

4.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

4.2.A Relationship Between Overall Goals and Specific Project Objectives

This response addresses comments FA1-1 and O28-55.

Commenters have claimed that some of the project objectives discussed in the LRDP EIR do not appear to conform to the overall purpose of the UC Merced project. As an example, commenters cite the project purpose of providing a planning framework for developing lands and protecting and conserving important resources and the project objective of providing adequate land and resources to accommodate the growth generated by the UC Merced Campus. Commenters urge that since the community is sized to accommodate growth generated by UC Merced and will, therefore, result in impacts to biological and agricultural resources, the stated purpose and objective contradict one another.

The planning framework contemplated by the project purpose in fact includes the cited project objective. The purpose of the planning framework, as stated, is to both develop lands *and* protect and conserve important resources. While accommodating the growth generated by the campus will result in some impacts to agricultural and biological resources, planners can design and construct housing in numerous ways, many of which are discussed at length in the UCP EIR, so as to minimize impacts to resources to the extent possible. In addition, as is also discussed in both the LRDP EIR and the UCP EIR, mitigation measures implemented in connection with the development of the Campus and the University Community can and will ensure that certain land and resources that would otherwise not be protected will be permanently preserved. For example, the land constituting the Campus Natural Preserve will be permanently protected from development or any other threat to the biological resources contained therein. Thus, it is possible to simultaneously develop and conserve, and the project purpose and project objective referred to by commenters do not in fact contradict one another.

Further comments related to the appropriate size for the University Community are addressed in the Final EIR for that project. Also see Section 4.22.C responding to comments about the purpose of the University Community.

4.2.B Relationship Between Implementing Strategies and Specific Project Objectives

This response addresses comment FA1-6 and other comments relating to strategies for implementing project objectives.

Commenters claim that the specific project objectives and implementing strategies discussed in the LRDP EIR do not correspond to the guiding project objective of “developing a premier research university consistent with the University of California’s mission of teaching, research, and service excellence.” In support of this assertion, commenters state that many existing UC campuses are examples of premier research universities, but do not provide the type of “amenities” sought by the project objectives, such as a high quality campus setting, promotion of regional harmony, and ensuring community integration.

Development of a premier research university requires that a campus attract high-caliber students and faculty. Students and faculty choosing among various campuses consider the quality of life

at a campus in making their decisions. A high quality campus setting, regional harmony, and community integration are generally accepted as characteristics contributing to a high quality of life on a campus. Inclusion of these characteristics in the development of the campus will render the campus more attractive to high-caliber students and faculty choosing among various schools. Thus, the specific project objectives cited by commenters are in fact integral to the achievement of the overall project objective of developing a premier research university.

The University does not agree with the commenter's assertion that the existing campuses lack amenities. UC campuses are located in attractive settings and have significant community amenities. Many of the present campuses were also established in less competitive environments. It is the University's considered judgement, based on experience with the existing UC campuses and knowledge of other university campuses throughout the country, that the identified amenities are necessary for this new campus to fulfill its mission.

Commenters also assert that many of the implementing strategies included in the Draft EIR to promote achievement of the specific project objectives do not directly correlate with those project objectives. For example, commenters state that the implementing strategy of providing on-campus faculty housing does not correlate with the project objective of attracting high-quality faculty.

As is explained in the LRDP EIR, the provision of faculty housing is a major consideration for potential faculty candidates choosing among various universities and colleges. Although commenters correctly note that many UC campuses attract and retain high quality faculty absent the provision of on-campus faculty housing, many of those same campuses routinely lose high-caliber faculty candidates to other universities better able to provide affordable housing to faculty on or proximate to campus. In addition, a fledgling university that has not yet established a reputation cannot rely, as many other UC campuses can, on the ability of its stature in the academic community to overcome practical obstacles to the recruitment of high-caliber faculty. Thus, the provision of on-campus housing to faculty is not only integral, but also necessary, for achievement of the Project objective of attracting high-quality faculty to the UC Merced Campus.

Commenters also claim that the strategy of designing and locating buildings in a manner that will avoid construction cost multipliers, additional maintenance, and other economic inefficiencies does not correlate with the specific project objective of avoiding unnecessary costs in the development of the campus. Commenters state that because this implementing strategy translates into buildings of no more than three or four stories, and many UC campuses have buildings of greater height, the strategy and objective are inapposite.

The fact that other UC campuses contain buildings taller than three or four stories does not detract from the effectiveness of limiting building height in achieving the objective of avoiding unnecessary costs. For reasons discussed at length in the Draft EIR, current construction regulations, favored building materials, and other conditions under which buildings are constructed in this day and age, lead to the conclusion that limiting the height of building does in fact avoid unnecessary costs.

4.2.C Expressions of Support for UC Merced Project

This response addresses 38 comment letters, identified as follows: I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I8, I10, I11, I12, I13, I14, I15, I16, I17, I18, I19, I20, I21, I22, I23, I24, I26, I29, I31, I41, I42, I43, I44, I45, I48, I49, I51, LA8, O5, O9, O27, and SA8. This response also addresses the comments of 21 speakers at the September 13, 2001, public hearing, as follows: PH1, PH2-1, PH3, PH4, PH9, PH10, PH11, PH13, PH14, PH15, PH16, PH17, PH18, PH19, PH20, PH21, PH22, PH23, PH24, PH26, PH28, and PH29. These comments express support for the project and urge certification of the Draft EIR. The commenters include many individuals, as well as the following elected officials, public agencies, organizations, and businesses:

Elected Officials:			
Congressman Gary Condit	Senator Dick Monteith	Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza	Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes
Assemblyman Dave Cogdill			
Public Agencies:			
McSwain Union Elementary School District	California Department of Water Resources	Merced Irrigation District	
Organizations and Businesses:			
Semiconductor Industry Association	University Committee of Merced	Merced County Farm Bureau	Virginia Smith Trust
Friends of UC Merced	Pacific-Sierra Publishing Inc.	Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce	Merced County Association of Realtors
Pacific Gas & Electric Co.			

While the specific remarks of each commenter varied, several common themes were expressed. Virtually all supportive commenters felt that the Draft EIR provided a thorough and exhaustive evaluation of the environmental impacts of the project, and that the mitigation identified in the Draft EIR presents a comprehensive and well-balanced approach to reducing those impacts to the maximum extent feasible. Many supportive commenters felt that the remaining impacts that are not mitigated to less-than-significant levels were outweighed by the significant economic, educational, and social benefits of the project to Merced County in particular and California as a whole. Finally, several commenters expressed their opinion that the environmental review process had been conducted fairly, openly, and with full public participation.