

Dear Colleagues,

Last week, as I was helping my 12-year-old daughter research an essay on the early history of African American dance, I witnessed her confusion as she encountered the ugly reality of this country's white supremacist past. Her eyes opened wide with disbelief as she saw images of white men in blackface imitating the "happy sambo" dancing and singing for his "massa", and recordings of talented artists like Bill Bojangles who were forced to adopt jerky movements and exaggerated facial expressions to meet the audience's expectations. Her beloved dance — until now exemplified by great artists like Misty Copeland and Alvin Ailey — was for the first time tainted with sadness and shame. Thanks to programs like African American Studies and Critical Diversity Studies, our students have access to theoretical frameworks and scholarly content that allow them to study, name, and refute the racism and misogyny that underpin historical — and contemporary — stereotypes designed to control and limit Black lives. But we cannot take this freedom for granted. Across the country, educational institutions face a backlash against DEI initiatives; curricula that explore race, sexual orientation, and intersectionality are being eliminated; and there has been a sharp increase in book bans that prevent young people from engaging with texts such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi.

Associate Professor Brandi Lawless' **opinion piece** published recently in her hometown newspaper takes up the question of what we, from our privileged location in the liberal San Francisco Bay Area, can and must do to stand for justice in solidarity with all those impacted by these national trends. Each of us, from our own standpoint and social location, building on our Jesuit values and principles, can make a difference through our research and creative expression, our advocacy and activism, and the work we do with students in and outside of the classroom.

Inspired by a USF education, our students are taking powerful steps to stand for justice and a more humane world. From the law professors and students at USF Law's Racial Justice Clinic, who **recently won their third exoneration for a wrongfully convicted person** to the students who founded organizations **servicing the unhoused** in San Francisco and **creating educational access for children in India**, our students, faculty, and librarians are living our strategic plan's call to "accelerate the achievement of a more just and sustainable world."

I recently met with the co-chairs of working group #2 (which focuses on investing in and promoting scholarly, creative, and community-focused endeavors that advance justice) and was excited by their ideas about creating fora, structures, publications, and networks to support faculty and librarian research. One small step in that direction is the publication spearheaded by Vice Provost Sheila Smith McKay that will feature "research justice" projects by USF faculty — projects that use research to advance justice and at the same time empower communities to harness research as a tool for social change. Thanks to a partnership with USF's Office of Marketing Communications, the publication will be disseminated to every nationally ranked university to elevate USF's reputation and share approaches that humanize research and put research capabilities into the hands of those most marginalized. I am committed to continuing to find high-impact ways to support our faculty and librarians and facilitate opportunities to do this important work.

### Call for proposals — Summer Writing Retreats

I am delighted to announce that the Academic Excellence Fund will once again support this important work by providing a limited number of mini-grants of up to \$3,000 this summer to support writing retreats by faculty and librarians. I am especially grateful for the support of Tanu Sankalia and Annette Regan, co-directors of CRASE, for supporting our faculty and librarians' research endeavors. Please read more about the application process for this opportunity **here** and **apply by Friday, April 21 at 5 p.m.**

[Apply for summer writing retreats »](#)

### Masonic East Update

Thanks to the entrepreneurship, creativity, and hard work of our faculty, librarians, and academic leaders, USF is moving forward with an exciting, interdisciplinary vision for the future of life science and health equity at USF in the Masonic East campus. The new campus will create innovative educational spaces to support experiential learning; maximize interdisciplinary collaborations; allow for large-scale, collaborative grants; enable community-oriented activities that promote health equity; and expand our capacity for research activities that can help us recruit and retain students, advance health equity, and foster science innovation.

Led by the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Nursing and Health Professions, in partnership with the School of Education and other units, the integrated vision will make USF a leading destination for undergraduate and graduate students seeking a premier life and health science education in the Jesuit tradition. If you are interested in hearing more about how we are reimagining spaces in line with strategic priorities, please join us later today (March 28) from 12–1:15 p.m. for **From Strategy to Space**, a community conversation about the Institutional Master Plan, co-hosted by Facilities Management and the Office of the Provost.

[Register Now »](#)

### Welcoming Admitted Students to Campus

It's an exciting time of year as we welcome admitted undergraduate students to campus for visits. Our SEMlastic Team is collaborating with faculty and staff across our campuses and across the world to share what makes a USF education distinctive with our admitted students, in the hope that they will join us in the fall. Please offer a warm welcome to these future changemakers and their families as they explore USF and get to know our community.



April Crabtree speaks with admitted students at an event in Mumbai. USF President Paul J. Fitzgerald, S.J., Lindsey McClenahan, and the Strategic Enrollment Management team on the road in India.

As we head into these busy weeks of the semester, I look forward to gathering at our upcoming happy hours for faculty, librarians, and staff or at our end-of-semester gratitude event to be in community and to thank you for your work in accompanying young people and emerging professionals in the creation of a hope-filled future.

Warmly,

*Chinyere*

Chinyere Oparah  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### From Strategy to Space: Dialogue on Preliminary Campus Observations for the Institutional Master Plan

March 28 | 12–1:15 p.m. | [Online on Zoom](#) | [Register »](#)

Join a community conversation about the Institutional Master Plan (IMP) process. We will share preliminary observations from campus analyses and listening sessions and seek input from the community on key questions associated with the IMP.

### LGBTQIA+ Caucus Spring Staff and Faculty Gathering

March 29 | 5–6:30 p.m. | [Koret Lodge, Lone Mountain Main](#) | [Register »](#)

We invite you to meet new colleagues, reconnect with friends, and build community at an all-USF LGBTQ+ faculty, librarians, and staff happy hour hosted by the Office of ADEI and the USF LGBTQ+ Caucus.

### Follow-up Conversation with Working Group 5: USF as an Equitable and Extraordinary Place to Work

April 3 | 12–1:15 p.m. | [Online on Zoom](#) | [Register »](#)

Join a follow-up conversation about the draft recommendations for Working Group 5. Your feedback and thoughts are welcome.

### One Earth Initiative Community Conversation

April 4 | 12–1:15 p.m. | [Online on Zoom](#) | [Register »](#)

Join the **One Earth Initiative** Working Group to learn about and contribute to USF's One Earth Action Plan for environmental sustainability and justice. Co-sponsored by the Office of the Provost, the Lane Center, and GoUSF's Environmental Justice Call to Action.

### All-USF Staff Happy Hour

April 4 | 5–6:30 p.m. | [Koret Lodge, Lone Mountain Main](#) | [Register »](#)

The Staff Council and the Office of the Provost warmly invite all staff to connect and build community together.

### Conversation with Working Group #3: Providing a Radically Inclusive, International, and Welcoming Campus

April 6 | 12–1:30 p.m. | [Hybrid In Person/Online](#) | [Register »](#)

Join a community conversation featuring **Dr. Genia Bettencourt**, assistant professor of higher and adult education in the Department of Leadership at the University of Memphis, whose work focuses on issues of access, equity, belonging, and student success in higher education.

### All-USF Faculty and Librarians Gathering

April 12 | 5–6:30 p.m. | [Koret Lodge, Lone Mountain Main](#) | [Register »](#)

Please join the **ALPPL**, **PTFA**, and **USFFA** for an all-USF faculty and librarians gathering to celebrate our community.

### Provost Gratitude Party and Strategic Plan Thank You Event

April 20 | 11:45 a.m.–1:15 p.m. | [McLaren 252](#)

Gather to celebrate the achievements of our broader community and our strategic plan working groups in advancing the priorities of our **strategic plan**.

Join the conversation **#USFCA** [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [Instagram](#) [LinkedIn](#) [YouTube](#)

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