

## College Spotlight: University of California, Merced

I recently had the opportunity to take a tour of the newest of the University of California's campus's in Merced. Opening in 2005, UC Merced has already begun to climb the ranks of Public Universities, and currently sits at number 38 on US News and World Reports list. The school is located on almost 8200 acres of the rural California central valley, about 2 hours South of Sacramento, and East of San Francisco. It claims to be the only institution in the US that is LEED certified (a green building certification program), and its Triple Net Zero commitment was to have succeeded in creating zero net landfill waste and zero net greenhouse gasses by the end of 2020.

Why consider UC Merced? The school has a very strong program of STEM majors, particularly in engineering (of the 25 majors offered, 6 are engineering related). Each year the school adds majors to its roster of educational programs. Many majors finish up with a capstone project during the senior year that includes an internship which often leads to job offers and opportunities. With just under 8200 students (52% female, 48% male) it is a great mid-size school. Again, because it is a newer and less established branch of the UC system, admissions are not quite as competitive as other campus's. While the majority of GPA's are over 3.25 %, the admissions rate is just about 71%. Standardized testing is not required for applications.

Athletics are also growing. Currently the UCM Bobcats field 8 (4 men's, 4 women's) NAIA teams in the Cal Pac league. There are also Club Sports, Intramural Sports, and a brand new Olympic sized swimming pool and two different recreations centers filled with exercise equipment and classes. Given the close proximity to Yosemite National Park, and Sierra Nevada ski resorts, there are also an unlimited number of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Everywhere one walks around campus, one is immediately struck by how modern everything is. The buildings are all powered by solar energy with all the most modern features and facilities. The on campus living selections range from standard dorm type rooms for one, two or three students, to suite-like rooms for older students. Admitted freshman are guaranteed two years of on campus living (however they are not required to live on campus) and transfer students are guaranteed one year of on campus living. There are fraternities and sororities associated with the school, however they do not offer sanctioned houses for living or socializing. Many of them rent large houses in the area where several students can choose to live together.

As an out-of-state student, a Hawaii resident will be forced to pay out-of-state tuition, which is currently just under \$42,000 per year. Ninety-nine percent of students receive some form of financial aid, most in the form of Pell Grants, or scholarships. As always, it is key to get your FAFSA filed as soon as possible to position yourself for the best shot at aid.

UC Merced is a fast-growing school that offers a student the chance to really make a mark for themselves in a new and exciting environment. Give it a look if you are interested in a UC education at a school where the classes are majors are not impacted, and the atmosphere is a bit more relaxed. Make sure to get your application in by the November 30 due date.

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