MEMORANDUM

TO: Academic Deans, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Elizabeth Garrett
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

DATE: January 12, 2011

SUBJECT: Transforming Departments and Programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Throughout its history, USC has made major contributions to humanist and social science inquiry. Over the past two decades, a number of our departments and programs in the humanities and social sciences have become recognized as among the best in the world, or are on the cusp of achieving that status. For USC to take its place among the great international universities of the 21st Century, we must further invest in our best and most promising departments and programs to ensure their greatness for the years to come.

I am therefore pleased to announce support from my office aimed at providing assistance to departments and programs in the humanities and social sciences. This support will assist schools in elevating their most promising departments and programs to a position of undisputed academic excellence and influence through the recruitment and integration of additional transformative faculty. Moreover, this initiative will encourage these departments to implement academic plans to ensure that the combined efforts of current and new faculty will decisively enhance the reputation of the program and improve the quality of Ph.D. or flagship professional graduate training. In many cases, the transformative faculty hires will also enhance the experiences of our undergraduates.

Deans should work with the leaders of their most promising departments and programs to create an academic plan that will ensure their elite status – in part through the hiring of particular transformative faculty, either singly or as a cluster. In many cases, these plans will focus on a particular department or program of an individual school; in others, the targeted group that will benefit may span school or department boundaries. These plans should identify potential hires, describe how hiring the proposed faculty will be transformative for the department/program and for USC, discuss how Ph.D. and other graduate
education is enhanced by the transformative hire, estimate the likelihood that such hiring will be successful; and provide any other relevant information, such as the relationship to undergraduate curriculum. Evidence is required that the hiring will be seen by the community of scholars as transformative.

Advising me with regard to this initiative are two faculty committees of leading scholars in the humanities and social sciences; the committee rosters are attached to this memorandum. These committees will review the proposals and provide their analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each plan; they will also assess whether the faculty hiring is likely to be transformative and propel the department or program substantially forward toward academic excellence. My office will then work with the schools, departments, and programs submitting the best proposals to determine the types of assistance and resources the Office of the Provost can provide in order to achieve success in recruiting the identified transformative faculty.

I note that we continue to pursue other faculty hiring initiatives that have successfully brought outstanding new colleagues to our academic community, such as the initiative to recruit Provost Professors, whose work is interdisciplinary and who have appointments in more than one school, and the initiative to identify, recruit and retain scholars who add to the diversity of our university at all levels of the tenure track.

Strategic plans, submitted by the dean or dean’s designate, will be accepted on a rolling basis. To submit a plan, or for additional information, please email Executive Vice Provost Michael Quick at evp@usc.edu.

c:  C. L. Max Nikias
    Robert Abeles
    Todd Dickey
    Al Checcio
    Martha Harris
**Humanities Advisory Committee**

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Percival Everett, Distinguished Professor of English

Thomas Habinek, Professor of Classics

Cynthia Herrup, Professor of History

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