

## Office of the President

### TO MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ATHLETICS:

#### DISCUSSION ITEM

*For Meeting of May 14, 2024*

### STRATEGIC CAMPUS ATHLETICS OVERVIEW: UC MERCED

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UC Merced Recreation and Athletics sponsors 12 sports programs as part of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA): women's basketball, men's basketball, women's cross country, men's cross country, women's soccer, men's soccer, women's track, men's track, women's volleyball, men's volleyball, women's water polo and men's water polo.

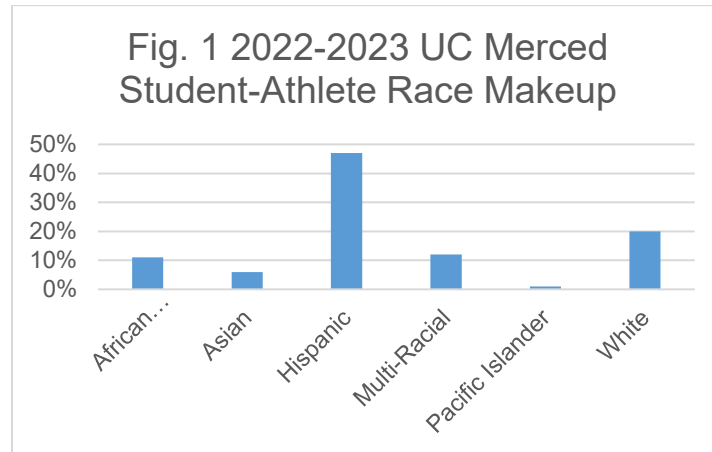
UC Merced is a member of the California Pacific Conference. The California Pacific Conference is an NAIA conference comprised mostly of private institutions: California State University Maritime Academy, Simpson University, Pacific Union College, Providence Christian College, La Sierra University, Soka University of America, and Westcliff University.

UC Merced is in its 12th year of intercollegiate athletics and in that time has won 12 conference championships, appeared in 12 team NAIA National Tournaments and 50 NAIA National Championships individual qualifiers, and won 30 NAIA All-Americans awards. In addition to the athletic success, 152 Bobcats have been recognized as Daktronics-NAIA Scholar-Athletes.

UC Merced has applied for membership in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) at the Division II level. UC Merced Recreation & Athletics is committed to enhancing student-athletes' academic and personal development and the NCAA Division II Life in the Balance philosophy aligns with UC Merced's philosophy on intercollegiate athletics. A decision regarding UC Merced's membership application is expected in July 2024.

#### BACKGROUND

For the 2022–23 academic year, UC Merced Athletics had 213 student-athletes, 113 men and 100 women. Most student-athletes were undergraduates, with one graduate student-athlete. The student-athlete race/ethnicity makeup is six percent Asian, 11 percent African American, 47 percent Hispanic, one percent Pacific Islander, 12 percent identified as two or more races, and 20 percent White. (Figure 1)



**Academics and Student Success**

The academic performance of UC Merced’s student-athletes surpasses the general undergraduate student population, as measured in both GPA and graduation rates. The overall student-athlete GPA is 3.134 and the overall undergraduate student population GPA is 3.041. UC Merced student-athletes have a four-year rolling graduation rate of 52 percent, while the undergraduate four-year rolling graduation rate is 45 percent.

UC Merced provides peer academic support through the Student-Athlete Learning Assistant program, a student-athlete learning center, which includes areas for individual study, tutoring space and academic resources, exam proctoring, and priority registration to student-athletes. Advising for student-athletes is conducted by the Bobcat Advising Center for first-year and undeclared student-athletes, while upper division and major advising is conducted in each of three academic schools for student-athletes. Along with the academic support provided to student-athletes, UC Merced Recreation and Athletics also provides student-athlete development opportunities required by the campus, State law, and Regents policies. Topics include Career Development; Mental Health; Graduate School options; Time Management; Insurance Coverage; Title IX; Financial Literacy; managing burnout and anxiety; along with other topics identified by student-athletes each semester.

