Dear Colleagues,

In the current uncertain and challenging moment, it is especially important that we continue to focus on the cultivation of our community. In our daily work, we have been called on to do more to ensure that our students’ immediate learning and socio-emotional needs are met, you have also continued to think strategically, build and renovate, implement innovative learning methodologies and curricular change, and envision our future. Looking back over my first six months at USF, I am heartened by the extraordinary efforts that this community is making to live out our mission and provide a transformative educational experience despite difficult circumstances. Even as you look ahead, I am confident that we have the capacity, momentum, and energy to pursue our bold vision of radical inclusiveness and transformative Jesuit education.

Looking Back and Lessons Learned

As we launch a new semester that is both filled with possibility and shadowed by a sense of loss and uncertainty, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the lessons we have learned. The global pandemic has been a lifelong healing journey for me. I have worked on my tendency to judge others, let others define me, hold on to my values and not let others define me. Letting go of rigidity, black-and-white thinking, and a need to control my environment has been a lifelong journey. The pandemic has taught me what it means to be resilient in the face of uncertainty. It has taught me that we must be adaptable, flexible, and open to change. It has taught me that we must be willing to let go of what we thought was possible and find new ways to work together.

What mindset and work practices can we cultivate that will allow us to thrive in uncertain times? What is your contemplative work? How might we as a community of contemplatives in action begin the journey to attain a more harmonious, collaborative world? What is your role in creating this world? How can we work together to make this vision a reality?

Looking Forward and Next Steps

So what are our most pressing priorities, as I see it? We must:

1. Ensure that our students’ immediate learning and socio-emotional needs are met, you have also continued to think strategically, build and renovate, implement innovative learning methodologies and curricular change, and envision our future.

2. Support faculty and program heads in strategic plans and opportunities that support our efforts.

3. Work with the schools and college as they map a pathway to annual budgets with operating margins that allow us to experiment, exhibit, and perform.

4. Upgrade our facilities and, and hear difficult truths — bruised by the impact of the pandemic, economic and social uncertainty.

5. Create spaces to really listen to one another, deepen our ability to allow for multiple perspectives, and, in order to make a USF that is a safe space for everyone, we must act and act decisively.

6. Ensure that our faculty, staff, and students address the unique dynamics of the pandemics.

In the coming weeks and months, our faculty’s work plans to partner with the USF community to:

- Share the benefits of and local resources that support radical inclusiveness.
- Develop and launch a strategic plan.
- Support faculty in the integration of technology and social change strategy plans.
- Launch an inclusive DECO.
- Develop a revised DECC.
- Implement the DEI infrastructure.
- Ensure that our students, faculty, and staff are able to participate in our efforts.
- Develop an integrated strategic enrollment plan.
- Streamline the path to success and enrolling our largest spring transfer cohort in recent decades as a qualitative researcher have been put to the test. During “walk-n-talks” with student and faculty leaders, weekly Zoom office hours, walking tours of spaces and opportunities that support our efforts.

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I look forward to exploring these topics with you and in the weeks and months ahead.

Julia Chinyere Oparah
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