

Dear Colleagues,

In the wake of the *Sports Illustrated* article published last week about sexual assault committed by former members of USF's men's soccer team, many of us are asking ourselves what more we can do — individually and collectively — to ensure that our community is a safe place for women and gender non-binary students, faculty, librarians, and staff to live, learn, and work. Whether through our scholarly and creative contributions, through praxis with individuals and communities, or in the classroom, we all can play a role in the movement to end all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, a struggle that we understand to be complex and intersectional.

As a survivor of sexual violence and someone who knows the long journey to recovery firsthand, I found it particularly painful to read the detailed accounts of what these students went through. They are not alone; in a study by the Association of American Universities, one in four undergraduate women had experienced non-consensual sexual contact since enrolling in college. I hope that when we discuss or share this issue with colleagues or in the classroom, we will be mindful of the potentially re-traumatizing impact and attend to *cura personalis* for the survivors in our midst. In the coming months, I look forward to engaging with members of the President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women (PACSW) to learn more about what the Provost's team can do to support their efforts. I encourage us all to participate in conversations about what it means to face these uncomfortable truths and to build a community that champions gender justice as we seek to “change the world from here.”

No community, however mission-driven, can live up to its values at all times. Instead, we need to have the ability to name detours from our ideals when they occur, listen with compassion, non-defensiveness, and grace, and look collectively for ways to rebuild trust. In the first of several *Conversations with Provost Chinyere*, faculty and staff did just that. I am grateful for their courage and vulnerability, knowing that while it may be emotionally difficult to name and to listen to our collective and individual suffering, it is a necessary first step in healing and ultimately makes us stronger. In the words of USFFA President Sonja Poole, “Repressed (and suppressed) emotions manifest in more harmful ways. Our emotions won't go away until they are acknowledged. So I am grateful that we are having these difficult conversations. I hope leadership continues to encourage them, face the emotions, and genuinely work toward collective healing. It's the only way.” I am working with the faculty associations and Lane Center to explore what brave spaces we might convene in future. Please stay tuned for more details. The Provost's team looks forward to continued community conversations. Please save the date and sign up below:

Transfer Success and Belonging Initiative

12–12:45 p.m. | Thursday, Oct. 14

[Register »](#)

Developing an “Office of Career Acceleration”

11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m. | Tuesday, Oct. 19

[Register »](#)

Conversation with Provost Chinyere #3:

What opportunities to extend access to USF programs are offered by our **regional locations**?

12–12:45 p.m. | Wednesday, Oct. 20

[Register »](#)

Conversation with Provost Chinyere #4:

How can we address our **equity gaps** in relation to Latinx students, faculty, and staff?

11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m. | Tuesday, Oct. 26

[Register »](#)

Even as we tend to the residue of the past 18 months and beyond, we also need to turn our energy to the future with optimism and vision. At the end of September, the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees engaged in a discussion with deans, faculty, and student representatives on how COVID-19 has transformed the higher education landscape, heightening pre-existing trends, and bringing us unexpected new ways of living, learning and working. This was the first of a series of strategic conversations bringing together trustees, academic leadership, faculty, and students to explore how we may best leverage the possibilities of the current moment and “future-proof” our academic offerings. The committee also heard presentations on topics including priorities, challenges and opportunities, strategic enrollment, COVID-19 re-entry and how we can better foster faculty excellence, well-being and diversity. In addition, Trustee Judy Miner, chair of the Academic Affairs Committee and chancellor of Foothill-De Anza Community College District, brought forward several new strategic goals and metrics, with my recommendation, which will focus the committee's work this academic year on the mission alignment, academic rigor, and inclusive excellence of our programs, the return on investment on a USF education, enrollment growth, and faculty excellence and diversity.

I close with a particular note of gratitude to our faculty, librarians, and staff for the extraordinary lengths that you went to to carry our students through the past 18 months. Our students see and appreciate your efforts, as do I. Students cited in the recent Princeton Review described our faculty as “extremely talented, well-educated, hard-working, and passionate professors” who are “well qualified and deeply care for my education.” As a result of your collective efforts, our first-year retention rate rebounded to 86.3 percent in fall 2021, after a pandemic-related drop the year before, students reported higher rates of satisfaction with their instruction and there was a 10 percent increase in students finding USF academically rigorous.

Reviewing the data, USF's **New Student Success Survey** concluded “we believe in a crisis, USF staff and faculty rose to the occasion and became more innovative with how courses are taught and services are provided.”

I know that behind these data, there were many nights grading and prepping or designing classes while children were asleep, extra hours supporting distressed and grieving students and colleagues, and time that could have been dedicated to research, creativity, or family. I understand that a thank you is not always sufficient, and that we as academic leaders have more to do to demonstrate our appreciation for your sacrifices. Yet, I humbly submit my gratitude nevertheless, in the hope that it may provide some emotional nourishment for the work ahead.

Warmly,



Julia Chinyere Oparah
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Office of the Provost

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