

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you have had the opportunity to read Fr. Paul's announcement about the letter of intent between USF and **San Francisco Art Institute** (SFAI) to explore merging SFAI's undergraduate and graduate arts programs into USF's College of Arts and Sciences.

I write to provide some additional information about this opportunity and to invite USF stakeholders to participate in imagining its curricular and co-curricular possibilities. As Fr. Paul shared, USF and SFAI are embarking on a period of exploration, due diligence, and discernment during which both institutions will have the opportunity to examine how a potential integration would serve our mission, strategic vision, and students. I see the next few months as an opportunity for creative co-design, and I am committed to offering opportunities for stakeholders across our campuses to participate, learn more, voice concerns, and help shape the vision of this potential significant investment in the arts.

How might this investment in the arts support students and faculty?

USF attracts students in the arts who are drawn to our unique mission-driven focus on the intersections of the arts, social justice and community engagement, and our commitment to educating the whole person. Our students enjoy small classes, innovative faculty, and opportunities to engage with local communities in meaningful and transformative ways. Despite the strengths of our programs in the arts, our ability to attract and serve students is severely limited by our current physical spaces. Our **strategic plan** calls on us to build or upgrade the spaces in which students and faculty learn, create, and research, yet space limitations have stymied efforts to expand and transform our arts, design, and architecture facilities.

Combining our efforts with SFAI would transform USF's profile in the arts, positioning the university as one of the nation's premier universities for arts education. We would be able to matriculate a significantly expanded population of undergraduate and graduate students in the arts and would welcome an internationally recognized faculty to our ranks. Our blended student and faculty bodies would utilize world-class studio arts and gathering spaces and film and video production studios housed in SFAI's beautiful and iconic Arthur Brown and Paffard Keatinge-Clay buildings at 800 Chestnut Street and at **Fort Mason**. In addition, our entire community would benefit from the robust, global, and diverse programming at the **Walter and McBean Galleries**, the historic **Diego Rivera mural**, as well as the **Anne Bremer Memorial Library's** extensive physical and digital archives. A snapshot of SFAI's extraordinary contributions to contemporary art and to San Francisco's diverse cultural heritage can be **viewed here**.

How might this advance our strategic priorities?

The university's strategic plan identifies the arts as central to our efforts to "reimagine Jesuit education to accelerate the achievement of a more just and sustainable world" and to "extend our visibility through strategic partnerships, public programming, and community outreach that extend our reach as people for and with others." Specifically, the plan envisions a center for arts, activism, social justice, and community engagement as well as one focused on science for justice, health equity, and environmental sustainability. This opportunity would provide us with an extraordinary platform to think boldly and to leverage major arts philanthropy to advance a newly invigorated strategic vision for the arts, social justice, and community outreach.

Our strategic plan also invites us to enhance global learning in our curriculum and co-curriculum. SFAI's deeply global vision of the arts in addition to its worldwide arts network would infuse international perspectives into our students' experiences, in and beyond the classroom. **Dust Specks on the Sea**, currently on exhibit at the Walter and McBean Galleries, is a powerful example of this commitment to walking with global and disenfranchised communities. The exhibit features sculptural work by more than a dozen francophone Caribbean artists and confronts the colonization of Haiti and the French Caribbean. A future exhibition in partnership with the Asian Art Museum later this year will feature **Carlos Villa** (1936-2013), the first major museum retrospective of a Filipino American artist. How might USF help to steward these invaluable resources and ensure that future generations continue to be inspired by the humanizing experience of meaningful encounters with both local artists and artists from across the globe?

How might this opportunity further *cura apostolica*?

One of the phrases that I have found most inspiring in our **refreshed mission** is the call to action framed in the following words:

Inspired by a faith that does justice, we strive to humbly and responsibly engage with, and contribute to, the cultural, intellectual, economic, and spiritual gifts and talents of the San Francisco Bay Area and the global communities to which we belong.

This period of discernment is an opportunity for the USF community to explore whether we are ready to take a bold step in solidarity with the local and global arts community. SFAI's recent challenges can be viewed within the broader context of gentrification, and the resulting dispossession of artists from the San Francisco Bay Area has had a particular impact on BIPOC artists. Can our joint efforts carve out a place for artistic experimentation, innovation, and cultural equity as San Francisco continues to evolve and adapt?

Opportunities for Co-Design

In the coming months, USF faculty in the relevant programs will collaborate with SFAI faculty to begin to co-design a reimagined and expanded suite of programs in the arts that could be offered in SFAI@USF; our enrollment management, registrar, and accreditation teams will map out pathways to degree completion for current SFAI students, as well as accreditation of and recruitment for any new USF programs; our budget, finance, facilities, and space teams will develop a sustainable financial and space usage model for SFAI@USF; and our development team will explore philanthropic opportunities to support the capital and operating expenses associated with a potential integration. Thank you in advance to all those who will participate in these efforts, and in particular to Dean Eileen Fung and her team, and the arts faculty for leading us in imagining and co-designing a potential SFAI@USF. There will be many opportunities to learn more and to get involved, depending on your level and focus of interest. Some of these will include:

- Attend the virtual town hall with Fr. Paul and myself on Feb. 8 at 12 p.m. **Register now »**
- Attend the "Conversation with Provost Chinyere" on Feb. 10 at 12 p.m. to discuss a vision for the arts at USF and share your perspectives and questions about the potential integration. **Register now »**
- Participate in one of the working groups that will be formed to explore issues related to curriculum, accreditation, student services, and more.

More information on each of these opportunities to participate will be forthcoming. In addition, we hope to facilitate opportunities to engage with the SFAI community, from a virtual meet and greet with SFAI faculty and academic leadership to a joint faculty retreat and/or symposium.

In closing, I recognize that the announcement this week raises many questions. What is the role of the arts in advancing USF's mission and working toward a more just, sustainable world? How might we steward SFAI's iconic physical and artistic assets, ensure that they continue to be used for educational and artistic purposes, and promote cultural equity and artistic innovation in San Francisco? How might we stand in solidarity with an institution that, like USF, is deeply committed to theory, action, and reflection, social and environmental justice, antiracism and indigenous solidarity? And how can we ensure that the budgetary, workload, and logistical realities of this opportunity do not become stumbling blocks to success? As we explore these questions and more, our Jesuit principles of solidarity and radical hospitality will serve as a framework for learning, exploring, and imagining alongside SFAI's innovative and passionate students, faculty, librarians, and staff.

As always, I look forward to hearing from faculty, librarians, staff, and students. Please do not hesitate to visit during my **office hours**.

I leave you with a quote, in honor of Black History Month, from an artist who has inspired me with her intimate and graceful depictions of quotidian Black life and mothering:

I have always wanted my art to service my people — to reflect us, to relate to us, to stimulate us, to make us aware of our potential. We have to create an art for liberation and for life.

—Elizabeth Catlett (1915 – 2012)

Warmly,



Chinyere Oparah
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

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