



USC University of Southern California

INSTALLATION REMARKS

Provost Michael W. Quick

May 6, 2015

To the trustees of this university: I want to say thank you for putting your trust in me. I will not let you down.

To my fellow senior vice presidents, vice presidents and chief of staff of this university: You are amazing leaders, creative thinkers and passionate advocates for this university. I can only help to live up to the standards that you set every day. I note that more than half of you are lawyers. That has significantly shaken my worldview.

To the deans of our very many schools: I have learned so much by watching what you do on a daily basis, how you lead your disciplines and your professions and how you would never think of resting on your current accomplishment. All but one of you is truly excellent.

To the academic senate: You have been great partners in my time at the provost office. I look forward to tackling the most important issues confronting USC as we move forward.

To the staff of USC: Don't think I don't recognize the enormous contribution that you make to the university. I know how hard you work and I thank you for the dedication. We are not going to get to where we want to get to as a university without your skills, so thank you so much.

Most importantly, to the faculty of this wonderful place: All that this university is and can become is frankly on you. Those of you on the teaching track, those of you on the research track, those of you on a clinical track and those of you on a mixed track, I need your individual and collective intelligence, creativity and hard work to create a university worthy of you and the great faculty that are to come. I look forward to working with each of you to realize your aspirations for what this great university should be.

All of you I have thanked -- administrators, staff, faculty and students who are a vital part of this equation, have all been very nice to me. Enough of that.

We will only make USC the place it should be by continuing to push, continuing to say what needs to happen, and by continuing to say what is not working. I need you to hold me to a higher standard and expect more from me every day. My guess is you will have no trouble doing so.

Finally, I need to single out three people in terms of thanks.

President Nikias. Max, thank you very much for your trust in me to lead the academic mission of this university. You have been an amazing tutor, a calming influence and a role model for hard work and big ideas. I appreciate your passionate commitment to USC. I also appreciate your tremendous fundraising prowess. I promise to match that with my tremendous fund spending prowess.

Next, I'd like to thank Beth Garrett. She showed me how crucial it is to never compromise on rigor and excellence and how to lead with dignity during the most difficult circumstances. Mostly, I'm thankful to her for giving me many opportunities to fail. It made me a better leader. She is an impossible act to follow.

Last, to my partner of 10 years, I'd like to reflect... 10 years is a long time. Dr. Marcia Ciccone shares one trait with President Nikias. She has had at least one serious lapse of judgment in her life. Marcia is an OB-GYN, which is of no practical use to me at all. She has showed me what it means to be truly kind, to be generous, and to be supportive. These are traits I will never have. However, every day I get up to thank the gods for her in my life, because she makes me try to be a better version of myself.

I am 35 days into leading the academic mission of this university, appointed on April Fool's Day. I have not driven this university into the ditch yet. Max, please know I do have higher aspirations for this university than keeping it out of the ditch.

In the few minutes I have, let me see if I can give you a sense of the kind of university I want to lead. As Max mentioned, I grew up with modest means. But we were very fortunate. I had a roof over my head, we had food every day, and my parents worked very hard to see that my sister and I had the kind of life that we could afford to have. They really did say, "education is important." My sister, who was a few years older than me, would come home with her report card; it would have five Cs and a B on it, and my parents would be thrilled. I would come home with five As and a B. All hell would break loose.

My parents would say to me then -- and it took years of therapy for me to understand -- "Michael, listen. You have been given a tremendous privilege by having half a brain. You never use it. You are disappointing us because of that. You have a requirement. You have a responsibility for the privilege you have been given to do something great with it." That, in a nutshell, is how I see this university.

This university has amazing assets. We're in the "Age of the Pacific." Where do we find ourselves? We're right, smack-dab on East Coast of the Pacific Rim. At a time when there is massive migration of people out of rural areas into cities, where do we find ourselves but in one of the great mega-cities of this world. When I look around at the quality of the faculty that exists on this campus, the quality of the faculty that exists across our campuses, and the number of amazing students we have at this university, you just think that we have so much potential.

