instruction from Grand Canyon University in 2017. She’s worked as a paramedic, a clinical

assistant and a full-time nursing professor.

Now, as Assistant Director of Registered Nursing at Merced College, she gets to help the RN program evolve. In collaboration with Director Lauren Marson, Roe ensures the faculty is adequately trained and credentialed, and that the curriculum follows CBRN guidelines. She manages grants and monitors transfer transcripts for course equivalents.

Roe first got the urge to teach while orienting new RNs to the ER at Mercy Medical Center in Merced.

“I knew I wanted to be in the classroom and working in every aspect of training,” Roe said. “I absolutely love my job.”

**Sam Samra**

Sam Samra first got into law enforcement as a part-time campus security worker at

Merced College, while earning his A.A. in Administrative Justice. Later, while a patrolman with the California Highway Patrol, he returned as an adjunct instructor.

Samra retired from the CHP after a distinguished 38-year career, and two years later, he got a call from the office of freshman U.S. Congressman John Duarte. A mutual friend recommended Samra to Duarte.

Samra acts as a de facto chief of staff within the district. He directs field reps throughout the 13th District, and he also guides case workers who help constituents untangle challenges with social security, passports, immigration, veterans affairs, etc.

“Working with Congressman Duarte is my way of giving back,” said Samra, who grew up in Livingston. “I don’t have to do this—I want to do this.”

Photos:  
Left: RN Students.  
Right: The next generation of 2023 alumni prepare to enter the world.





## The Merced College **EMP** Educational Master Plan

Since 2018, Merced College has charted a course of transformative growth and innovation, driven by a dynamic Educational Master Plan (EMP).

These past five years have been marked by significant strides in enhancing student success and institutional effectiveness, a testament to our commitment to educational excellence.

This section of our annual report takes you through a journey of notable milestones: the launch of new programs, the expansion of our campus facilities, and the adaptation to unprecedented challenges, including the global

pandemic. These achievements reflect our unwavering dedication to serving our students and community, even in the face of adversity.

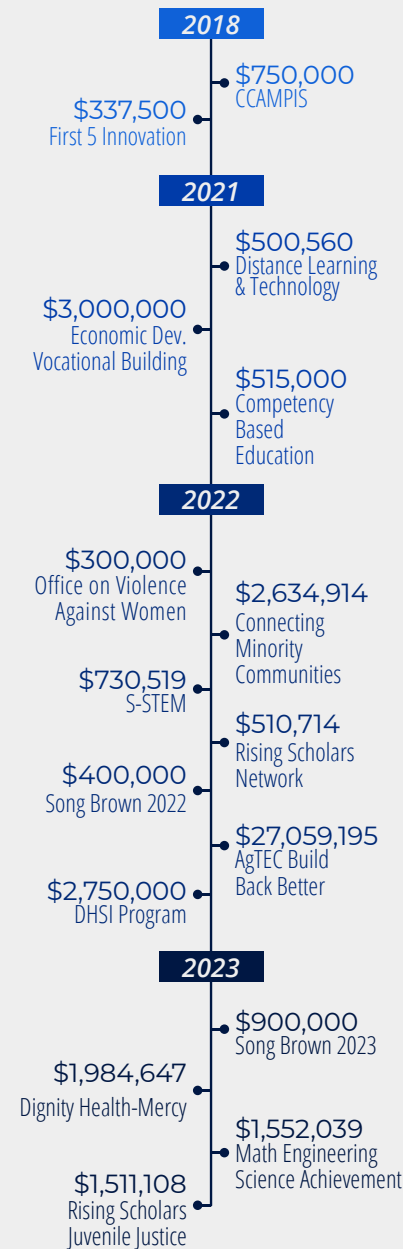
As we reflect on these years of remarkable progress, we are filled with pride and gratitude for the collective efforts of our faculty, staff, and supporters. Together, we have not only met but exceeded the goals set forth in our EMP, paving the way for an even more ambitious future at Merced College.

Join us in celebrating this era of growth and innovation, as we continue to forge a path of excellence in higher education.



