

# WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES – SENIOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COMMISSION (WSCUC)

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA – ANSWERING THE CALL

May 8, 2019

*Compared to just a few years ago, the world has become smaller and more interconnected. Migration from rural environments into large, diverse urban “megacities” is accelerating. Populations are aging. Silicon-based intelligences are interfacing with biologically-based intelligences. Social media is changing how we communicate – how quickly and how accurately. The arts and humanities are more salient than ever as we strive for greater cross-cultural awareness and mutual understanding. Security, sustainability, and health care are not esoteric concepts, but daily urgencies. And, universities themselves and the roles they play are being questioned. Are liberal arts values still relevant in today’s world? Is higher education still a vehicle for upward mobility and the most secure route to prosperity? Are universities concerned with providing access and opportunity or is higher education only for those who can afford it?*

*– USC 2018 Strategic Plan: Answering the Call, pages 1-2*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Modern research universities emerged in response to – and helped propel – the social, political, and economic revolutions that transformed the nation and the world over the last 150 years. As we enter the middle decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, myriad challenges and opportunities have emerged to which colleges and universities must respond.

We will approach our accreditation reaffirmation guided by a query similar to one that urged us forward during our most recent strategic planning process: “What will society demand of research universities in the coming years?” Our inquiry will center on two themes: embracing the inclusive spirit and fostering the convergent spirit. We see embracing the inclusive spirit as a way to enrich diversity, pursue excellence, ensure equity, and build prosperity. And, we see fostering academic convergence as a way to reimagine the curriculum, build collaborations within and beyond the academy, create new knowledge, address the world’s most intractable social challenges, and prepare graduates to face those challenges with optimism and purpose. These themes are deeply rooted in our history even as each provides a path forward.

***Embracing the Inclusive Spirit.*** USC’s first class in 1880 included women and men, and a mix of students of different ethnic and national backgrounds. The valedictorian at USC’s first graduation ceremony was a young woman, Minnie Miltimore. USC’s first group of faculty also included both women and men. We are proud of our past with diversity and inclusion while also recognizing that our history has not been a story uninterrupted progress and the triumph of political courage. We own our history and continue to learn from it. In recent years, we have instituted several important structural changes to make USC more inclusive. We have developed new ways to expand access and opportunity for current and prospective students. We have added new programs and resources to build and support a more diverse community.

We have created new ways to communicate our values with regard to diversity and inclusion. Finally, we have added new resources through gifts and grants to advance the cause.

***Fostering the Convergent Spirit.*** Opening its doors in 1880 with 53 students and 10 faculty, USC could best be described as a liberal arts college. That changed quickly with the addition of a school of music, college of medicine, and programs in law, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering, education, and several social sciences within the first 30 years. A graduate school, architecture, fine arts, social work, business, international relations, and cinematic arts followed suit and, by 1930, USC grew to 7000 students, of which 10% (700) were international. Today, USC has 21 academic units, including a liberal arts college, outstanding professional schools, and six conservatory-quality arts schools. Each change prompts inquiry into the relationship between disparate bodies of knowledge, about the nature of the curriculum, into the changing roles of faculty, and about how to make the breadth of our programs available to students. More recently, we made several changes to promote new interdisciplinary teaching and research, and to support the production of new knowledge. We announced teaching grants to support interdisciplinary curriculum development through team-teaching and funding for graduate-level course practicums that use interdisciplinary methods to explore social challenges. We have established several interschool research centers focused on the biosciences, race and equity, and new applications for artificial intelligence. And, we have created new arts collaborations that help form community partnerships to address intractable social problems.

How best to pursue excellence and serve society is not just a question for USC. It is a challenge for comprehensive research universities across the nation and around the world. For USC, the salience of this question is rooted in our history. Our themes reflect our past, both in terms of the importance of diversity to our progress and prosperity and in terms of the importance of the growth of new programs in the arts, medicine, and the other professions that began almost immediately after our founding – all devoted to meeting the emerging needs of our region.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION

The University of Southern California grew up with Los Angeles. From its founding in 1880, USC consciously declared itself not a “pastoral college” removed from the world of human affairs, but a “city university” committed to advancing society and elevating humanity. USC’s development was in no small part related to its symbiotic relationship with the city – each nurturing the other, each succeeding because of the other. Over the past 140-years, each, in its own way, has grown into a global powerhouse. The University today is a comprehensive, global research university.

USC’s institutional context has three parts. First, we are a private research university consisting of a multidimensional and diverse liberal arts college, exceptional professional schools, and a remarkable mix of conservatory-quality arts schools. Second, the University is set in the heart of the global metropolis of Los Angeles, arguably the most diverse urban center in the world in terms of ethnicity, gender identity, religious practice, language use, sexualities, artistic expression, national origin, economics, and other key characteristics of urban centers. Third, USC’s college and schools share a commitment to liberal education. That commitment is

mirrored in its principal institutional mission, “...the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit.” These three features are the essential components of our institutional context. They are reflected in almost every part of the University’s values, makeup, and history.