We have committed alumni, friends of the university, trustees, amazing supporters and tremendous financial strength. We have strength across the disciplines from conservatory quality art schools to the clinics. We really have tremendous assets. Those are the tangible ones. We have intangible assets, as well. We talk about the entrepreneurial spirit that this university embraces on a daily basis. I also love the fact that we are willing to reinvent ourselves, much like America in the West. We have a willingness to build from the ground up and a willingness to take risks. These are our assets. This is our privilege. With that privilege comes responsibility.

Shame on us. Shame on this university if we are not the most influential engine of innovation, creativity and leadership for the 21st century.

What does that mean? How do we achieve it? What is going to be USC's unique and influential contribution? These are questions worthy of discussion and debate. Since I'm the guy with the microphone, let me say a few things about what I want this university to be, taking from the framework of privilege and responsibility.

First, I believe we will have squandered our privilege if we are not the great private research university that takes on the most intractable, difficult, multifaceted problems of our time.

These are often called 'wicked problems.' Google it. Other problems are poverty, food and water security, obesity, social justice issues, cancer, sustainability and climate change, terrorism, cyber security, aging and dementia. These are the big, complex problems facing the 21st century. They need big, complex entities to engage them.

In my field of neuroscience, I think about the dementia issue that is facing us as a country and a world. As we are aging and have severe problems with dementia, what are we going to do about it? To solve that problem, we are going to need the creative artist and humanist to set the context for what it means to be human and what it means to lose that humanity. We're going to need the social scientist to tell us the costs that will incur on this world if we don't solve the problem. We'll need the natural scientist and engineers to design the next generation of therapeutic approaches to solve problem of dementia. We're going to need clinicians who are working person-by-person with those who may soon suffer from dementia, have dementia, and family members of people with dementia. You are going to need all of them to solve the problem.

Pick any of these really difficult problems. They're going to require a large place to take them on. Few institutions of higher education have the breadth to do this. We are one of the few. And it is our moral responsibility to do so. Not only must we lead in research and creative activities related to these difficult and intractable problems, we must transform education so that our students learn how to deal with them in the future.

How do we create curricula that are not only multi-dimensional and rigorous, but also combine theory and practice? How do we teach flexibility? How do we teach creativity? How do we teach fearlessness? That's our collective challenge at this university. It's our responsibility to rise to it.

Second, I believe we have squandered our privilege if we are not the great private research facility that fully commits to access and opportunity.

USC has a tremendous record. Do not get me wrong. A lot of you know the amazing stories told about the access and opportunity we give to people every day at this university. Our tremendous neighborhood academic initiative allows kids from the fifth grade on to have an amazing trajectory into college. We do great work taking transfer students from community colleges. We have an amazing record with Pell Grant recipients.

We have an amazing record with first generation college goers, of which I was one. This is a tremendous foundation upon which to build. Let's commit to do this at all levels. This includes graduate students, postdocs and certainly faculty.

Many places feel that recruiting diverse faculty from other universities is the answer. That simply changes diversity's address. It does not expand diversity. Let's commit to doing the hard work. Let's take the time to build the pipelines it is going to take. Let's examine the data that tells us where we are failing and why. As one of the great research universities in one of the most pluralistic countries in the world -- in one of the most diverse cities in the world -- it is our moral responsibility to do so.

Third, I believe we have squandered our privilege if we are not the great private research university that figures out what it means to be global.

If there is one area I feel higher education is most at sea, it would be an understanding of how to have true global impact. Let's face it, when it comes to global education, we're an industry inventing the Pony Express during the Information Age. We build an overseas campus in a city somewhere, and we call ourselves global. We send an 18-year-old to Spain to learn Spanish for three months, so we call ourselves global. We hire international faculty, so we call ourselves global. We count how many countries where we have collaborations, so we call ourselves global. Don't get me wrong, all of this is terrific. But this is impact that happens to take place somewhere around the globe. This is not global impact.

Let's not forget that the world may be flat, but it's big. How do we scale to have that kind of impact? What does it mean to teach? Right now, we're providing the fish of higher education. What does it mean to teach global fishing in a culturally responsible manner? If we are going to be the most impactful university of this era, it is our responsibility to figure that out.

Fourth, I believe we will have squandered our privilege if we are not the great private research university that cares about value.

