Sacramento State names new provost

President Alexander Gonzalez announced Thursday that Frederika “Fraka” Harmsen, 54, will become Sacramento State’s new provost and vice president for Academic Affairs.

She will hold the University’s second-highest position. Academic Affairs is the largest unit on campus, made up of the seven academic colleges, the University Library and the College of Continuing Education.

“I am honored to have the opportunity to serve the students of such an excellent university and work with the talented faculty and staff of Sacramento State,” Harmsen says. “Public higher education in California has entered an era of transformative technology and greater demands for accountability, and partnering with the campus community and leaders in the region to shape Sacramento State’s success is both challenging and exciting.

“I am a firm believer that universities must remain agile to ensure future graduates learn the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in today’s rapidly changing job market.”

She will fill the position vacated by the June 2012 departure of Joseph F. Sheley, now president of California State University, Stanislaus. Charles W. Gossett served as Sac State’s interim provost. He will assist with the transition in Academic Affairs and will remain with the University as a faculty member.

Harmsen will begin in her new position at Sacramento State in February 2014.

She currently is dean of the College of Natural Sciences and a professor of geology at California State University, Chico. She has nearly three decades of experience in the California State University system, including 26 years at Fresno State, where she served as a professor, department chair and associate dean of the College of Science & Mathematics before leaving for Chico in 2011. In 1989-90, she was San Jose State’s visiting scientist at Moss Landing Marine Laboratories.

“Dr. Harmsen brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the important role of the California State University to our campus,” Gonzalez says. “She has excelled as a teacher in the classroom, as a scientist in the lab and in the field, and
as a leader during very challenging times for public higher education. I have full confidence that Dr. Harmsen's collegial, thoughtful approach will strengthen our campus and create new opportunities for our students."

Harmsen's work in the CSU includes initiatives to promote student diversity in science and engineering, and outreach to K-12 schools for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. Her research in geology includes work across the globe, and she has secured more than $3 million in federal research grants.

Her recent research projects include a $650,000 grant to investigate paleontological resource mitigation of the Fairmead site in Madera County and $300,000 from the National Park Service for benthic habitat mapping of Channel Islands National Park.

She specializes in marine and non-marine sedimentology, depositional environments and basin analysis. Her interests include climate change and sustainability, paleoclimate analysis using marine proxies, paleotsunamis and benthic marine habitat mapping for ecosystem-based management.

She serves on the executive committee of the CSU's Council on Ocean Affairs, Science and Technology (COAST), which was established in 2008 to promote marine science research and education throughout the system.

Harmsen was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and grew up in New Zealand. She earned a B.Sc. (Hons) 1st Class, followed by a doctorate in geology in 1984, from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. She moved to the United States later that year after accepting a position as a National Science Foundation post-doctoral fellow at the University of Montana.

She is a member of several professional organizations, including the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, the Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists, and Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society. Harmsen is married to botanist Thomas Mallory. They have a pet Labradoodle named Iwi. Harmsen is the lead vocalist and keyboard player in a band; her hobbies include scuba diving, cycling, video production and theater.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Office of Public Affairs at (916) 278-6156. – Dixie Reid