USC’s academic culture is shaped by values that grow from its composition, urban location, and core academic mission. The unusual combination of a liberal arts college, professional units, and arts schools has made USC a leader in promoting interdisciplinary teaching and research that address societal needs. The University’s institutional makeup and its location in Los Angeles (and on the Pacific Rim) have helped create a culture that rewards entrepreneurship, encourages global engagement, and values and welcomes diversity.

#### PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE THEMES

Our themes align closely to our [2018 USC Strategic Plan: Answering the Call](#) so, in that sense, the hundreds of people engaged in producing our strategic plan participated in developing our proposed institutional themes. Following notification that the WSCUC Commission had approved USC to participate in the Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR), meetings were held with the Executive Vice Provost and Provost to discuss a thematic approach, with attention to aligning the themes to the priorities from our strategic plan. The ALO was asked to draft a set of possibilities for discussion. Those options were debated first at Provost Cabinet. Discussions continued with members of the Executive Vice Provost’s leadership team as well as other key campus stakeholders. After further revision, the themes were presented by the ALO and further discussed by members of the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate. Following a special session that included other TPR institutions at the WSCUC Academic Resource Conference, the themes were again revised. The Provost and Executive Vice Provost approved a final version. That version was later discussed at two consecutive sessions of the President’s Cabinet. Subsequently, the Provost charged the ALO to complete the requested TPR submission report.

#### DESCRIPTION OF EACH THEME

Our interest in these themes long predate our most recent strategic plan. The importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access extends back to our founding. Over the past four years, we have adopted several strategies to meet current challenges. We would like to examine the efficacy of those changes. Relatedly, interest in academic convergence is the natural extension of USC’s institutional development. In a relatively short time period, USC grew from a small regional private college to a global research university with a broad range of areas of study – from the traditional disciplines of the liberal arts, to professional areas, health-related fields, and the full range of the arts. More recently, we have instituted incentives that foster new academic and research collaborations across the university and partnerships beyond the academy designed to address today’s most complex social challenges.

***Embracing the Inclusive Spirit.*** Globalization and modern technology have made the world both smaller and larger: smaller in the sense that the world has become our neighbor; larger in the sense that our neighbors share unique life experiences and perspectives, some vastly

different than our own, that can help expand our understanding, our embrace, and our worldview. For college graduates to navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century and benefit from this diversity of thought, universities must model the 21<sup>st</sup> century for its community, and it must show students the value of diversity, equity, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence. Just as diversification in nature makes ecosystems stronger, generative, and more resilient, so it does for culture, society, and university communities. For USC to lead, we must embrace this inclusive spirit.

Creating a community of diverse experiences and viewpoints in order to build a generation of innovators, leaders, visionaries, and creators remains one of our highest priorities. In this century, USC has enrolled more international students than any other college in the nation. More recently, we have established a student body that ranks among the highest in the country, among private research universities, in the number of underrepresented groups, Pell Grant recipients, first-generation college goers, transfer students, military veterans, and religious practice, among others. We have created a number of programs to support further diversification of our student and faculty bodies, created pipeline programs to expand diversity at all levels, and, led by the Academic Senate, made significant progress in creating a more inclusive campus climate with regard to age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, national origin, race, religious affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status.

We continue to prioritize diversity and inclusion. In the past two years, we have asked every school to create and execute a strategic plan for diversity and inclusion. We have invested in research programs that encourage evidence-based approaches to this work. We have created faculty leadership training programs so diverse voices have unfettered access to the mantle of university leadership here at USC and beyond. We have created programs for first-generation students – at all levels – that allow them to better navigate their campus experience and their chosen life and career paths. We have provided curricular opportunities for students to raise their cultural literacy. In sum, we have worked to multiply opportunities for distinct voices to be heard on our campuses and we have strived to instill the value of listening to those voices. We want to examine the efficacy of several of the changes we have instituted, even as we know that we are not finished, by any stretch of the imagination, in our efforts. (CFR's 1.4, 2.2a, 2.10, 2.11, 3.1, 4.6, 4.7)

***Fostering the Convergent Spirit.*** For decades, the overwhelming amount of information coming from major disciplines has led to a multiplication of ever-narrowing fields of discovery. Scholars have become experts in increasingly more restricted domains. Narrow expertise is still of immense importance, however, the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not fall into neatly and narrowly defined academic disciplines. For USC to lead, we must identify, recruit, train, support, and reward talent that sees problems and solutions, from multiple viewpoints, moves fluidly across disciplines, and works comfortably in large, disparate teams. For USC to lead, we must foster this convergent spirit.

