

Dean, School of Natural Sciences

Position description

Search Announcement

The University of California (UC), Merced, the youngest campus in the world-renowned University of California system, seeks a new Dean of the School of Natural Sciences (SNS) to lead this unique school into an exciting new era as it continues to grow, champion inclusive excellence, and distinguish itself within the UC system and among research universities globally. The new SNS Dean will be joining the university at a pivotal time, with the opportunity to facilitate its ongoing development and ensure its continued rise. The SNS Dean will need to be a gifted academic leader who will work closely with SNS faculty and staff and the larger campus community to continue to develop the school as a magnet for high-caliber students from diverse backgrounds, talented faculty, and a respected center for research addressing major global challenges as well as the pressing needs of the Central Valley.

UC Merced and the School of Natural Sciences

Opened to undergraduates in 2005, UC Merced was the first new University of California campus in 40 years, and the first American research university of the twenty-first century. UC Merced now ranks #28 among public universities and #60 overall among national universities and remains the youngest university in the top 100 U.S. News & World Report rankings. We are proud that our campus is recognized as #4 in the nation for creating social mobility and #13 for economic diversity in the 2023 U.S. News & World Report. UC Merced achieved R2 classification (“doctoral-granting university with high research activity,” per the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education) in record time and is now setting a very ambitious trajectory towards quickly earning an R1 designation. Since welcoming our first first-year class, UC Merced has grown in enrollment to 9,148 students.

Declared undergraduate enrollment is divided among the School of Natural Sciences (SNS) (25%), the School of Engineering (SoE) (33%), and the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA) (42%). Sixty-five (65) percent of undergraduates are first-generation college students and 59% are Pell Grant eligible. Geographically, 99% of UC Merced undergraduates are from California and approximately 28% are from the Central Valley. An additional 35% of students come from Southern California (including Los Angeles and San Diego) and 33% from the San Francisco Bay Area.

UC Merced is proud to be a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with nearly 55% of its undergraduates identifying as Hispanic. UC Merced is also proud of its eligibility status as an Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander serving institution and a Minority Serving institution (MSI). In 2021, UC Merced was awarded the Seal of Excelencia in recognition of its commitment to the success of Latino students and the HEED Award for Excellence in Diversity in both 2021 and 2023.

With its completion in fall 2020, the 2020 Project campus expansion nearly doubled the campus’s physical capacity to support enrollment growth to 10,000 students. The university is now expanding its capacity to reach 15,000 students in the next decade. The impact of UC Merced’s rapid ascent reaches beyond the campus and continues to transform the region economically, academically, and environmentally as we maintain a focus on sustainability, research, diversity, and community. We lead the UC system in the percentage of students from underrepresented ethnic groups, low-income

families, and families whose parents did not attend college. Our graduation rates exceed national expectations. Our undergraduate research participation rate is the highest in the UC system and we are delivering on the promise of expanding access to a UC education with UC Merced accounting for 53% of the Central Valley's growth in UC attendance since 2005.

UC Merced is becoming well-known nationally for its state-of-the-art facilities and well-established research programs in fields including agricultural technology, biomedical, behavioral and health sciences, climate science and sustainable systems and solutions, theoretical, computational and data sciences, and inequality, social justice, and policy. Building upon this strong foundation, the Dean will lead the continued evolution of SNS as the campus pursues recognition as an R1, or "Highest Research Activity," institution.

SNS has recruited outstanding, award-winning faculty with vibrant and highly productive research programs. A large proportion of the faculty are relatively early in their careers (roughly 35% are assistant professors) and many take highly interdisciplinary approaches to both research and teaching. This talent has attracted substantial funding, including many early career awards from leading research agencies, such as NSF, NIH, the Department of Energy, NASA, and the USDA.

Campus Strategic Plan & Goals

UC Merced is uniquely poised to impact a rapidly changing world. To this end, Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz led an inaugural long-range comprehensive strategic planning process over a year of thoughtful engagement and refinement by faculty, staff, students, and external community and partners. This strategic plan outlines three mission-driven, intertwined priorities: discovery and the advancement of knowledge, developing future scholars and leaders, and cultivating a culture of dignity and respect for all. The strategic plan reflects UC Merced's ever-deepening commitment to continuous and iterative transformation toward a socially just, equitable, and sustainable campus and society, to expanding and enriching the campus's educational offerings and research portfolio, and in turn to deepening and diversifying leadership across all fields and the nation as our graduates pursue post-graduate education and employment. The plan includes the ambitious goal of being the youngest university ever to achieve a very high research (R1) designation, which, beyond acknowledging UC Merced's increasing research impact, will help to accelerate the campus' rise. The strategic plan also elevates the importance of an inclusive workforce and flexible and sustainable infrastructure that evolves with the research and learning enterprise. The full university strategic plan can be found here: <https://strategicplan.ucmerced.edu>.