**Scan the QR code to view a video covering everything we've accomplished!**

### TOP GRANTS SINCE 2018



# 2018 2019



## JANUARY

### Dual Enrollment Program Grows

Launched in 2016, dual enrollment at Merced College got a boost in 2018 with the passing of AB288, which expanded eligibility for local high school students to get a head start in higher education by taking college courses. Merced College now serves more than 1,000 students per year through dual enrollment. Many students, including the Schwesinger twins, graduate from high school with full associate degrees or even multiple degrees in hand.

## APRIL

### New Plan, New Structure

The rollout of the 2018 Educational Master Plan coincided with the implementation of the California Guided Pathways Model and the creation of the “Schools of” structure for academic programs at Merced College. This has created clear, easy-to-follow academic maps and support structures for students to be successful.



## JULY

### Employee Giving Program Returns

The Merced College Foundation revived its Employee Giving Program in 2018. Today, more than 50 percent of employees give anywhere from \$5 to \$200 per month, funding mini-grants for special projects that directly benefit students.

## AUGUST

### Welding Facility in Los Banos

Welding has become one of the most popular programs at the Los Banos Campus thanks in part to a new facility that opened in 2018. A new Student Success Center also opened in Los Banos the same year.



## AUGUST

### Our Promise: Free Tuition

The Merced College Promise Program launched in 2018, offering free tuition to all first-time, full-time students. The program remains in effect today, and has even been expanded to include returning students.



## MARCH

### Raj Kahlon Makes \$5M Commitment to Merced College

Wanting to give back to the community in which he has thrived as a pistachio and almond farmer, Raj Kahlon made a \$5 million commitment in 2019 to support the agricultural programs at Merced College and a new Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex. The donation remains the largest gift in Merced College history, and Kahlon was honored with the President’s Medallion at the 2019 State of the College Address and Luncheon.

## MARCH

### Lady Blue Devils in the Final Four

A new chapter was added to Merced College’s storied athletic history in 2019, when the Blue Devils women’s basketball team advanced to their second consecutive state Final Four.



## AUGUST

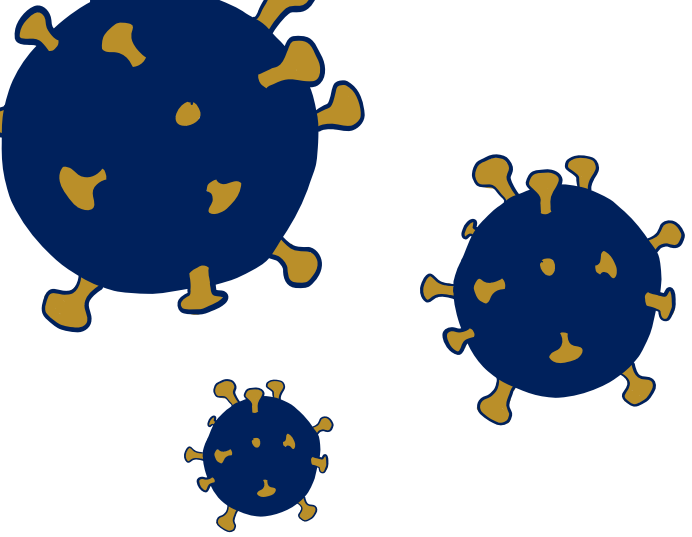
### Expanded Short-term Courses

In support of the goals outlined in the EMP, two significant changes were made to directly benefit students: expanding short-term course offerings and centralizing academic support services. In recent years the college has continued to offer a wider variety of course modalities and schedules, and support services have been further centralized.

## APRIL-JUNE

### Planning Continues

Following the adoption of the Educational Master Plan in 2018, several new plans were rolled out in 2019, including the Facilities Master Plan, the Technology Master Plan, a new Student Equity Plan, and EEO and Professional Development Plans. A Staffing Plan was also adopted later.



# 2020



## MARCH

### Pivoting in a Pandemic

All the planning in the world couldn't have prepared anyone for the COVID-19 pandemic. After the immediate shutdown of campus and a frantic but successful pivot to online instruction, Merced College began doing everything it could to ensure students and employees were cared for and able to continue their lives and education as effectively as possible.

Free laptops were loaned to students who needed them, a student emergency fund was implemented, and employees were given the hardware and software tools they needed to work remotely. Later, as the campus prepared for the return of students, wi-fi was improved throughout the district and additional outdoor seating was created to allow for better social distancing. Hybrid and online course offerings were expanded, and counseling and other services were offered through Zoom.