There's a lot of talk about affordability in higher education. I think it's important, but not exactly the right measure. We need to talk about value instead. The most inexpensive education can be extremely expensive if it provides no value. An expensive education can be invaluable if, indeed, it's invaluable. In everything else, we should strive to be as efficient as possible. However, let's strive to be the great inefficient research university when it comes to providing value.

Think about a standard measure of quality education, the student/teacher ratio. That is nothing more than a measure of inefficiency. Let's find ways to be inefficient. There has been a lot of discussion around the idea of MOOCs: Massively Open Online Courses. MOOCs are incredibly efficient. One faculty member teaches tens of thousands of people at a time. The point is not whether MOOCs are good or bad. The real point is that a student at USC is getting the same education here. If they can get that from a MOOC, we have failed.

'Personalized medicine' is a term that is *en vogue* these days. We're going to read your genome, monitor you with Apple watches, and look at your lifestyle. We're going to tailor-make an experience for you to maintain health. When you get sick, we're going to target personalized treatments to you. It is time to apply that same mentality to education. Let's do personalized education. Let's not take care of 40,000 students. Let's take care of each individual student and repeat that 40,000 times.

If we look at it that way, how does it change what we do in the classroom? How does it change what we do in the residence halls? Think about building the residential colleges with USC Village coming online. How does it change our advising? How does it change how we view safety and well-being? Let's bring the big data revolution to higher education practice. To do less is to fail to provide the kind of education worthy of students who come to USC.

This is the university of which I would be proud to be a member. The great private research university whose singular focus is on serving the global public good. We will do this by taking on the intractable problems of the 21st century. We will do this by prioritizing access at all levels, educating students with the skills they need to take on these problems. We will do this by creating the first university with true global impact and by providing affordability through value.

To lead in redefining the public good for a new era also means that we have to be accountable. Let's start by being accountable to ourselves. We have come a long way as an institution in just a few very short years. For too long, we have been defined by others. It is time to have self-confidence to lead.

Let's hold ourselves, as a university, to unobtainable standards and goals. Let's be the university that sets its own bar – that sets it high -- and let's see how close we can get. Let's tell the world what we believe in. Let's measure ourselves and tell the world how we are doing. Whether it's good or bad, it's the moral responsibility of a true leader. Let's be a true leader.

The history of American higher education has been a history of the evolution of serving the public good. The early transition to secular institutions in the 17th and 18th centuries changed the mission of universities away from the training of clergy to creating an educated citizenry. The rise of the land-grant institutions in the 19th century brought into focus the idea of universities solving regional needs. The rise of the research university of the 20th century enlarged the focus to solving the challenges facing the American century. The role of the great public university systems in the latter half of the 20th century gave purchase to the idea of education for all.

What an amazing vision for what it means to be an institution of higher education that serves the public good: solving the most important challenges of the day, while providing education access to all. Who really does that today? This is especially true as we enter the era of globalization. Who will be and who can be the university with the singular focus on serving the global public good?

Only a few private and public research universities have the capacity to take on this challenge. Private universities often fail to provide affordability and access. Public research universities have come closest to the idea of carrying out a responsibility to serve the public. Financial and other pressures have caused them to lose their way. No one has figured out, in this global age, how to have global impact. The mantle of the research university serving the global public good has been dropped. It is our responsibility, given our tremendous privilege, to assume the work.

Universities can be great in many ways. There are research universities that do scholarship with impact and train the next generation of academic leaders. There are professional schools and conservatories that train practitioners and industry leaders. Minority-serving institutions provide access and opportunity. State schools and community colleges provide affordable education for all. Liberal arts colleges provide great one-on-one student experiences. I want to work with you to be the one university that does all of these things. It's our moral obligation, given the great privilege we have been given.

It is a huge challenge. Together, let's rise to it.

As you all know, we have been called a lot of things. We have been called, "university of spoiled children." I happen to like, "university of second choice."

The old clichés die hard.

Let's work together to change the narrative. Let's become the university of tackling wicked problems. Let's become the university of access and opportunity. Let's become the university of global impact. Let's become the university of value and affordability. Let's become the university that rises to a higher standard.

Let's be a new kind of great, private research university for the 21st century. And when the chapter is written about the one university that redefined serving the global public good, let's be proud that we're called the University of Southern California.