

Dear Colleagues,

I write to inform you of updates within academic leadership and to share information on several key initiatives and opportunities in academic affairs.

**Introducing Rebecca Hong**

I am delighted to announce Rebecca Hong as our new vice provost for student success, inclusive excellence, and curricular innovation.



Rebecca currently serves as the assistant vice provost of educational effectiveness and assessment and chief accreditation liaison officer (ALO) at Loyola Marymount University (LMU). She brings wide-ranging expertise in student learning, institutional effectiveness, curricular planning, accreditation, and state authorization. She has led LMU's efforts to place student success at the center of its academic enterprise — examining effective educational practices, bringing a data-informed lens to decision-making, and ensuring that equity and inclusive excellence are woven into all undergraduate and graduate academic programs. Rebecca has overseen institutional change initiatives to advance equitable learning environments, improve student learning outcomes, and respond to the needs of today's learners. She brings significant experience in aligning student outcomes with institutional objectives and advancing strategic online learning efforts and access, having helped launch four undergraduate degrees, 16 graduate certificates, 19 master's degrees, two international locations, and the first online doctorate at LMU. [Read Rebecca's bio.](#)

I am grateful to Sheila Smith McKoy, who served as chair, and the **members of the search committee** for their service and hard work to identify talented candidates for this critical role. In their summary recommendations, the committee noted Rebecca's comprehensive experience in the realms of responsibility for the position, her extensive focus on student success and DEI, her demonstrated track record of partnership with deans and faculty, and her deep understanding of Jesuit educational practices. I look forward to Rebecca's collaborative leadership, emphasis on *cura personalis*, growth-oriented approach, and innovative use of data to drive educational outcomes and student success efforts. Rebecca will begin her work with us on Aug. 1.

I am extremely grateful to Shirley McGuire for her deep expertise and willingness to continue until August to ensure a smooth transition in this very important role. Later in the spring, I look forward to celebrating Shirley's accomplishments, her tremendous contributions to academic leadership at USF, and the inclusive, generous, and mission-driven spirit she has brought to her work in the provost's office.

**Wishing Well to Jeff Lefkoff**

Please join me in thanking Jeff Lefkoff for his contributions to the USF community during the past academic year as vice provost of budget, planning, and strategic analysis. During his time at USF, Jeff has brought transparency, innovation, a passion for the university's mission, and a commitment to *cura personalis* to his work. He has worked successfully to align the academic affairs budget with strategic priorities and the university's strategic plan, and to identify resources for investment in growth even as we have weathered a very difficult fiscal environment. Jeff's last day will be June 16, after which he looks forward to spending more time working on a book project, volunteering with a nonprofit that serves people with developmental disabilities, and deepening his spiritual practice.

**Growing Entrepreneurship and Innovation at USF**

As we continue to find ways to implement the university's bold and mission-driven strategic plan, I am pleased to announce that we are exploring the design of a new hub for entrepreneurship and innovation. "USF is in the heart of the city that is inventing tomorrow" and has the opportunity to support students who are interested in entrepreneurship as one way to drive social impact. This could serve as a catalyst for building entrepreneurial and innovative work that is interdisciplinary by design and uniquely USF, grounded in our Jesuit, Catholic tradition of community engagement on campus, in our Bay Area home, and in our commitment to social justice, to the marginalized, and to care for our planet.

The co-design process is being facilitated by Gleeson Library Dean Shawn Calhoun, who serves as a co-chair of the Strategic Plan Advisory Council, and will be shaped in partnership with campus leaders, faculty, and key stakeholders. In support of this co-creation process, there is an open **call for nominations** to join the working group. Please self-nominate by Friday, April 28 or nominate faculty, librarians, staff, or community partners whose skills and expertise can be helpful in developing the center.

**Celebrating Our Community**

As we move into these busy last few weeks of the spring, faculty, librarians, and staff are making extraordinary efforts to support our students — whether they are preparing to graduate, finalizing summer internships or research projects, or working on finishing the semester strong. Our SEM team is preparing for Destination USF, which will host nearly 2,300 people beginning tomorrow. Campus will be brimming with 840 future students and their families who are looking forward to learning about our community and our distinctive Jesuit education. Meanwhile, USF scholars and staff continue to make an indelible impact as they educate for justice and enhance USF's visibility and prominence in our local, national, and international communities. In particular, I wanted to offer my warm congratulations to the following colleagues on their recent recognitions:

- Associate Professor James Zarsadiaz, who recently received the **2023 Lawrence W. Levine Award** for his book, *Resisting Change in Suburbia*, recognized as this year's best book in American cultural history by the Organization of American Historians, the largest professional society dedicated to the teaching and study of American history.
- Star Plaxton-Moore, director of community-engaged learning at the Leo T. McCarthy Center, who has received Campus Compact's **Nadine Cruz Community Engagement Professional Award** for ethical leadership, advocacy, and transformational work in justice-oriented community-engaged learning.
- Professor Brian Komei Dempster, poet, professor of rhetoric and languages, and director of administration for the Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies, who has been selected as a **2023 Guggenheim Fellow**.

I look forward to celebrating more of the inspiring work of our faculty, librarians, and staff in an upcoming announcement of the **Provost Faculty and Staff Awards** and hope to see many of you at our Provost's Gratitude Party and Strategic Plan Celebration on Thursday, April 20. Please [register here](#). All are welcome.

I'm so grateful for the time, thought, and care that you have dedicated to shaping USF's future and to supporting our students and community. As always, I welcome your feedback, suggestions, and stories during my **office hours**.

Sincerely,

Chinyere Oparah  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

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