The early days of the pandemic were chaotic, and the later months were exhausting, but President Chris Vitelli came away proud of the college's response and confident in the future.

"It was brutally hard, but we're better for it," Vitelli said. "I'm beyond humbled by the initiative and leadership our team showed during a tumultuous and unprecedented time."

## JULY

### The Work Continues

While many campus operations came to a halt and goals were put on pause due to the pandemic, a lot of behind-the-scenes work to benefit students and employees continued. Among the achievements that occurred in 2020 were: the continued development of online degree programs and student-friendly

course offerings; the creation of an enrollment management dashboard; the creation and implementation of a staffing plan; the creation of bridge pathways to increase persistence from noncredit to credit programs; implementing the review of all incoming student transcripts; and utilizing the Jobspeaker online platform for student employment.



## FEBRUARY & NOVEMBER

### Two New Transfer Pipeline Programs

Merced College established new transfer agreements with two nearby universities in 2020.

The Merced Promise program is committed to creating a streamlined transfer process for local students to earn their bachelor's degrees at UC Merced. The new collaboration supports local students and their families, benefits underserved populations, and lays the groundwork for future graduates to stay local and thrive in an economically growing region.

The Warriors on the Way (WOW) program facilitates an efficient transfer path from Merced College to CSU Stanislaus. As part of this agreement, Merced College students who complete their ADT in a similar major as offered at Stanislaus State, and meet all of Stan State's application deadlines, will be guaranteed priority admission.

## AUGUST

### Medical Assistant Training in LB

A new addition to the Los Banos Campus in Fall 2020 was a noncredit Medical Assistant Program, which is geared toward adult learners desiring vocational training in a clinical setting. The free program provides Westside students with the opportunity to attain a much-needed skill set.



## OCTOBER

### Downey Family Makes \$1M Gift

Local rancher Susie Downey, on behalf of herself and her late husband, Col. Russell Downey, made a \$1 million donation to Merced College in 2019 to support student success and access initiatives. In honor of their generosity, the Learning Resource Center was later renamed after the Downeys, and Susie Downey was presented with the President's Medalion Award at the State of the College event in 2021.



# 2021



**FEBRUARY**  
**COVID Community Vaccination Clinics**

In Spring 2021, thousands of Merced County residents received COVID-19 vaccines during a series of clinics held on the Merced College campus, thanks to a collaborative effort by the county, the City of Merced, Dignity Health-Mercy Medical Center, Merced College, University of California Health, and UC Merced.

It could not have gone so well without help from dozens of trained volunteers from the college's staff, as well as nursing students and instructors. At Convocation in 2021, the nursing programs and Allied Health were named the President's Blue and Gold Award recipients for their work during the clinics.

**JUNE**  
**Grant to Remodel Vocational Building**

Merced College received a \$3 million federal grant to renovate and modernize. Planned renovations will include a new culinary lab along with a rebuilt interior.

**JULY**  
**Mapping Success**

Launched in 2021, the Program Pathways Mapper enables students to find courses organized by Learning and Career Pathways, plus information on related occupations and careers.

**AUGUST**  
**Hospitality Career Academy Launches**

In the Hospitality Career Academy—a new and innovative partnership between Merced College, El Capitan Hotel and Mainzer—local residents can pursue careers in hospitality and customer service while earning college credits.



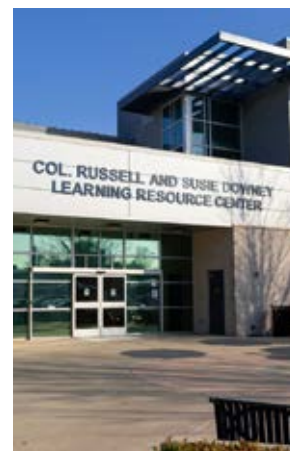
**MAY**  
**Commencement Back on Campus**

After a year away due to the pandemic, commencement returned to the Merced College campus, with ceremonies honoring the classes of 2020 and 2021.

**AUGUST**  
**Learning Resource Center Renovated**

The two-story structure now known as the Downey Learning Resource Center (LRC) has been a student hub and a jewel of the Merced College campus since it was built in 2007.

