



HISTORY OF
PLANNING
FOR
UC MERCED

HISTORY OF PLANNING FOR UC MERCED

The 1988 authorization by The Regents of the University of California to initiate planning for additional campuses was the beginning of a lengthy process leading to the identification of the County of Merced and the Lake Yosemite site as the location for the tenth UC campus. This chapter provides the historical context for the decisions that were made, leading up to the choice of locating the campus site.

University of California's Need for New Campuses

In the late 1980s, The University of California, in conjunction with the California State Department of Finance's Demographic Research Unit (DRU), produced a series of projections for the state that anticipated a dramatic increase in qualified California students seeking admission to the UC system through 2005. The analysis projected the need to accommodate 63,100 more students within a 10-year period. The University sought to accommodate this increase by forming the University of California Site Selection Task Force (SSTF). (A recent DRU analysis predicted a growth in enrollment of over 30% between 2000 and 2010.)

The projected student population increase is related to several converging demographic factors. The first reflects the increasing population in the United States in general. The second factor is the increase in the number of college age students that need to be accommodated in California. This significant increase is comprised of college-bound youths who are the progeny of the post World War II baby boomers. The third factor for the increase is related to the economic expansion of recent years that has enabled more families to send their children to college. While other

American state universities may also feel the effects of these demographic factors, the impact is amplified in California due to the state's growing immigrant population, in particular its Spanish-speakers, for whom the university estimates a dramatic increase in participation.

In response to the University of California's internal projections and subsequent demand analysis, policy-makers in Sacramento requested that all universities and colleges in California begin studying the feasibility of assuring space for the projected number of new students interested in higher education. Currently, the nine existing UC campuses would only be able to accommodate 34,000 of the 63,100 total new students projected by the DRU. In the best possible scenario, with all nine UC campuses fulfilling their LRDP enrollment goals, 24,000 more students could be accommodated, leaving 5,000 prospective students unaccounted for beyond 2010.

The State Master Plan for Higher Education commits the University of California to accommodate all eligible students who meet the admissions standards of being among the top 12.5% of public school graduates in the state. It is from this unequivocal commitment that the decision to build a tenth UC campus emerged as a pivotal decision for the future of public higher education in California.

Locating UC in The San Joaquin Valley

The Regents further stipulated that the search for a new campus site should focus on a central California location. The existing nine UC campuses cluster in Northern and Southern California, leaving the central portion of the state without the positive impact of a local UC campus (Figure 2.1). In addition, the Regents were keen to acknowledge the University's obligation to improve service to the growing San Joaquin Valley, the state's valuable agricultural region and historical nexus for newly arrived immigrants. That rates of enrollment of San Joaquin Valley students were consistently lower in comparison to other geographic regions in the state was also of concern to The Regents and informed the eventual choice of Merced as the site for the tenth UC campus.

The demographic composition of the San Joaquin Valley differs from the rest of California. In the San Joaquin Valley, 40% of the children are Latino. Projections for the state suggest that the Valley may in fact foreshadow California's own future demographic make-up: population projections for the state suggest that the Latino population will increase to 28 million from its current number of 9 million residents. The addition of a UC campus in the San Joaquin Valley was a decision primarily based upon this need.

The University of California's Site Selection Task Force (SSTF) saw in Merced County the possibility of tackling existing imbalances in the current nine-campus UC system by establishing an institution of higher learning in this region of the state. By following a basic tenet of the UC mission, that of insuring the widest

possible geographic distribution of educational and economic benefit, the University of California would generate a lasting positive impact upon the region. While UC campuses are intended to be state-wide in focus, it has been observed that a large percentage of students enrolled at each campus come from nearby areas. The San Joaquin Valley has the largest population concentration in California that is at a distance of greater than 50 miles from a UC campus. Locating a new campus in the San Joaquin Valley was seen to have potential positive impacts on college participation rates in the region.

The selection of the Lake Yosemite site came after a review of more than 85 sites in the San Joaquin Valley. Finalist sites were in Merced, Madera and Fresno Counties. Among the criteria leading to the final selection were available housing, commercial services and cultural amenities, as well as access to metropolitan areas, community support, availability of water, and an estimation of environmental effects associated with the site. The site proposed in Merced County also had the significant advantage of being owned by the Virginia Smith Trust, which funds higher education scholarships for local high school graduates.

In May 1995 the Site Selection Task Force identified the need for a 2,000 acre site for the new campus as part of their final report to The Regents. This finding was based on the experience of the University with long term development at various campuses, and most particularly of the experience of the newer campuses—Irvine, San Diego, and Santa Cruz—which opened in the mid- 1960's.