The potential for fostering convergence begins with faculty. It is quite common for faculty at USC to have multiple appointments across schools. Over the past decade, we have recruited a

cadre of “Provost” professors, world-renowned scholars whose research and creative work has impact in multiple disciplines. Dauterive Hall is a leading center for interdisciplinary social science research, and the Michelson Center for Convergent Bioscience brings together scientists and engineers in large-team settings to tackle increasingly complex problems, like cancer. Programs in Visual Studies, Gender Studies, Media Studies, and Thematic Option strengthen the convergent mindset across the humanities and humanistic social sciences. Finally, top undergraduates completing degrees in multiple disciplines have long been recognized as Renaissance Scholars. Indeed, this is only a small sampling of work USC has done in the area of convergence.

USC is doing more. We are investing in faculty whose research brings together divergent fields to solve intractable problems. We have begun new initiatives that bring together students, scholars, artists, practitioners, and off campus partners to eliminate homelessness and engage the arts for social change. We have created training programs for graduate and professional students, for postdoctoral fellows, and for junior faculty so that they become more fluent in multidisciplinary work. We have instituted policies and reward systems that encourage team research, creative team endeavors, and team teaching. We are changing the conversation so that students speak less about their major and more about what great problems of the 21st century they hope to solve. As we have in the past, we want to continue to examine the effects of encouraging our students’ breadth of study. (CFR’s 1.3, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 2.11, 4.7)

#### TIMELINE FOR EACH THEME

How are we *answering the call* and have we been successful? Several established initiatives, structural changes, support programs, and other projects will be part of our inquiries to understand our progress towards embracing inclusion and fostering academic convergence.

#### **Embracing the Inclusive Spirit**

##### **A. Prior to Spring 2019 term**

- Creation of the Diversity Task Force, now the [Diversity Council](#). (Spring 2016)
- Launch of a [diversity website](#) to facilitate communication to the USC academic community. (Spring 2016)
- Creation of [Diversity Liaisons](#) Diversity Liaisons in every academic unit and assignment of Diversity and Inclusion roles to three [Associate Provosts](#) for Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, and Health and STEM. (Spring 2016)
- Guidelines established for strategic plans for Diversity and Inclusion and first drafts of the strategic plans.
- Recruitment of Shaun Harper and his [USC Race and Equity Center](#). (Summer 2017)
- Provost memo on [Fostering our Diverse Community](#). (Fall 2018)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Week](#). (Spring 2019)

##### **B. Spring 2019**

- Diversity Conference co-sponsored by the Provost and the Academic Senate.
- Visit by Professor Daryl Smith, [Diversity’s Promise for Higher Education](#), and continuing work with her.

C. Summer 2019 – Spring 2020

- Forming research questions and developing evidence to assess our progress towards: 1) increasing access and opportunity, 2) diversifying the faculty and student body, 3) support for students and mentoring for young scholars (graduate students, postdocs, early-career faculty).

***Fostering the Convergent Spirit***

A. Prior to Spring 2019 term

- Formation of the [USC Society of Fellows](#) for postdoctoral scholars across the arts and humanities. (Spring 2016)
- Formation of [Steering Committees for Confronting 21st Century Challenges](#) (2016)
- Announcement of [Wicked Problems Practicums](#), which are interdisciplinary programs created by faculty that invite graduate students to create think-tanks partnering with community and government agencies to address pressing challenges of our century. (Spring 2017)
- [Interdisciplinary Teaching Grants](#) announced. (Spring 2018)
- [Interschool Research Centers](#) announced, including USC Michelson Center for Convergent Biosciences, Race and Equity Center, Center for Artificial Intelligence in Society, and Center for Human Applied Reasoning and the Internet of Things (CHARIOT). (Fall 2018)
- Establishment of the [Arts in Action](#) program to leverage strength across the arts to promote social change. (Fall 2018)

B. Spring 2019

- [Mentoring Award](#) prize winners announced.
- [Renaissance Scholar](#) prize winners announced.

C. Summer 2019 – Spring 2020

- Forming research questions and developing evidence to assess our progress towards: 1) increasing academic breadth in our students' studies, 2) fostering interdisciplinary teaching and research, and 3) creating new partnerships within and beyond the academy in order to address intractable social problems.

**RESOURCES**

Significant resources have been provided for each of the programs described above. Many of those programs include calls to assess effectiveness towards achieving their objectives, which will be leveraged to contribute to our self-study. In addition, the resources of the Office of the Provost and the efforts of several campus partners, including the Registrar, Student Affairs, and Institutional Research colleagues will be leveraged for our studies. Other funds to support continuing and new learning assessment projects have already been appropriated, many of which receive ongoing funding across fiscal years. Finally, the Provost is committed to added support where needed to enhance our inquiries.

**INSTITUTIONAL STIPULATION**

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