But after undergoing a \$1.4 million renovation, and moving tutoring operations into the building in 2021, the LRC can now fully live up to the promise of its name.



**NOVEMBER**  
**Los Banos Campus Celebrates 50 Years**

During the past half-century, many who might not have otherwise been able to attend college have benefitted from the Los Banos Campus, earning degrees and certificates, transferring to universities or finding well-paying jobs. In November 2021, the campus celebrated its 50th anniversary with a packed event that attracted many local leaders, businesses and community organizations.



**SEPTEMBER**  
**Soccer Returns**

Men's and women's soccer returned to Merced College in 2021 with much fanfare. In 2022, just its second year since restarting the program, the men's team made it to the state Final Four.

**SEPTEMBER**  
**New Space for Innovation**

The space formerly occupied by the Student Success & Tutorial Center is now the Trident Innovation Center, which includes a remote worker lounge, collaborative work spaces, and instructional designers with state-of-the-art recording studios.

**OCTOBER**  
**Leadership Academy**

President Chris Vitelli launched an intensive yearlong study in leadership and management skills for faculty, classified employees and managers.



**OCTOBER**  
**High-Touch Tech**

Anatomage tables contain detailed, 3-D visualizations of human bodies to enable simulated dissections and views into every physical structure and system.



**DECEMBER**  
**A Family Affair**

With a generous \$1 million donation, four brothers honored their late mother, Hermione Isakow, with the creation of the Isakow Plaza, a beautiful new space near the front of the Merced campus.



# 2022



## SEPTEMBER

### A New Era for Ag

In September 2022, Merced College celebrated the opening of the 29,000-square-foot Raj Kahlon Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex. The \$25 million complex now houses several of the college's academic programs, and it features a 7,500-square-foot courtyard, a sun room for plant science, and an animal science room.



Merced College also announced the new Agrifood Technology and Engineering Collaborative (AgTEC), led by the Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF). The AgTEC initiative will leverage the strength of community colleges throughout the Valley — with contributions from small farmers and multinational companies alike — to revolutionize how agricultural workers learn the skills they need.

Merced College will receive more than \$27 million through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better Regional Challenge to serve as the project lead for the AgTEC Workforce initiative, which will include another new building: the Ag Technology Innovation Center. A \$15 million investment from the state, made possible by Sen. Anna Caballero, will help launch the AgTEC initiative.

## JANUARY

### Student Support Services Expand

Supporting the goals of the Educational Master Plan, the college has worked to improve access to student services through virtual options and other modalities, provide students with basic technology and training, and increasing opportunities for students to receive mentoring.



## MARCH

### Equity Hub Opens

Merced College has for years offered programs to reach and nurture Black students, Latino students, disabled students, students who are military veterans, foster youth, homeless or anyone struggling academically. The college's new Equity Hub provides an inclusive and welcoming home for students.

## FEBRUARY

### Food Pantry Expands

Merced College has expanded its food pantry, which offers all students a snack and drink per day and one bag of groceries per week. In addition to the pantry in the Student Union, a food pantry has also been added at the Los Banos Campus.

## MARCH

### Live Theater Returns

The Merced College Theater Department returned to the stage in 2022, with a production of *The Great Gatsby* and a unique, interactive haunted house experience called *The Last Masquerade*.



## APRIL

### Merced College Online Launches

After a successful transition to online instruction during the pandemic, Merced College introduced four fully online degree programs in 2022. The college continues to pursue innovations in Credit for Prior Learning and Competency-Based Education, as well.



## APRIL

### New Butch Hughes Clubhouse Opens

The Athletics Hall of Fame event featured a dedication ceremony for the baseball team's newly renovated and renamed Butch Hughes Clubhouse, along with the induction of Hughes' remarkable seven state championship teams.



## AUGUST

### 'Team' Approach to Student Success

Supporting student success has always been a priority at Merced College. In Fall 2022, it became even more of a "team" effort with the creation of new Student Success Teams. No longer will students be served in a siloed approach, but rather through a cross-department success team designed to meet the various needs of the student population.



## AUGUST

### New Programs in Popular Fields

In direct response to community needs, Merced College is now offering education and training in the high-demand, well-paying fields of truck driving and paramedics.



