

Dear Colleagues,

As we begin a new semester and a new lunar year, we struggle to make sense of the tragic events in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of the victims and to everyone in these grieving communities. We stand in solidarity with all of them and with our vibrant Asian and AAPI communities. We are all deeply impacted by these events and we must stand together and support one another in these difficult and painful moments. We are united against hate and violence.

And we must continue to educate for understanding, for gender and racial justice, and for peace.

As we continue this critical work in our classrooms, labs, and offices this spring semester, I want to express my gratitude and share some thoughts about the current moment and our work ahead. I am grateful to the faculty and staff who provided transformative experiences for our students during intersession intensives and immersion trips to Jakarta, Indonesia — Galápagos Islands, Quito, and Yasuní, Ecuador — as well as Johannesburg, South Africa, and U.S. Black heritage sites in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.



Intersession immersions included transformative student experiences in the American South (left) and the Galápagos Islands (right).

Last week I attended the American Association of College and Universities' annual conference here in San Francisco with 15 faculty and staff from across our university. It was an energizing event, filled with practical strategies and useful insights on topics ranging from data-informed leadership for equity to "navigating post-tenure with purpose and joy." The theme of this year's meeting, "**Reclaiming Liberal Education**," touched on many of the headwinds higher education is currently facing — declining public trust, backlash against progressive agendas, demographic challenges, rising operational costs, increasing burnout, and mental health needs. We are feeling some of these at USF and, increasingly, are seeing the impact of these challenges on peer institutions in the Bay Area, most recently Holy Names University (HNU). We are working closely with colleagues at HNU, who announced the institution's closure in late December, to enable as many of their eligible students as possible to continue their education at USF.

The conference also provided an opportunity for academic leaders to come together and remind ourselves what our community stands for: free and open inquiry; democratic values; racial and social justice; and preparing our students to thrive and seek justice in an increasingly global and complex world. Sustaining this work will require us to be resilient and tap into our sources of support, renewal, and creativity.

A key theme of the conference was the linkage between student success, institutional resilience, and openness to new ideas and ways of thinking and doing. Just as we teach our students to deploy innovative, interdisciplinary approaches and take bold, good risks in order to make progress on questions of environmental sustainability, public health, racial injustice, and migration, we too need creative new approaches to deal with the "wicked" and seemingly intractable problems we face. "When the winds of change blow," the saying goes, "some build walls and others build windmills." How can we harness the energy of the headwinds that buffet higher education so that we may build windmills and become catalysts for change? To do so requires courage, agility, and an orientation toward a hope-filled future, characteristics that I see across our campus as faculty and staff work together to recruit next year's class, evolve our curriculum and co-curriculum, develop new high-impact programs, and reimagine our core curriculum and graduate programs.

I am grateful for the extraordinary efforts that this community is making to provide a transformative educational experience to our students despite difficult circumstances — to build windmills in stormy times.

We can turn for inspiration to the creative work being done in support of our students and across our campuses, including:

- The work of our **Student Success, Retention, and Equity Task Force** assisting the community with leveraging best practices and data-informed approaches and working with deans, faculty, and staff to identify strategies that enhance student success;
- The progress on our **Integrated Strategic Enrollment Plan (ISEP)**, with 40 new articulation agreements for transfer students, new digital tools that are boosting visibility and enhancing our connection to prospective students, and a new undergraduate admission and financial aid strategy to improve yield and optimize net tuition revenue;
- The development of eight compelling proposals for the newly acquired property at 250/270 Masonic Avenue, providing an opportunity to reimagine the spaces where our students learn and engage with one another in creative, interdisciplinary ways;
- The development of the **Ann Getty Institute of Art and Design**, with generous support of USF alumnus and benefactor Gordon Getty '56, which will significantly increase visual and performing arts programming, enhance performance spaces at USF, and allow for greater community engagement in the arts;
- The global expansion of the **Andersen MBA Enterprise** program, leveraging online capabilities honed during the pandemic to generate new revenue streams and offer USF knowledge and expertise to a key industry partner;
- The unique educational experiences at **Star Route Farms**, where increasing numbers of USF students and faculty are studying topics ranging from soil microbes to carbon sequestration to stream ecology as they grapple with questions of climate change, land stewardship, and sustainability;
- The continuing campus dialogue and community fora coordinated by the Strategic Plan Advisory Council and Working Groups. I invite you to **register** for the upcoming forum on Global Focus and Responsibility.

This semester, the provost's office will continue to create spaces for dialogue, co-creation, and reflection, with **conversations and workshops** on topics including the first-year experience, the institutional master plan and the journey to a post-pandemic campus, and holding difficult conversations. In addition, I hope you will make time to connect with one another and to our mission and Jesuit values at one of the many upcoming events, whether to wish for peace in the Year of the Rabbit at one of the **Lunar New Year** events on campus, to commemorate **Black History Month**, or to join the Institute for Nonviolence and Social Justice today at 11:45 a.m. in McLaren 251 for a **community gathering to carry forward the vision of the Beloved Community** shared by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh and by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.

Warmly,

Chinyere Oparah
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

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