

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES

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**LEADING EDUCATION AND ACADEMICS FORWARD**

**Thank you for staying  
connected!**



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# MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

My Fellow SNS Community Members,

I want to thank you all for your hard work and dedication during the past 9 months. It's truly awe-inspiring to see everyone's resilience, dedication, and commitment to ensuring that we continue to provide educational continuity to our students and move forward with research, all while maintaining a sense of community.

During these uncertain times, I urge you to be mindful of both yourself and your colleagues and offer support whenever possible. Although we must stay physically distant, it is important for everyone's well-being to stay connected and intentionally take steps to maintain camaraderie and promote collaboration. I encourage you to pick up the phone to talk to a colleague or friend and try to maintain work-free space at home to connect and recharge with your family and loved ones (both human and furry!).

Although we try to remain flexible, patient and supportive of one another during these uncertain times, we will all struggle at some point along the way. When that happens, I encourage you to seek out support to help you through. Both the [Academic Personnel Office](#) and [Staff Human Resources](#) have created resource pages that include information on corona virus workplace programs and policies. UC Merced students, staff and faculty also have access to the [Calm App](#), a popular sleep and meditation app.

We're all tired and ready for a holiday but keep up the fantastic job you've done supporting yourself, your students, and your colleagues, and know that SNS and the rest of the UC Merced community is here for you as we blaze a trail into a future that will offer opportunities as well as challenges. Remember, we are stronger together.

Betsy

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## NEWS & UPDATES

So much has happened since the start of the fall semester. Here are just a few highlights:

- SNS welcomed 10 new faculty members this fall. [Click here to learn more.](#)
- This new academic year brought a change in SNS' leadership. [Click here to view this year's members.](#)
- CalTeach launched its Bobcat Online Homework Help program for K-12 students. [Click here to learn more.](#)
- Thanks to the dedicated effort of the SNS Long Range Planning group, [Phase 2 of SNS' Long Range Plan](#) was submitted to campus in late September and is currently open for review by the campus. The plan lays out nine Strategic Initiatives that will move our School toward R1 status by addressing research, growth and excellence in graduate and undergraduate programs and staff development, all in the context of highlighting diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. Phase 3 planning will kick off with open discussions about specific actions within each of our Strategic Initiatives. Keep an eye out for invitations to participate; everyone's ideas are wanted and welcome! For more information regarding the Long Range Plan project and how to get involved, [click here.](#)
- SNS Undergraduate Advising hosted its annual open house for our 2<sup>nd</sup> year majors last month. New students were able to meet faculty, advising staff and other students in order to learn about SNS and its various programs and majors. In case you missed it, [the recorded sessions can be found here.](#)
- UC Merced has entered the ranks of US News & World Report's 'Top 100' schools, tying with UC Santa Cruz for #40 in 'Top Public Schools'. [Click here to learn more.](#)




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## FACULTY and STAFF LEADERSHIP and RESILIENCE

SNS faculty, staff and students are continually stepping up to help ensure the continuity of education to our students and to support campus COVID planning efforts. Here are just a few examples of those efforts.

- Faculty continue to work nonstop to prepare and maintain their classes for distance learning while mentoring students and managing their research labs.
- SNS faculty have been vital to plans for managing the spread of COVID-19. Applied Mathematics faculty members Suzanne Sindi, Erica Rutter, and Shilpa Khatri created and continue to use mathematical models to help predict the outcome of multiple scenarios for repopulating our campus.
- Faculty and graduate students with experience in online learning generously

stepped up to offer training and support to their colleagues.

- Several members of SNS' staff are donating a portion of their time to staff the campus COVID response team. With their assistance, campus can enact a key component of their reopening plan by creating a campus level tracing system.

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## RESEARCH NEWS

### UC Merced newsroom has recently featured

- Professor Rudy Ortiz's new study into the effects of CBD on the high blood sugars and hypertension associated with metabolic syndrome.
- Chris Amemiya's discovery that upended traditional ideas about a structural polysaccharide called chitin that is found in some fish
- Stephen C. Hart is helping lead a research cluster within the NSF's Critical Zone Collaborative Network program
- Hrant Hratchian and Suzanne Sindi contributed to a major expansion of UC Merced's super computing infrastructure
- Emily Moran's work on determining which trees are most likely to grow and thrive when planted after a wildfire has damaged an area
- Justin Yeakel's study on how ecosystem engineers play a crucial role in stabilizing their environment
- Stephen C. Harts' discovery that bacteria and archaea communities underneath giant sequoias are twice as species rich as those from nearby sugar pine trees
- Chelsea Arnold and her School of Engineering faculty collaborators were awarded a two-year NSF grant for their proposal, 'STEM Teachers Alliance for Regional Tech thinking through Underrepresented Professional development in the San Joaquin Valley'

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## FACULTY ACCOLADES

- Asmeret Berhe was awarded the American Geophysical Union's Joanne Simpson Medal and has been elected as a fellow in the society
- Shahar Sukenik's work earned him an Outstanding Investigator award from the National Institutes of Health
- Ajay Gopinathan was elected a Fellow in the American Physical Society
- Lin Tian received an NSF grant to expand her work on quantum exploration
- Juan Meza has been named a Fellow of the American Mathematical Society



## STAFF CORNER

### SNS Staff Council Development Series

Members of our staff have been busy producing

professional development webinars. In the last few months, Josephine Vang gave us a workshop on managing student workers, Shannon Adamson taught us some Excel tools and tricks, Mariah Gonzales showed us how to manage communication in the workplace and John Newton coached us on how to reflect on our perspective of time.

For those of you who have missed any of the webinars, [they are housed here](#).

The council invites all staff members to consider giving a presentation (skills and expertise may or may not be directly related to your work here at SNS!) by contacting [snsstaffcouncil@ucmerced.edu](mailto:snsstaffcouncil@ucmerced.edu).

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## **SNS Living Learning Communities Celebrate the Start of their 3<sup>rd</sup> Year**

SNS' Living Learning Communities are now well into their 3<sup>rd</sup> year and we continue to hear about successes of former members.

- At least 17 former Carson House students are currently involved in research labs.
- Students from last year's Carson House were recognized at last summer's California Higher Education Sustainability Conference where they won the Best Practice Award in Interdisciplinary Academics.
- Students from this year's Aristotle House presented STEM workshops to K-6 youth in November virtually through the Expanding your Horizons conference.

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## **Got News? Recent Accomplishments? We Want to Hear From You!**

If you have any news please email us at: [snsnews@ucmerced.edu](mailto:snsnews@ucmerced.edu)