## SEPTEMBER

### New Athletic Branding Launched

The college unveiled a series of fresh new logos and wordmarks for its athletics teams and spirit branding, including a new version of the popular trident logo and a new "MC" monogram logo.

## NOVEMBER

### Dynamic Plan for Student Equity

With a particular focus on Hispanic and first-generation students, the new Student Equity Plan will track student enrollment, persistence, completion of transfer-level math and English classes, and transfer and completion rates.



## NOVEMBER

### Nursing Program Doubles Capacity

In addition to its longstanding partnership with Mercy Medical Center in Merced, the Merced College nursing program resumed a previous partnership with Emanuel Medical Center that will double the number of students the college can train each year.

# 2023 in the News

## Isakow Plaza Brings New Life to Campus

The sparkling new Hermione Isakow Plaza was the site of President Chris Vitelli's annual State of the College address in 2023. The Isakow family, whose \$1 million donation in 2021 funded the plaza's design and construction, was presented with the President's Medallion Award.

The plaza, named for the family's matriarch, features a large metal sculpture of a Baobab tree. Known as the "tree of life" in the family's homeland of South Africa, the Baobab provides water and nourishment to elephants, birds and other animals.



## Merced College Launches New Website

Merced College unveiled its brand-new website in the spring with improvements designed to better serve prospective students in finding their path to success. The new website has a clean, dynamic and action-oriented design.



## Enrollment Rebounds

Like most community colleges, Merced College saw a significant enrollment decline during the COVID-19 pandemic — that tide has turned. After a slight uptick in Fall 2022 and a record-high count in Summer 2023, the district entered the Fall 2023 term with 10,378 total students, a 12.4% increase over Fall 2022 and the highest mark since Fall 2019.

## Kyoto Agreement

An MOU with Kyoto University was signed calling for the schools to explore an exchange program for students and faculty members engaging in transdisciplinary education.



## Solar Eclipse

The college's Geology and Natural Science Club hosted a solar eclipse watch party on Oct. 14, with a gathering on the lawn near the front of campus.

## ESL Classes Expand

Merced College offers free classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship (preparing students for the U.S. naturalization interview and test) at locations throughout Merced County. In 2023, even more of those classes were offered virtually, and meals and child care were provided for in-person classes.



## Three Musketeers

The Merced College Theater put together an entertaining production of "The Three Musketeers." Merced College students were involved in all aspects of the production, including costume design and mask making.



## Promise Housing Moving Forward

Merced College and UC Merced will jointly build a 488-bed student housing project for community college and transfer students. The Promise Housing facility will offer rooms on UC Merced's campus to income-qualified community college students who have met the academic requirements of the Merced Promise transfer agreement.



## Donation Drive for Planada

In response to devastating floods, ASMC leadership held a donation drive that raised \$3,000 worth of backpacks, school supplies and lunch boxes for Planada students, as well as bedding and cleaning supplies for displaced families.

ASMC collected the items from Merced College students, faculty, classified professionals and management in February in the weeks after the flooding.



## Dreamscape Learn is Coming

Dreamscape Learn is an innovative technology, developed at Arizona State University, that uses virtual reality and cinematic storytelling to create engaging learning experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible to students. After several Merced College faculty, classified professionals and leaders visited ASU to view and experience the technology, the Board of Trustees voted in December to bring Dreamscape Learn to Merced College. The project is scheduled to be installed during the Spring 2024 semester and launch in Fall 2024.



### AgTEC Innovation Center Planned; Curriculum in the Works

A key component of the AgTEC funding received in 2022 is a new AgTEC Innovation Center on the Merced College campus.

The state-of-the-art facility will provide opportunities for collaboration between food processing, technical labs, and a farm-to-fork retail space. Groundbreaking is scheduled for August 2024, with an expected completion date of December 2025. The other key component of the AgTEC initiative is Competency-Based Education (CBE), which will streamline the process for current agricultural workers to demonstrate mastery and readiness for career success. The CBE curriculum has been developed and approved to serve students starting in Fall 2024.

### Ag-IT Complex Wins Design Award

The Raj Kahlon Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex received an Award of Excellence from the Community College Facility Coalition (CCFC) at its 2023 Professional Design Awards Program. Along with five other statewide district projects, Merced College and Darden Architects were recognized at a ceremony and luncheon in Sacramento.