**Budget**

Revenue		Expenses	
Student Fees	\$ 4,744,298	Career Staff & Coaches	\$ 3,448,969
Central Campus Funding	\$ 1,485,735	Student Staffing	\$ 792,905
Generated Revenue	\$ 267,534	Facility Operations	\$ 1,047,419
Development	\$ 128,000	Operations	\$ 470,375
		Athletic Financial Aid	\$ 110,000
		Team & Program Expenses	\$ 688,748
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 6,625,567</b>	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 6,558,416</b>

### Revenue

The majority of the campus funding is generated through student- and campus-based fees, comprised of a Recreation Fee, which is \$146 per student per semester, a Competitive Sports Fee that is \$75 per undergraduate student per semester with a 25 percent return-to-aid component, a Facility Expansion and Enhancement Fee that is \$40 per student per semester with a 25 percent return-to-aid component, and a Student Summer Recreation Fee of \$75 per student for the summer. The department also receives an allocation from the Student Service Fee to support student staff wages in the department. Central campus funding provides support for debt service on recreation and athletic spaces.

The Generated Revenue line includes ticket sales, concessions, and retail, plus recreation fees collected for non-student memberships. Development revenue includes both philanthropic gifts and corporate sponsorships.

### Expenses

The largest expense for the program is salaries and benefits for coaching staff, administration, and operations staff. Recreation and Athletics employs over 200 student staff who work in all areas of the department. Their wages are paid by student fees. Operation expenses include the administrative cost for the department, and the Facility Operations line includes utilities, maintenance, and operation expenses associated with the facilities. The allocation for Athletic Financial Aid is scholarships provided to student-athletes and the Team and Program Expenses cover travel, uniforms, officials, and equipment.

### *Opportunities*

UC Merced Recreation and Athletics has applied for membership in NCAA Division II and will learn the status of its application in July 2024. Upon acceptance into the NCAA Division II membership process, UC Merced would be members of the California Collegiate Athletics Association (CCAA) for most sports. Women's and men's water polo would be members of the Western Water Polo Association (WWPA), and men's volleyball have petitioned for membership in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation (MPSF).

The philosophy of NCAA Division II is to provide balance for student-athletes with academics, athletics, community engagement, and personal development. This philosophy aligns with UC Merced's philosophy on intercollegiate athletics and supports UC Merced's mission to develop outstanding alumni and athletes. Membership in the NCAA aligns the institution more closely with similarly sized public institutions in California within the CCAA membership, comprised of all California State University campuses, sharing a similar mission. Whereas in the NAIA, the campus' peer institutions are small, faith-based private institutions.

The focus on community engagement at the Division II level also resonates with UC Merced Recreation and Athletics. Student-athletes are engaged in the campus and Merced community through providing service to community programs, holding leadership positions on campus, and

supporting local students. UC Merced student-athletes participate in community programs such as local park cleanup, clothing drives for local homeless shelters, reading to local elementary school students during Read Across America Day, and serving as pen pals for elementary school students in Merced. Student-athletes hold leadership positions in the Associated Students of UC Merced, national leadership positions in the NAIA Council for Student Athletes, and in student organizations on campus.

### ***Athletics Philosophy Statement***

UC Merced Athletics believes in the following guiding principles and perspective of the value of Intercollegiate Athletics at UC Merced:

**Academic Excellence** is paramount to the experience of student-athletes and at the core of what UC Merced Athletics does as a department and an institution. Student-athletes graduate at a higher level than the rest of the student body, and UC Merced Athletics strives to maintain that edge. Working with campus partners, UC Merced Athletics continues to provide opportunities for student-athletes to learn the skills, knowledge, and experiences which will help them excel in their time after UC Merced.

