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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**California State University, San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus establishes Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program**

PALM DESERT, Calif. – California State University, San Bernardino’s Palm Desert Campus (PDC) has announced the establishment of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program, joining an elite group of only four chapters in the United States—and the only one in California.

The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program is a distinguished initiative that promotes civic engagement, ethical leadership and public service. The program provides selected students with opportunities to participate in advanced leadership development, mentorship with community and national leaders, scholarly dialogue, and service initiatives that embody the values and legacy of President Gerald R. Ford, the 38th President of the United States.

“The establishment of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program at the Palm Desert Campus represents a significant milestone for our university and for the region we serve,” said Edna Martinez, associate vice president and administrator in charge of PDC. “This program will provide our students with exceptional opportunities to engage in meaningful leadership training and civic initiatives while connecting them to a national network of distinguished Ford Fellows.”

As the only chapter in California, the program underscores the PDC’s unique role as a hub for leadership, scholarship and service in the Coachella Valley and beyond. Students will become fellows through a rigorous, multi-stage selection process designed to identify individuals who exemplify the values of civic responsibility, ethical leadership and public service.

“This is a historic moment for the Palm Desert Campus and for the entire CSU system,” said Kevin Grisham, professor of global studies and faculty advisor of the program at PDC. “Becoming the only California chapter of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program underscores our commitment to preparing the next generation of ethical leaders and engaged citizens.”

The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program is part of the Gerald R. Ford Leadership Forum, founded in 2022 as an initiative of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation. In addition to CSUSB’s Palm Desert Campus, other chapters include the University of Michigan, Hope College (Michigan) and Middle Tennessee State University.

“Gerald R. Ford had two places he called home: Grand Rapids, MI and Rancho Mirage, CA,” said Jeff Polet, director of the Ford Leadership Forum. “When we created the Ford Leadership Forum our intention was to honor his legacy by serving the people who shared his homes with him. We are thrilled to partner with the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus to bring Ford’s virtues of service, integrity and civility to a new generation.”

As the Gerald R. Ford Leadership Forum notes, Grand Rapids and the Coachella Valley “are bounded together by [President Ford’s] legacy of hard work, public service, personal integrity, bipartisan cooperation and courageous action.” Recognizing his long-standing connection to the Coachella Valley, the Ford Foundation selected the Palm Desert Campus in spring 2025 to carry forward this important mission.

Students selected as Ford Fellows at PDC will engage in:

- Leadership training workshops
- Public service projects in the Coachella Valley
- Training in civil dialogue and bipartisan cooperation
- One-on-one mentorship from community leaders
- Seminars, lectures and panel discussions highlighting Ford’s legacy and values
- Hands-on experiences with diverse communities to strengthen their leadership in a pluralistic society

The Ford Presidential Fellows Program offers students more than professional development—it cultivates leadership rooted in character, civic responsibility and a commitment to the common good. By preparing fellows to lead with integrity and respect for democratic values, the program ensures President Ford’s enduring legacy continues to inspire future generations of leaders in California, across the nation, and around the world.

Visit the [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Fellows Program webpage on the PDC website](#) for more information.

**About the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus:** The [CSUSB Palm Desert Campus](#) is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience in the Coachella Valley. With a focus on academic excellence and community engagement, the campus offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs designed to meet the diverse needs of its students and the region.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at [msinger@csusb.edu](mailto:msinger@csusb.edu) or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at [www.csusb.edu/pdc](http://www.csusb.edu/pdc).