Fig. 2.1
UC Merced
Location



Lake Yosemite Site

The original site proposed for the campus was a 2,000 acre parcel identified by the University within the larger Virginia Smith Trust property located to the north and east of Lake Yosemite. In the course of planning for the campus, additional site evaluations and characterizations were conducted. As a result of these additional analyses, the site identified in the Site Selection EIR and approved by The Regents in May 1995 was proposed to be moved from the center of the Trust property to the southwestern corner, closer to the City of Merced and immediately adjacent to Lake Yosemite and the Lake Yosemite Regional Park, as shown in Figure 2.2. The main campus is to be located on the site of the existing Merced Hills Golf Course (owned by the Virginia Smith Trust), on property east of the park owned by the County of Merced, and on adjacent undeveloped lands owned by the Trust. A gift from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to The Regents of the University of California will enable acquisition of the entire holdings of the Trust, approximately 7,030 acres. The site is approximately 2 miles from the city limits of Merced. The preponderance of the campus site consists of lands that have been historically used for grazing. Outside of the golf course, a barn and corral are the only structures on the site. Two major canals owned by the Merced Irrigation District (MID) run through the campus area.

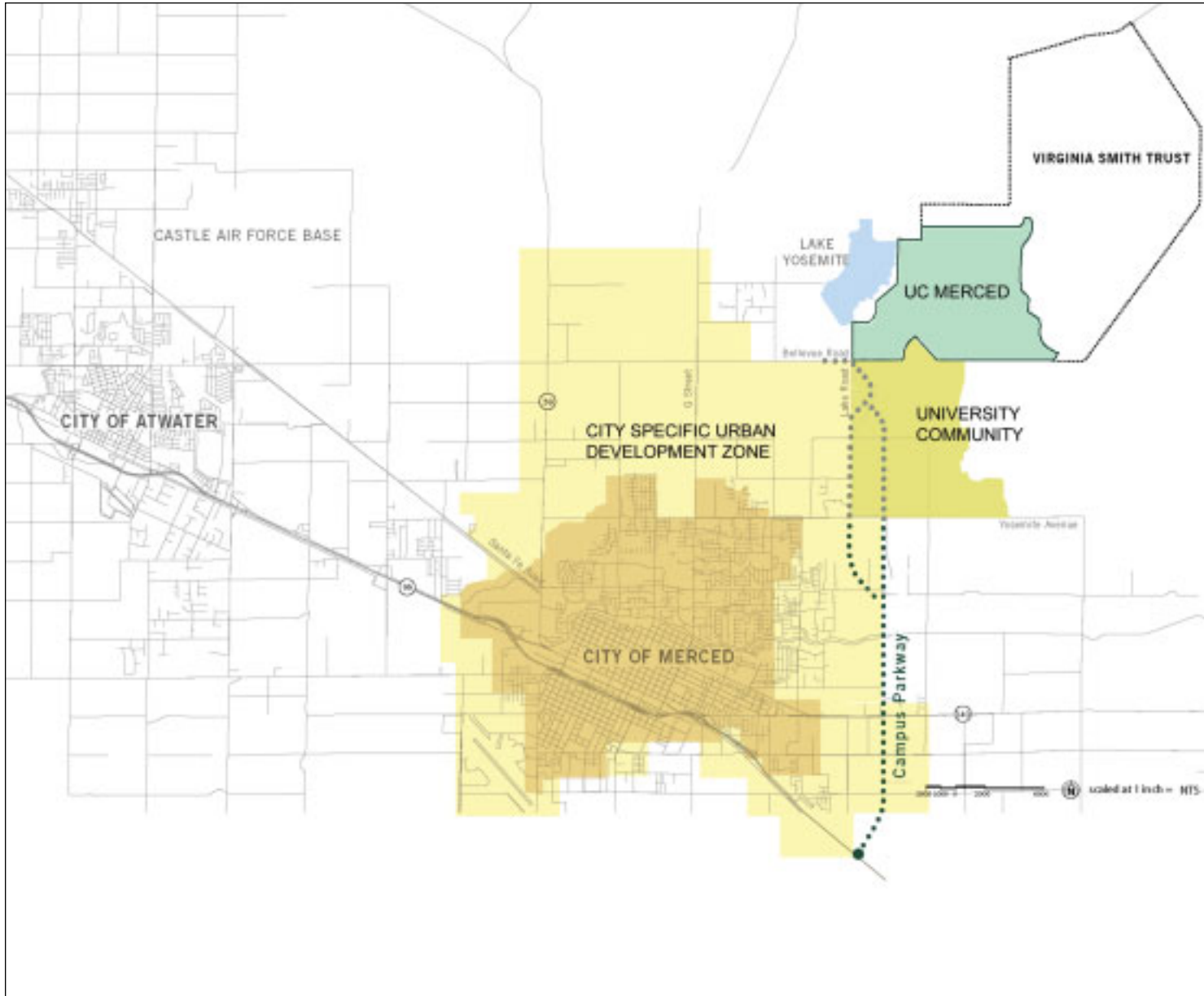


Fig. 2.2
Regional Location