

Cheri Cruz: Woeful education statistics

First lady Michelle Obama recently scanned an audience of University of California graduates and their families and friends at the Merced campus' first commencement ceremony.

She noted many were the first in their family to earn a college degree. She recalled her own experience just a few decades earlier.

"Like Merced, the South Side of Chicago is a community where people struggled financially, but worked hard, looked out for each other and rallied around their children. My father was a blue-collar worker, as you all know. My mother stayed at home to raise me and my brother. We were the first to graduate from college in our immediate family," the first lady told her Merced audience.

"I grew up just a few miles from the University of Chicago in my hometown. The university, like most institutions, was a major cultural, economic institution in my neighborhood. ... Yet that university made no effort to reach out to me -- a bright and promising student in their midst -- and I had no reason to believe there was a place for me there."

Despite these dire economic times, UC Merced and the other members of the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, including Merced College, are determined not to allow deserving, talented students in our midst to be overlooked and left out.

Comprised of about two dozen public and private colleges and universities, the consortium's goal is to increase all students' access to higher education.