Role of the Dean of the School of Natural Sciences

The Dean of the School of Natural Sciences is the chief officer of the School with overall administrative responsibility for an academic unit that currently includes five departments offering six undergraduate majors and four graduate programs, the Center for Chemical Computation and Theory (ccCAT) and the Institute for Symbiotic Interactions, Training, and Education in the Face of a Changing Climate (INSITE). SNS faculty also play active roles in the Center for Cellular and Biomolecular Machines, the Health Sciences Research Institute, and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute. SNS has 89 tenured and tenure-track Senate faculty and 39 non-Senate faculty, 1,978 undergraduate students, and 278 graduate students (277 Ph.D.). As the School's executive head, representative, and administrator, the Dean provides intellectual and academic leadership for the instructional and research missions of SNS and in doing so works closely with the School's faculty and staff as well as senior leadership across the campus.

to deliver the School's mission. The Dean supervises the hiring, promotion, and retention of faculty and staff, guides the development and provides oversight of undergraduate and graduate curriculum and degree programs, oversees and promotes the continuous improvement of the School's academic and administrative operations, manages all School resources, and works with campus administration and the Academic Senate on matters of School and campus-wide policy. As part of the Provost's leadership team, the Dean is an active participant in planning the campus' ongoing development. Successful candidates will have demonstrated leadership skills in a full range of activities associated with the academic and research missions of the School.

Key Opportunities and Challenges for the Dean of the School of Natural Sciences

UC Merced has made remarkable progress and requires outstanding leadership to move into its next phase marked by excellence in research, innovation in teaching, and thoughtful growth, guided by excellent leadership and shared governance. As an emerging research university, UC Merced has exceptional freedom to pioneer new models for teaching, research, and service. In leading SNS into its next stage of growth, the Dean will address several key opportunities and challenges, which are detailed below.

Lead the vision and strategy for the School

The next Dean of SNS will provide critical leadership for the School's ongoing development and the continued advancement of its mission. Building from the current Academic Plan, the Dean will advance the School's contributions to achieving the goals outlined in UC Merced's Strategic Plan as it strives to become a top-tier (R1) research university. As part of this effort, the Dean will continue to develop the school's administrative infrastructure with the goal of achieving ongoing sustainability of its academic and administrative operations. To this work, the Dean will bring a spirit of community and collaboration and administrative know-how.

Recruit, retain, and support talented faculty

Attracting, hiring, and retaining high-caliber faculty will be essential to continuing to grow the School's reputation and the impact of its scholarly and academic output. Beyond facilitating the strategic addition of new faculty, the Dean will promote structures and programs that continue to aid, develop, and support existing faculty in their pursuit of excellence in scholarship and instruction, including both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research across the campus. Along with supporting individual achievement, the Dean will strive to further a culture of inclusive excellence. The Dean will understand diversity as integral to all work related to recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty and staff, and will further the culture of inclusivity and commitment to diversity that is core to the mission of UC Merced.

Enhance the academic profile and scholarly impact of the School

The Dean will lead the growth of the School's research portfolio and support faculty engagement in research and scholarly activity. In close collaboration with faculty, the Dean will further expand existing research and scholarship programs, identify new opportunities for scholarly research, and advance the School's contributions to UC Merced's R1 ambitions.

Grow the student body intentionally and effectively

SNS will be an important contributor to UC Merced's goal of achieving a total enrollment of 15,000 students. In this context, the Dean will work with leadership across campus to facilitate the School's enrollment growth, focusing on efforts that increase new student enrollment and the retention of existing students. Likewise, working collaboratively with the Vice Provost and Dean for Graduate Education, the Dean will consider how best to support and strengthen graduate student enrollment. This includes working with faculty to build new academic programs, undergraduate and graduate, and to reflect on existing programs with the goal of continuous improvement.