### District Focuses on Employees

Employee engagement remained a major focus with the continuation of monthly Fri-Yay! events and the President's Leadership Academy, along with two new initiatives. The popular Well-Being Institute is now being offered for free to all employees, and the new President's Advisory Council creates a space for candid discussions about campus climate, culture and morale.



### Rising Scholars Celebrates Grads, New Grant

The Rising Scholars program, which serves incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students, celebrated dozens of graduates in a pair of commencement ceremonies at Valley State Prison and the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla.



### New Things Brewing

Students and employees alike gained a new on-campus perk in Fall 2023 with the opening of a new coffee shop, Blue Devil's Brew, in the Downey Learning Resource Center. A café at the Los Banos Campus is also in the works.



### Choir Has Reason to 'Be Happy'

The Merced College Community Chorus performed alongside Grammy winner Bobby McFerrin — creator of the global hit "Don't Worry Be Happy." Led by Professor Alex Simon, the choir performed alongside other local choirs and music students from Merced College and UC Merced.

### NAACP Recognition

Merced College was honored as the 2023 Community Organization of the Year at the annual Freedom Fund Banquet of the Merced Chapter of the NAACP. This recognition is a testament to the district's collective efforts in working closely with community organizations to create a positive impact.



### Multicultural Celebration

Merced College Student Equity, in partnership with Associated Students of Merced College, hosted the first annual Multicultural Event on Oct. 24. The event provided food, live performances and interactive celebrations from a variety of different cultures.



### Female Officers Make History

Hermila Guevara and Angela Henke became the first female officers in Merced College's history.



### Success in Ethics

In November, the inaugural Merced College Ethics Bowl Team — including faculty coach Jacki Alvarez and four students — participated in the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl at Bakersfield College. Despite being newcomers, the team won two matches, tied one and lost one, steadily improving and even defeating an undefeated team.

### Grant Supports Student Parents

A \$2 million grant through the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program will provide childcare to 24 children of low-income student-parents in a new preschool classroom.

### Voc Building Remodel is Underway

The remodel of the Vocational Building, funded by a \$3 million federal grant, is now fully underway, with an expected completion date of December 2024.



### CVHEC Summit Focuses on Program Pathways

Student Success Center assistant Araceli Tilley, a Merced College alumna, shared her experiences as a transfer student at the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium Summit held in Fresno on Oct. 20.

Tilley spoke about the Program Pathways Mapper, which proved useful for her transfer to UC Merced in Fall 2022 and provided her an easy way to map her college courses for her final two years of college at UC Merced. "The mapper provided a straight path that really helped me out, especially because counseling and advising is super impacted at many colleges, and you don't always get to meet in-person with advisors. And since I worked at Merced College as an outreach ambassador, I was able to help other students showing them how it works. It's a very useful tool, especially for students who are self-directed."

# Planning, Accreditation Offer Opportunities to Reflect, Innovate

Creating a new Educational Master Plan requires campus wide reflection, months of research writing, and faith in the process.

Renewing the district's accreditation, including an extensive self-evaluation, reveals areas that should be celebrated and those where improvement may be needed.

Doing both at the same time, while challenging, has also unlocked a deeper understanding of what's happening at Merced College and what steps the district will take to more effectively fulfill its institutional mission of helping students succeed.

## Educational Master Plan

"The question of 'How do we want to grow as an institution?' we answer by crafting an EMP," said Julie Clark, a mathematics professor who also served as co-chair of the EMP Task Force.

The college's mission emphasizes student success and workforce development.

But since the 2018 version of the EMP was developed, changes in technology and remote connectivity were accelerated by the pandemic.

That reality has changed how Merced College students view and chase their education.

"Sometimes the EMP feels like this big thing that everyone ignores for five years," said Director of Ag Innovation Nikki Maddux, who also served as a co-chair on the task force. "But it is the direction the college is headed, and will be instrumental for developing instructional and facilities master plans as well."

Faculty, staff, students and the community, via town hall meetings and surveys, gave their feedback about what was good and what needed attention.

