

Riverside

and the Region

UCR rising to the fore as research facility

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By Felix Sanchez
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RIVERSIDE

The University of California, Riverside, has added another notch to its research belt, garnering recognition as one of the fastest rising public research universities in the U.S., and the top campus for publication in scholarly journals.

The rankings are part of a recently released 320-page book, "The Rise of American Research Universities," in

which two educators analyzed 200 American universities based on faculty productivity, research grants and fellowships, published research and peer recognition of published work.

This is not the first time that UCR has been recognized as a prominent research university. Last year, 11 UCR researchers, more than any other U.S. university, were named fellows in the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"This book's analysis of our stature is very complimentary to the AAAS awards, which highlight our strength in the sciences," said Harry W. Green II, vice chancellor for research.

In 1995, UCR tied Harvard University and the University of Wisconsin in the most number of association fellows, with eight. And a 1995 report by the National

Research Council ranked UCR among the nation's top public research universities.

"What emerges is a pattern in which UCR has, in a remarkably short time, moved itself into a position to be a real player on the national research scene," said Jean-Pierre Mileur, dean of the UCR graduate division.

Administrators say UCR's showing in the latest study is more impressive because it is the result of analysis that the two authors have said more truly reflects the quality of a university.

That is because the authors avoided criteria based on reputations, and gave smaller colleges a handicap by using a scoring system that takes into account average scoring by an individual professor, not total numbers of faculty.

The study used five criteria, all divided by the total number of faculty members:

federal grants for research and development, the number of journal articles published by its faculty members, the number of articles published in a smaller number of prestigious journals in science and technology and in the social and behavioral sciences, and awards in the arts and humanities.

The data covered 25 years, from 1965 to 1990.

"What is different about the list is the presence among these elite schools of several new institutional faces, beginning with UC Riverside," the book's authors write in an analysis of their findings.

Some ratings experts applauded the elimination of reputation as a criteria:

"Reputations are very, very slow to change," said David S. Webster, an associate professor at Oklahoma State who

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specializes in university rankings. "Even a guy like me, who likes to think he keeps up with college quality, sometimes finds he has not."

According to the book, UCR is ranked first among public research universities in the number of per capita publications by faculty members. Following UC Riverside were UC San Diego, UCLA and UC Berkeley.

In addition, UCR ranked fourth among 21 so-called "rising" public research universities, and 11th among public universities for its breadth of disciplines, including science, social science, arts and humanities.

The study evaluated public and private schools separately.

Among private universities, Yale University and the University of Chicago were the leaders.

"This is terrific news for UCR. Students, faculty, staff, alumni and our community partners should be proud of the tremendous job UCR has done in creating new knowledge while at the same time dedicating itself to the teaching mission," Chancellor Raymond Orbach said.

students are actively involved in research.

"If you look at it and say a faculty member is spending only six hours a week in the classroom, 'What the hell is he doing?' Well, what he is doing is impacting on a student's education in many different ways," said Curt Burgess, assistant UCR psychology professor.

And one of those ways is direct, hands-on involvement in research, Burgess said. Research is teaching, he maintains. In his work in cognitive psychology, Burgess has six undergraduates involved in laboratory research and ongoing projects.

On Feb. 26, Burgess was the lone UCR panelist at a National Academy of Sciences conference forum in Washington, D.C., on the issue of "Stresses on Research and Education."

"There is this issue of balancing research and teaching. What I proposed is that is the wrong question to ask. You have to look at how do faculty impact on student education," Burgess said.

"The one thing that business and industry wants is they want somebody that can solve problems," Burgess said. "It is being more actively involved in research where a student learns how to solve problems."

It is that sometimes perceived conflict between a university devoting itself to research at the expense of teaching undergraduates that has prompted some criticism of research universities in the past, said Patrick Callan, executive director of the California Higher Education Policy Center.

"It is a really important question for which there is no answer. The people who support research universities say undergraduates benefit from being around these world class researchers," Callan said.

"The other argument is what they (students) do is get ignored and how can that be a benefit," Callan said. "A lot of people have opinions but few people have done research into the issue."

On the UCR campus, several respected professors said undergraduates benefit from the research being done at the university, especially because many faculty members make sure the

Robin DiMatteo, psychology professor and chairwoman of the UCR psychology department, does not understand critics who believe a university cannot be both a strong research institution and a strong teaching institution.

"In all my years, I've found the best researchers are the best teachers. There is a very strong relationship between the two," DiMatteo said.

At UC Riverside, DiMatteo said there is no special preference given to active researchers. "Everybody is expected to teach and to teach a considerable amount," she said.

"Researchers," she said, "are able to teach students the newest research, the latest theories in their field. They are not rehashing old lecture notes from years ago."

The N.Y. Times News Service contributed to this report.