SNS's 1,978 undergraduate students form a multi-ethnic student body with approximately 53% of students identifying as Hispanic. For undergraduate students, opportunities for academic enrichment include involvement in research, student professional organizations, comprehensive student advising, leadership opportunities, and experiential learning, just to name just a few.

As with faculty, diversity will be a framework the Dean will use to approach enrollment growth for undergraduate and graduate students in SNS. As the most ethnically diverse campus in the UC System, and as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and a Minority-Serving Institution, the campus is a vivid example of how academic excellence and diversity inform one another and provide the best possible environment for learning. The Dean must be dedicated to supporting these ideals, actively promoting them within the School and across the university, with attention to recruiting and retaining diverse students and cultivating an environment of inclusiveness across the School.

Manage the academic enterprise

As part of SNS's continued development, the Dean will be responsible for analyzing and refining the School's administrative infrastructure to support its ongoing growth and success and for collaborating with the EVC/P leadership team to foster and strengthen a culture of fiscally aligned planning and accountability. The Dean will apply analytical and strategic leadership as well as financial acumen to balance resource advocacy, constraints, and management. This includes bringing creativity, fiscal resourcefulness, and thoughtfulness to budget challenges while advancing priorities for growth. The Dean will work with the faculty and staff to position them for success in this changing environment. In advancing these efforts, the Dean will sustain a positive team culture across the School that advances the campus's commitment to equity, justice, and inclusive excellence.

Advocate for SNS as a unit, both internally and externally

As the leader of the SNS community, the Dean will be a compelling spokesperson for the School. The Dean will build relationships and bridges at UC Merced through working collaboratively with other Deans and administrators. At the university level, the Dean will advocate for investment in infrastructure and initiatives that will amplify the School's research and educational missions.

The Dean will work with the Division of External Relations and Strategic Communications to promote SNS externally, creating and maintaining relationships in the region and state, nationally, and globally. This advocacy will raise the profile and prestige of the School, and lead to broadened partnerships for scholarship and learning and to additional financial resources to support the School's mission.

Qualifications

Basic qualifications

Required Skills, Knowledge, Abilities, and Competencies

- A doctorate and a research program in a field compatible with the programs offered within the School of Natural Sciences.
- A distinguished record in teaching, scholarship, and service consistent with the expectations of the rank of a full professor with tenure in the School of Natural Sciences.
- Significant years of increasing responsibility for leading and managing (an) academic area(s) that demonstrate visionary leadership and management and administrative skills.
- Demonstrated leadership skills in a full range of activities associated with the academic, research, and/or scholarly mission of the School.
- Demonstrated ability to create an inclusive environment within a unit and advance equity, justice, and inclusive excellence.
- Experience fostering interdisciplinary research and education.
- Demonstrated skills as a creative and collaborative leader in the creation of new programs and academic structures.
- Proven leadership abilities in a complex environment with various stakeholders in order to achieve support for, and move forward projects and initiatives through, relationship building, motivation, influence, and transparency; strong community and consensus builder to leverage partnerships and resources.
- Expert analytical and strategic thinking skills to understand key institutional drivers.
- Strong management skills, including the ability to lead, assess, and support professional staff and to motivate department chairs and managers to develop and achieve mission-aligned goals.
- Skilled in organizational management and development; strong and visionary organizational leadership to sustain cohesion, culture, and effectiveness of the School and the stakeholder community.
- Strong financial acumen and sound budgetary judgment.
- Experience in fundraising and securing external support from a variety of sources.
- Ability to focus on regional and global issues; ability to gain/build knowledge of and focus on the needs of the UC Merced campus and San Joaquin Valley region.
- Demonstrated ability to be a good listener who can communicate and collaborate effectively with administrators, faculty, students, and staff.
- Understanding of academic checks and balances within an environment of shared governance, as well as to engage in consultation with faculty and staff.
- Strong diplomatic skills and political acumen.
- High emotional intelligence and excellent interpersonal skills.
- Appreciation for the mission and responsibilities of a university serving a multi-ethnic state and a demonstrated personal and professional commitment to diversity.

Preferred qualifications

Preferred Skills, Knowledge, Abilities, and Competencies

- Familiarity with the organizational unit's objectives and activities.

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- Thorough knowledge of general university administrative organization, policies, procedures, and practices including the principle of shared governance.
- Familiarity with WSCUC or other university-wide accreditation procedures.