The findings specific to the student body showed that, regardless of age, circumstance or previous education, Merced College students now need flexible course options to also fit family, work and other responsibilities into their schedule. In the classroom, students want an experience that is less theoretical and more applicable to help them improve their lives.

"We have so many students who take tons of units and don't complete degrees," Clark said. "We have to make sure the students' work leads to a job or furthers their education. That's not just us. It's statewide."

"We will always have a need for face-to-face classes and support," Vice President of Student Services Mike McCandless said. "At the same time, we want to continue to develop our educational platforms and wraparound services online to enhance the student experience."

The EMP for 2023-2028 was developed from October 2022 through May 2023, and approved by the Merced Community College District Board of Trustees on June 13. The task force evaluated the college from student, faculty and community perspectives.



# ACCREDITATION 101

## MASTERING A MASTER PLAN

October  
2022

Phase 1  
INPUT



Phase 2  
INNOVATION



January  
2023

Phase 3  
TESTING



February  
2023

Phase 4  
SYNTHESIS



April  
2023

ADOPTION BY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

June  
2023



The next step for the EMP is to turn the findings, explanations and recommendations into an action plan. The Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) will include objectives and tasks that will guide the college's efforts over the next five years.

To help with developing the EMP and now the SIP, the college hired consulting firm Vivayic, which brought a new perspective to the project. For example, Vivayic did a deep dive of the college's presence on Twitter, finding that students were looking for a full educational experience—including academics, clubs, activities and sports—to feel more invested in their education.

"They [Vivayic] made us start fresh," Maddux said, "We weren't just writing words to get them down. If you look at our other master plans, this one is totally different. It's visionary. I was excited to be part of it."

### Accreditation

Merced College is also renewing its accreditation, which happens every seven years as prescribed by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

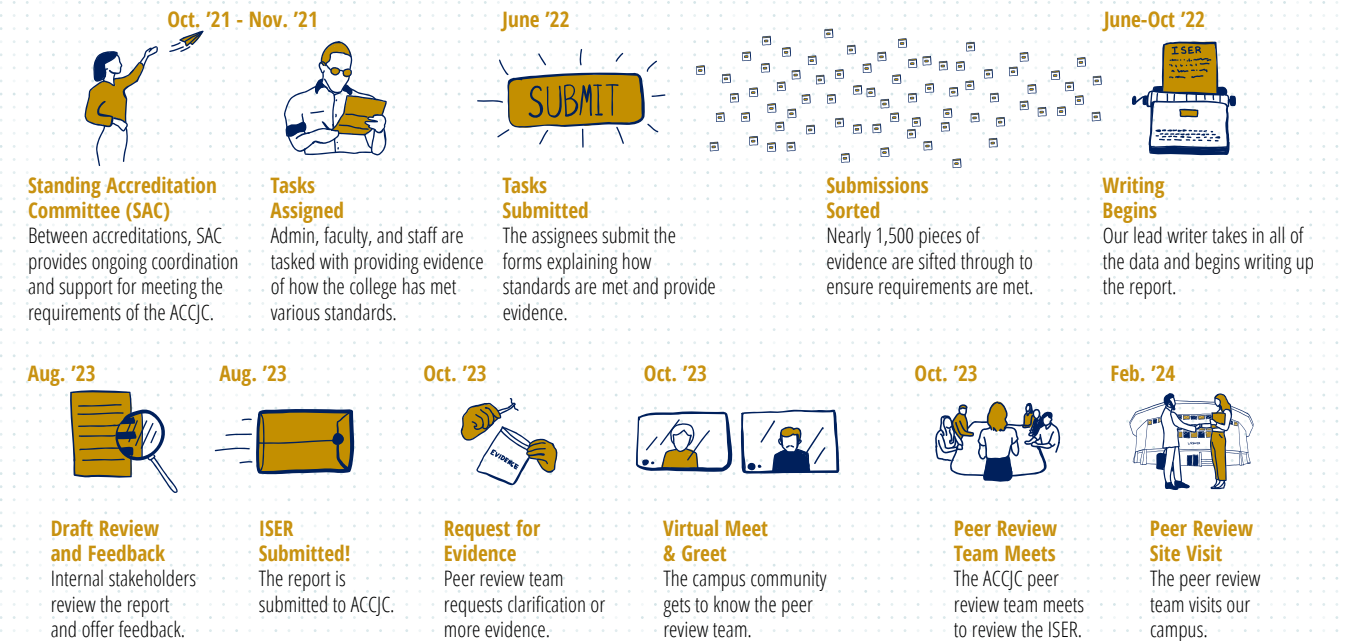
As part of the accreditation renewal process, the college produced a 257-page Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and submitted it in August. The campus team and accreditation team had an official virtual meeting in October 2023. The accreditation team reviewed the ISER, asked questions, and requested additional information and evidence.