UC Merced Athletics' value of excellence includes a commitment to **Athletic Excellence** for all student-athletes. This is rivaled only by a commitment to academic excellence. Coaches continue to build upon their success in their drive to win championships by recruiting outstanding student-athletes who will excel in their sport and in the classroom. UC Merced Athletics continues to strive to provide athletic financial aid and outstanding sports medicine services and to develop student-athletes, which will allow them to compete in conference and national championships.

**Integrity** is a cornerstone of the department and, as such, UC Merced Athletics values diversity, equity, and inclusion, which fosters a sense of belonging and respect for all members of the department and campus. UC Merced Athletics strives to maintain an environment in which all members of its community feel valued and are encouraged to provide their unique viewpoints and strengths. Everyone in the Recreation and Athletics maintains a high level of integrity and ethical behavior and are committed to the fair treatment of others in all interactions.

UC Merced Athletics' **Focus on Students** encompasses student-athletes, student employees, and the student body. UC Merced Athletics prioritizes students in its decision-making process, from hiring coaches and career staff to facility improvements. Students are provided opportunities to be leaders not only on their teams, but as student employees and campus leaders. UC Merced Athletics is here because of the students., UC Merced Athletics strives to support and help student-athletes navigate and manage the unique demands of being a student-athlete so they can thrive.

**Teamwork** is key to the success of any organization. UC Merced Athletics is committed to creating an environment in which everyone is valued and working towards the common goal of supporting students and providing outstanding academic, athletic, and life skills preparation.

**Community Engagement** is woven into the fabric of the department and the campus. Part of the mission of the University of California is public service. UC Merced students demonstrate this through numerous opportunities to serve and give back to the community through athletics or through other avenues on campus. Student-athletes, coaches, and staff regularly give back to the campus and the greater Merced community in meaningful way.

Athletics can serve as the first interaction for many with a university. UC Merced Athletics takes that responsibility to heart, and the actions of student-athletes, coaches, and staff model outstanding sportsmanship, servant leadership, and a sense of fair play. UC Merced Athletics strives to create an environment at all of its events that is inviting, exciting, and entertaining for students and members of the community.

UC Merced athletics is committed to a student-focused program which values excellence in all that it does and provides an opportunity for student-athletes to excel and grow into outstanding alumni and members of their community. This is accomplished through the engagement of campus and community partners to provide meaningful experiences outside of the classroom that foster a sense of belonging within the community.

### ***Challenges***

Academic advising is a challenge for student-athletes, especially major advising in the schools. UC Merced strives to meet the guiding principle regarding academic advisors trained to work with student-athletes as recommended in Regents Policy 3501: Policy on Student Athletes. As UC Merced transitions to NCAA membership, this becomes even more critical for the academic success of its student-athletes.

The transition to NCAA is also a challenge as UC Merced student-athletes will not be eligible for NCAA post-season competition for three years (2027–28 will be the campus' first year of post-season eligibility). During this time, it will be important to provide unique, quality opportunities for student-athletes in place of post-season play to continue to recruit high-quality students and student-athletes.

New industry requirements, NCAA bylaws, and the the continual shifting of the legal and legislative landscape around college athletics will present an ongoing challenge. The transformation of conference alignment at the NCAA Division I level will begin to impact NCAA Division II institutions and conferences. The use of name, image, and likeness (NIL) will be a challenge as new legislation and rules are developed in California and nationally mainly for NCAA Division I institutions, but the impacts will be felt at the NCAA Division II level.

### ***Accomplishments***

UC Merced Recreation and Athletics competitive accomplishments include:

- Women's Soccer, 2023 California Pacific Conference tournament champion, earning a berth in the NAIA National Championships Tournament for the first time in program history
- Men's Soccer sixth consecutive appearance in the NAIA National Championship Tournament, from 2017 to present
- Men's and Women's Cross Country qualified individuals for the NAIA National Championship Meet for the 11th year.
- Men's Cross Country California Pacific Conference individual champion, Jonathan Chavez, won his second consecutive individual championship and All-American status in 2023.
- Men's Volleyball 2024 California Pacific Conference regular season champion for the first time in program history