

Dear Colleagues,

It has been wonderful to feel the energy and excitement of our community as students animate our campuses, classrooms, and cafes. I was delighted this past week to attend the Leo T. McCarthy Center open house and dedication of its mural, which was co-created by students, faculty, staff, and a community-based mural arts organization, Precita Eyes. The McCarthy Center was filled with dozens of USF faculty, staff, and students as well as musicians, dancers, community members, donors, and local and state legislators. Their support for the center's mission of inspiring USF students to pursue lives and careers of ethical public service was palpable.

As we enter the new academic year, we are poised to embark on an exciting journey toward *magis*, as we work to reimagine Jesuit education and build a path toward greater sustainability. I am grateful to everyone who has played a role in getting us to this point.

Thanks to the outstanding work of several search committees, supported by the exceptional efforts of our HR team and our colleagues at WittKiefer, we are entering the new year with a talented, unified, and mission-aligned academic leadership team. Our new members were attracted to USF's diversity and commitment to social justice, and the culture of *cura personalis* they experienced during the search process. The amazing efforts of our Facilities and Finance teams have enabled us to add nearly 86,000 square feet to our campus, offering R-1 quality science research spaces and the opportunity to dream big about how we can transform our spaces on the Hilltop. The dedication of colleagues who developed the USF 2027 Strategic Plan and the Integrated Strategic Enrollment Plan (ISEP), through a participatory and broadly consultative process, has provided our community a clear roadmap for our journey toward *magis* and abundance.

The creative work of our faculty has helped us generate innovative academic programs and launch partnerships with community and industry partners that will improve USF's attractiveness and relevance, and serve as a springboard for enrollment growth. Thanks to our "SEM-tastic" admissions team, we have welcomed USF's largest-ever incoming undergraduate cohort and our largest-ever cohort of Black-identified undergraduate students this fall. A dynamic partnership with our Development team offers the opportunity to co-design a new comprehensive campaign that will make USF the leading destination for a transformative Jesuit education that centers diversity, inclusiveness, excellence, and innovation and advances justice in the local and global communities of which we are a part.

We also face significant headwinds. Our retention and graduation rates, impacted by the pandemic, have continued to decline. Particularly hard hit are our Latinx and Pell-eligible students. The booming employment market has greatly impacted our graduate programs, and many of them will fail to meet their enrollment targets this fall. Some of our academic programs and non-academic units are struggling with overly lean staffing resulting in high workloads, turnover, and burnout. And our student services are struggling to keep up with the high demand for mental health, financial services, and other support needs. Clearly, we need to act to improve student outcomes and support services, and to bolster staffing in our existing programs. And we also need to invest in the new programs and initiatives that will allow us to grow and thrive into the future. As the saying goes, "no margin, no mission." In order to thrive and live out our mission fully, we need to become an institution that generates annual surpluses that we can reinvest in our students, faculty, librarians, staff, and our local and global communities. Doing what we have always done is not an option, because our peers and competitors are innovating, enhancing their academic programs, and embracing new ways to support and retain students.

All of this points to a year ahead with incredible opportunities as well as real, sobering challenges. We must act deliberately and strategically and keep both our mission and our margins in mind. In the coming weeks and months, we will invite the USF community to participate in a number of strategic initiatives that will help us to move the needle on student success, faculty and staff retention, and financial sustainability:

- **Student Success, Retention, and Equity:** The provost's office will partner with Student Life to launch a task force to analyze our student success data, make recommendations, and implement strategic interventions to improve retention and equitable outcomes.
- **Enrollment Growth and Optimization Plan:** Implementation of the ISEP will begin with an evaluation of the optimal pace for enrollment growth and the impacts on tuition revenue, aligned with student support services, space needs, and academic program development. In addition to improving student retention, we will enhance the profile of our incoming student cohorts, measured by yield, selectivity, melt, and discount rate. We will integrate these efforts with financial analyses to develop multi-year forecasts of budgetary resources.
- **Recruiting and Supporting International Students:** Our restructured international admissions team will develop new strategies to enhance and broaden international recruitment, and we will work collaboratively across campus to improve the student experience and support international students from matriculation to graduation and beyond.
- **Graduate Enrollment Initiative:** The provost's office will partner with deans to develop action plans, informed by admitted student surveys and enrollment reporting, to bolster the effectiveness of our graduate recruitment processes and to implement the initiatives outlined in the ISEP to increase graduate enrollments.
- **Curricular Transformation Initiative:** As part of the strategic plan's call to reimagine Jesuit education, the provost's team will support the deans and faculty in evaluating our academic portfolio to ensure that our academic programs are continually evolving to meet the needs of the moment, and the demands of students into the future. This initiative will provide resources and tools to assess and bolster the antiracism/DEI, global, environmental justice, and mission content of our curriculum across disciplines.
- **Core Redesign Task Force:** Ensuring our academic programs are evolving also means redesigning our undergraduate core curriculum to prepare students for the challenges of tomorrow. The Core Advisory Committee and Joint University Curriculum Committee have recommended the formation of an exploratory task force to review and revise the core and we will be launching that process in partnership with faculty leadership shortly.
- **Strategic Plan Working Groups:** The Strategic Plan Advisory Council will launch working groups in each of the goals of the strategic plan, as well as a working group on global focus and responsibility, one of the guiding principles of the plan. An invitation to submit nominations for these working groups will be available in mid-September.
- **Faculty and Librarian Excellence, Equity, and Engagement:** We will develop strategies to recruit, retain, mentor, and support our diverse faculty, staff, and librarians that address the unique stressors of higher education today, in alignment with Strategic Plan goal #5, "Equitable and Extraordinary Place to Work." A call to join the advisory group that will explore how we can better support faculty and librarians across the lifecycle of their careers will be available in the coming weeks.
- **Transformational Leadership Workshops:** The provost's office will offer a series of workshops designed to provide tools and shared space for faculty, staff, librarians, and administrators across campus, starting with a conversation about burnout and secondary trauma.
- **Indigenous Engagement:** We will advance the journey toward reconciliation with Native peoples, honoring Indigenous worldviews and cultural protocols, and develop a model for Indigenous engagement in Jesuit higher education.
- **Student Advisory Council:** We will partner with Student Life to develop a Student Advisory Council that ensures students play an active role in guiding our efforts to reimagine Jesuit education.

As always, I look forward to inviting the entire USF community to share your wisdom, creativity, and insights as we co-create USF's future. Please keep an eye out for invitations to join the above initiatives as well as to participate in a series of Provost's Conversations on topics of interest suggested by many of you. And don't miss the chance to join us in celebrating our community at the concert by **USF alumnus, musician, activist, and poet Michael Franti** on Sept. 10 as part of our Silk Speaker Series.

As the Labor Day holiday approaches, I wish you a restful weekend and recognize the important work of each of you in making USF the thriving enterprise and equitable, social-justice-seeking community described in our strategic plan.

Warmly,



Chinyere Oparah
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Join the conversation **#USFCA**



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