According to Merced College Dean of Institutional Effectiveness Dee Sigismond, "Without accreditation, we don't qualify for federal financial aid and our students don't earn credits that transfer to other colleges and universities."

During the site visit in February 2024, the campus team will provide additional information and respond to additional questions in group meetings. It will also be an opportunity for the campus team to share successes and highlights.

Merced College Dean of Instruction, STEM Dr. Marie Bruley, who was the lead writer for the ISER, said the goal of accreditation isn't to punish schools that aren't compliant, but to help them.

"Nor (does the accrediting body) want to dictate to the college



how they should be doing things," Bruley said. "The ACCJC wants schools to engage."

Bruley and Vice President of Instruction Karissa Morehouse congratulated Sigismond and her colleagues in Institutional Effectiveness—including Academic Support Specialist Gabriela Garcia and Program Assistant Amber Norris—for creating the system that streamlined the process of building the ISER.

"Accreditation can be hard on the teams because the ISER does take quite a few editing sessions," Bruley said. "Everyone was open to the back-and-forth. And the process Dee's team created allowed for updates without stalling the overall work"

Thanks to the team's work, departments and groups all over campus—faculty, classified, business services, maintenance and facilities staff, marketing, etc.—were able to efficiently and successfully document how they were meeting standards.

Merced College submitted its ISER with more than 1,400 pieces of evidence.

More than 50 people, who were also doing their day jobs at the time, contributed to the ISER.

"We always want to look at data and see how the numbers help us with our equity efforts," Sigismond said. "With the ISER, we can see that we are making data-informed decisions."

"It's an opportunity to prove to ourselves that we're meeting our own standards to ensure the quality of our own institution," Bruley agreed. "It's part of caring about student success. It's not easy, but it's worthwhile."

While schools renew their accreditation every seven years, Morehouse, who also serves as the campus Accreditation Liaison Officer, says the process never stops.

"The function of the accrediting body is to prod us to ask ourselves: Are we improving and serving students better at every turn?" Morehouse said. "That's what I like about accreditation. It's now a process we celebrate. ... I'm excited about where we are."



Read the  
ISER here.



See highlights from our inaugural graduation.

# A Year of Growth

It was a year full of growth and new developments at the Merced College Los Banos Campus, highlighted by the campus's inaugural commencement ceremony in May.

First and foremost, the Los Banos Campus saw an increase in student enrollment of over 6% from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023. This included a significant increase in the number of students taking face-to-face classes rather than online or hybrid classes; in Fall 2023, 48% of classes were in person, up from 38% in Fall 2022.

A new agriculture program in Los Banos is led by Professor Elias Armenta. The popular welding program expanded its physical space with a new suite, and also expanded its course offerings with new Friday/Saturday classes.

Dual enrollment continues to grow in Los Banos, as well, providing high school students the opportunity to take college classes to jumpstart their academic journeys, we added new in-person courses at Dos Palos, and a new partnership was made with Valley Community Day School.

The Los Banos Campus itself saw the installation of a new outdoor gym for kinesiology classes, new exterior paint on all buildings, and new digital signage to keep students informed of Merced College events and services. A new child development center is nearing completion in early 2024.

Employee engagement has been a top priority. The campus hosts its own Fri-Yay! events, with operations closing down one Friday afternoon each month to allow employees time to reconnect and enjoy each other's company.

The district's Well-Being Initiative has also expanded to Los Banos, which is hosting its own cohort for Spring 2024.

In addition to direct outreach to prospective students in the community and at local high schools, Los Banos also hosted its own Blue Devil Preview Day and participated in community events like Trunk or Treat for Breaking Barriers, a College and Career Fair at Los Banos High School, a Multicultural Night at Pacheco High School, and the All Saints Festival.





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