

Dear Colleagues,

In this season of completion, community, and celebration, I am looking forward to celebrating our graduating students at USF's 164th Winter Commencement. I want to thank you for your work in supporting their success. Accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future is one of our most important callings as a Jesuit university. Launching 902 USF graduates into the world, prepared with a Jesuit education to address the pressing social justice challenges of our time, is one of our most hopeful acts.

In his book, *The Practice of Hope*, Néstor Oscar Míguez talks of hope as a practice that inspires courage, enables good risk-taking, and fosters creativity in the face of empire. Rather than a feeling or reaction to conditions, hope is a praxis that can be cultivated and enacted intentionally, as an alternative to the hope-stifling oppressive systems that shape our society. Míguez writes "history ... is made from forward-moving proposals, from the quest to overcome the present and its various oppressions in a vision of the future."

What is our proposal to overcome the present? Our vision that looks to the future? Our praxis of hope?

As we reimagine Jesuit education, redesign our core curriculum, and seek to develop a signature Jesuit educational experience, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves: what would a curriculum for liberation comprise? What if we placed the wisdom, creativity, and freedom visions of marginalized communities at the center of the liberal arts? How can we lift up marginalized voices and ways of knowing?

This semester, I have been heartened by practices of hope in the face of significant headwinds. Our Student Success and Retention Task Force is working across units to strengthen structures that retain our undergraduate students, bolster advising, and increase students' sense of belonging. A new data-informed approach has enabled us to disaggregate data, to identify majors and demographic groups that persist at lower rates, so that we can target interventions to support those students. And faculty across the schools and the college are designing and implementing retention initiatives, from revising curricula as part of a reimagined first-year experience to expanding peer mentoring systems to bolstering advising with support in part from the **Academic Innovation Fund**.

We are leveraging the learnings and capabilities gleaned during the pandemic to expand modalities and broaden access to a USF education. Based on the recommendations of the Joint University Curriculum Committee (JUCC), we have approved four **instructional modalities** on an ongoing basis beginning in fall 2023: in-person, online synchronous, online asynchronous, and hybrid. These modalities will enable us to meet students where they are and to innovate our academic programs to meet the needs of Gen C — the COVID generation.

Our academic deans and program heads are implementing innovative strategies to grow back our graduate enrollments, with analysis and support provided by SEM:

- The College of Arts and Sciences plans to expand new concentrations and undergraduate programs based on industry and community demands, developing two innovative new undergraduate programs and creating a signature scholarship award for each graduate program to recruit and retain more diverse students.
- The School of Education is conducting a comprehensive review of, and changes to, instructional modality in all its programs to increase accessibility and flexibility for current and future students.
- The School of Nursing and Health Professions is investing in increased digital marketing efforts, exploring the Centralized Application Services platform to reorganize marketing, recruitment, and admission approaches, and revising clinical placement strategies.
- The School of Management is launching the Andersen MBA program globally, revitalizing the academic program portfolio, and launching fully online degree completion programs for working professionals.
- The School of Law is introducing more strategic yield approaches, leveraging a new career services team to help students and graduates find jobs, and launching exciting new centers including the **Center for Contemplative Law and Ethics** that will put the law school at the forefront of the mindfulness and law movement.

Our students are the embodiment of our hopes for the future. Last week, I had the opportunity to witness our students' deep commitment to *cura personalis* and food justice at the food pantry when I joined student volunteers from the Urban Agriculture minor, the HiveMinders student organization, the Martín Baró Scholars Writing and Speaking in Community class, and the ASUSF president. I also enjoyed seeing our students' passion for environmental sustainability on full display during the winter exhibition of student engineering work at the Innovation Hive.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the faculty who are transitioning to emeriti faculty status. Please join me in acknowledging our colleagues for their exceptional scholarship, creativity, and dedicated service to our students and the USF community:

- **Terrence Parr**, Data Science Program and Computer Science Department, College of Arts and Sciences
- **Peter Novak**, Performing Arts, College of Arts and Sciences

I hope to see many of you at events in the coming days and I look forward to the graduation ceremonies, where Charles Lyden Murphy, at age 85, will cross the sanctuary in St. Ignatius Church and receive a bachelor of business administration from Fr. Fitzgerald. Charles, who matriculated in 1955, interrupted his studies to serve in the Army, and returned to USF to complete his degree in 1976. He never had the opportunity to walk in a USF graduation ceremony — until now. I am grateful to the registrar's team and everyone who made it possible for Charles and all of our graduating students to persist and succeed.

Thank you for your hard work and commitment to the success and well-being of our students during an extraordinarily demanding semester. I wish each of you a restful and rejuvenating break that brings a renewed sense of possibility and promise for the year ahead.

Warmly,



Chinyere Oparah  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

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