

Dear Colleagues,

This week, my heart has been filled with a mixture of joy and pride as our Asian and Asian American, LGBTQIA, Latinx, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Black students of the Class of 2022 received their stoles at the affinity graduation celebrations. Working closely with Erin Echols of the Cultural Centers, our student, staff, and faculty planning committees captured the power of this moment of transition and transformation through themes such as “Rooted in Our Past, Unveiling Our Future” and “Ignite the Light that Shines from Within.” Listening to our student speakers share their struggles, victories, and hopes for the future with vulnerability and passion, I was reminded of why I came to USF and why I have come to love this community. I was particularly moved to witness our students acknowledging the faculty and staff who have gone the extra mile to support their success, and **I would like to lift them up too**. Thank you for all that you have done this year to build an inclusive, equitable environment where all our students can thrive.

### Courageous Conversations and Healing Connections

During our Asian and Asian American commencement celebration, I was introduced to the concept of Kapwa by undergraduate student speaker Jared Bague. Central to Filipinx epistemology and spirituality, Kapwa signals the deep interconnectedness that emerges when we acknowledge our authentic selves and share our full humanity with one another. Listening to Jared’s words of wisdom, it came to me that perhaps my most critical task this year has been to ask the USF community to reflect on where we experience Kapwa, and where it has been disrupted and needs to be rekindled.

One way that I have sought to begin this work has been through the Mission Priority Examen — a call to discern where we experience USF at its most mission-aligned, and to name where we feel a sense of disconnection or rupture. This semester, I have hosted conversations with faculty, librarians, and staff with disabilities, and with probationary faculty and librarians and part-time faculty. In these conversations, I heard about the many ways that we advocate for, champion, and serve as pillars of support for one another. I also heard about moments of desolation, where trust was ruptured or structural barriers left unchallenged, sowing seeds of doubt about our mission and our sense of belonging and value to the institution. I am grateful to everyone who shared their perspectives and opened their hearts during these sessions. And I look forward to partnering with faculty, librarians, staff, and administrators to identify and implement strategies to advance disability justice, support and retain our faculty, librarians, and staff, and rebuild trust. I recognize that healing and building trust take time and cannot be rushed, and I am committed to leaning into this work in the long haul so that together we can work to manifest Kapwa in all our relationships.

### Previewing the Fall Term

As I look ahead to the fall, I am thrilled about the **talented and diverse students who will be joining our community**. I am grateful for the work of April Crabtree and members of the Strategic Enrollment Management team who have recruited a very robust class and the most diverse undergraduate class in USF history. This year’s incoming class includes our largest-ever number of Black-identified students, and a significant rebound in international students. This class represents 44 states, Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico as well as 49 countries, with over 40 students joining us from India. More than 31 percent of our first-year class are the first in their families to go to college. This is an academically exceptional, passionate, and diverse class of changemakers ready to take on the opportunities presented by a USF education.

The fall will also bring an **inspiring cohort of new full-time faculty colleagues**, with a record number of full-time faculty of color hires. This is a result, in part, of the **Faculty and Librarian Diversity Hiring Initiative** that is a partnership between the provost’s office and deans. While 36 percent of our current faculty are BIPOC, 68 percent of our new full-time faculty hires are BIPOC. These new faculty include 19 percent African American, 19 percent Asian or Asian American, 19 percent Middle Eastern, and 11 percent Latinx. In addition, a few searches are still being finalized. I am grateful to the search committee members and, in particular, the search committee chairs for their exceptional efforts. I look forward to assessing the outcomes of the diversity hiring initiative and identifying areas for continued improvement as we begin a new round of searches in the fall.

As the **Black Achievement Success and Engagement** program (BASE) continues to accelerate our ability to recruit African American students, I am very aware of the need to provide the staff support and resources for the program’s continued success. I am therefore delighted to announce **Emille Davie Lawrence** as senior director of BASE. This is a new full-time position designed to bolster the support available for our Black Scholars Program students and all of our Black students. Emille will work closely with LaShirine Howard, new program manager, Kevin Collymore, assistant dean for retention and persistence programs, and the entire BASE team.

Emille is an associate professor of mathematics and statistics at USF who has held numerous leadership positions and has been dedicated to broadening participation in the mathematical sciences. She began her work with BASE as a member of the Black Scholars Program Selection Committee (2020 and 2021), and in summer 2021 she assumed the role of director of the Black Scholars Program. Emille takes the mantle from Candice Harrison, whose vision, advocacy, and dedication have been integral to establishing BASE, and who will be on a much-deserved sabbatical next academic year. BASE is one of USF’s flagship programs, providing transformative learning experiences for our Black students and fast establishing USF as a West Coast magnet for global Black excellence.

### Mini Grants and Summer Retreats

I am delighted that the Provost’s Fund for Faculty Excellence and Diversity will fund 28 summer retreats and mini grants, providing invaluable support for research, writing, and retreats by faculty and librarians of color, parenting faculty, and others impacted by the pandemic. I would like to thank **Tanu Sankalia** and **Erin Grinshteyn**, co-directors of CRASE, and Senior Vice Provost Pamela Balls Organista for their painstaking review of the **more than 45 applications for mini grants and summer retreats** that we received. Notices to applicants will be sent soon.

In closing, I hope that the summer months bring you time to reflect on and metabolize a fast-moving year, and to set intentions for the year ahead. I wish you every success in your research and scholarly endeavors, and in the important wrap-up and planning. I look forward to the fall, when we will continue our work for justice and liberation through the power of a transformative Jesuit education with renewed vision, energy, and passion.

Warmly,

Chinyere Oparah  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

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