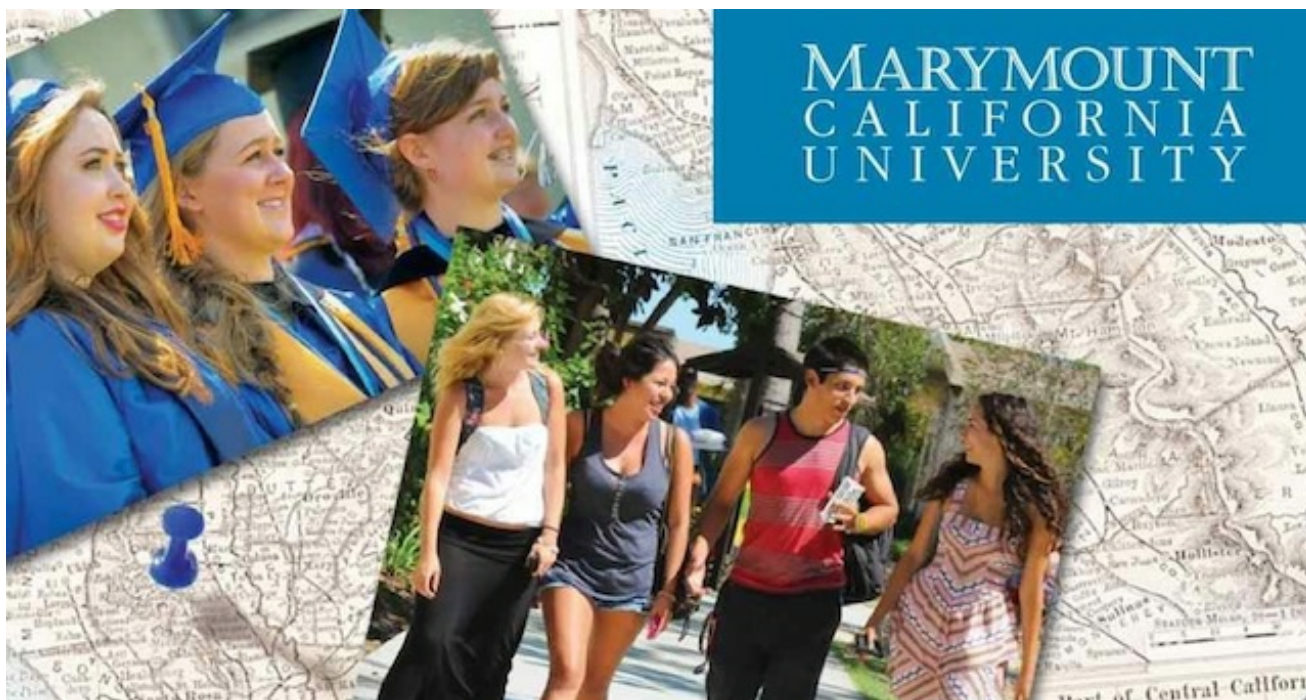


University eyeing Visalia for four-year institution

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Contributed Marymount California University is weighing options on a possible four-year college campus in Visalia, with the first classes possible by 2016. Marymount California University is a liberal arts institution offering associate, bachelor's and master's degrees and serving students in three California communities: Palos Verdes and San Pedro in Los Angeles County and Lucerne in Lake County.

Not to be confused with another Catholic university Loyola Marymount, Marymount California is a four-year and graduate level college, billed as an independent, Catholic, coeducational, and residential university.

New mission

Now Marymount California, on a new mission to establish multi-site campuses in the state, is looking at a location in the San Joaquin Valley, in Visalia, a city of 125,000 that currently has but one university — evangelical-based Fresno Pacific University — offering upper level classes.

“After a community meeting held in Visalia October 23, we are ready to take the next step toward establishing a four-year higher educational program in Visalia,” said Marymount Board Member Bonifacio (Bonny) Garcia, who works as the city attorney for Delano.

Garcia was urged to consider Visalia after talking to a friend, long-time educator Dr. Bob Aguilar of Visalia. Aguilar set up the community meeting at the Visalia Holiday Inn inviting about 40 community leaders to attend to hear from Garcia as well as president of the college Michael S. Brophy, Ph.D.

“We felt we got an excellent reception,” said Aguilar, who explains the college is exploring the possibility of a campus here if the right formula can be found.

President Brophy recently said the college was ready to move forward on a collaborative study.

Priority one

Visalia has hungered for a four-year college for decades. Visalia City Council Member Greg Collins, who attended the community meeting, stood up and recounted that “for 23 annual city council strategy sessions held early each year to set priorities, bringing in a four-year college has been No. 1 on the list every year.”

Warren Gubler, another Visalia councilmember, had reason for optimism.

“I agree this would be just wonderful for Visalia,” he said. “It could start out small and go from there.”

Also in attendance at the meeting were Visalia City Manager Mike Olmos, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak as well as various business, nonprofit and educational leaders.

“There will be more next time,” Aguilar said.

Marymount Board Member Garcia sees it as a good fit.

“With the need here for a four-year education opportunities, I would say both for Marymount and for the community, Visalia is in the sweet spot,” he said. “This looks like a win-win.”

Multi-site campuses

The college’s main campus is located along the coastline of Rancho Palos Verdes in Southern California on 26 acres. The institution is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

In 1968, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, a Roman Catholic community, established Marymount California University. In 1975, they transferred responsibility for the university to a lay board of trustees. In summer 2011, Marymount California University opened the Waterfront Campus in San Pedro, Los Angeles.

Just last year, Marymount College (MCU) announced that it was changing its name to Marymount California University to “reflect the gradual transformation of the 45-year-old institution of higher education to a future multi-site institution with undergraduate and graduate programs,” according to a press release.

Classes possible by ‘16

University President Brophy offered the following perspective in an email sent to this reporter Nov. 11.

“Based on our experience in establishing an extension campus in Northern California (Lake County) MCU would like to lead a study of the Visalia region’s need for a four-year and graduate degree programs. This study will include working in partnership with your excellent community colleges, College of the Sequoias and Porterville Community College. The study will provide regional leadership with the information it would need to commit to hosting a four-year university like MCU in community provided facilities as early as 2016-2017.

“Resourcing this study would be important, so our proposal would include the estimated financial investment the region would need to make to support a thorough and thoughtful study,” Brophy added.

MCU is also looking to offer an 18-month Professional Leadership Graduate Certificate Program aimed at working professionals to study leadership through four graduate courses to be delivered by MCU professors, mentors, local professionals and business owners, he said.

“The goal would be to provide Visalia area leaders with access to best practices in leadership and mentors who have

made a difference in their community,” Brophy said.

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