MEMORANDUM

To: USC Dornsife College Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni, and Supporters

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

Date: May 1, 2012

Subject: Appointment of Dr. Steve A. Kay

On behalf of President Nikias, I am very pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Steve A. Kay as the twenty-first Dean of the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters Arts and Sciences. Professor Kay will also hold the Anna H. Bing Dean’s Chair.

Dr. Kay comes to USC from the University of California, San Diego, where he has distinguished himself as an innovative researcher, a successful administrator and an inspiring leader. At UCSD, he has served as Dean of the Division of Biological Sciences and has held the Richard C. Atkinson Chair in Biological Sciences since 2007. He is also a UCSD Distinguished Professor of Cell and Developmental Biology. Dr. Kay is trained in genetics and genomics and received his Ph.D. from the University of Bristol, United Kingdom.

His work has been cited in Science magazine’s “Breakthroughs of the Year” consecutively in 1997 and 1998, and again in 2002. In 2008 he was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences, in 2009 he was elected as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and in 2010 he was awarded the UCSD Chancellor’s Associates Faculty Award for Excellence in Research. He was recently chosen to receive the 2011 Martin Gibbs Medal by the American Society for Plant Biology as recognition for pioneering work in plant sciences.

As a dean at UCSD, Dr. Kay led a large and dynamic academic division, with nearly 6,000 undergraduate biology majors, several hundred graduate students and post-doctoral researchers, and faculty spanning four major departments. As an academic leader, Dr. Kay has demonstrated a commitment to faculty excellence, recruiting exceptional new faculty members to the division, including department chairs and center directors, members of the National Academy of Sciences, and many other distinguished and productive researchers. During the same period four significant new research centers were created spanning biomedical to environmental sciences.
From 2007 to 2011, grants and contract activity grew nearly sixty percent in the division. Most recently, in 2011, the UCSD Biological Sciences Graduate Program received world-class recognition when it was ranked number one in the United States by the National Research Council.

Under Dr. Kay’s leadership, the Division of Biological Sciences also developed new scholarships for undergraduate researchers, expanded and improved laboratory research opportunities for students, strengthened peer mentoring for incoming Ph.D. students, established a new divisional diversity committee, and launched workshops for teaching assistants and post-doctoral trainees related to cultural inclusion and equity.

In support of the academic mission, Dr. Kay also directed numerous administrative improvements at UCSD. He oversaw the development of new IT applications, including a virtual advising system, updated the course enrollment process, and launched a communications campaign to enhance the visibility of the division.

He has held faculty positions at the Rockefeller University, the University of Virginia, and the Scripps Research Institute prior to joining UCSD. He has also served as the Director of Discovery Research at the Genomics Institute of the Novartis Research Foundation (GNF), where he helped build research programs applying human genome science to biomedical research and drug discovery. Dr. Kay has also founded several biotechnology companies, the latest of which is Reset Therapeutics, a San Francisco-based drug development company.

Dr. Kay’s research involves the large-scale application of genomics technologies and systems approaches to understand complex regulatory networks in plant and animal cells. He has applied functional genomic screens and chemical biology approaches to elucidate the composition of the molecular circuitry underlying circadian rhythms. Applications of his discoveries include development of novel drugs, agricultural biotechnology and bioenergy production. He has published over 200 papers and is named by ISI as a highly cited scientist. His recent interests bridge the interface between basic science and food and energy security. His ongoing research program applies modern genomics and bioinformatics to the discovery of therapeutics. Dr. Kay is widely sought after for his expertise, and he advises many U.S. government agencies, foreign governments, non-governmental organizations and global corporations on a range of issues relating to the application of scientific discoveries for societal benefit.

On behalf of the President, I want to again thank Professor Howard Gillman for his service as dean of the Dornsife College since 2007. His excellent work helped position the Dornsife College so that it could benefit from the generosity and vision of Dana and David Dornsife as they made their gift of $200 million to support the college’s academic mission. As leader of the Dornsife College, Dean Gillman implemented plans to ensure that all undergraduate students would have access to resources enabling them to conduct research. He also expanded opportunities for overseas study and service learning. During his tenure, graduation rates increased, improvements were made to the quality of Ph.D. programs, non-tenure-track faculty promotion pathways were created, and many outstanding new faculty members at all ranks were recruited.
Dr. Kay’s appointment is effective October 1, 2012. Because Dean Gillman steps down on June 30, 2012, Executive Vice Provost Michael Quick will assume the dean’s administrative duties beginning July 1 and continuing until Professor Kay arrives. Dr. Quick will be assisted during this transition by members of the Dornsife leadership team, including Vice Deans Steven Lamy, George Sanchez, and Donal Manahan.

I want to acknowledge the stellar work of the dean search advisory committee. Vice Chairs Avishai Sadan and Michael Quick were instrumental in coordinating the search, as were the dedicated committee members. Many faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters of the Dornsife College participated in the process, and their insight and contributions were extremely valuable. The President and I also benefited from the wise advice and counsel of Dana and David Dornsife, who served as special advisers in this search.

Please join President Nikias and me in warmly congratulating Dr. Steve Kay on his appointment as dean of the USC Dornsife College, and in welcoming him, his wife Professor Shelley Halpain, and their three children, Sophie, Alexander, and Julian, to the Trojan Family. We all look forward to their arrival this fall.

cc: C. L. Max Nikias
    Robert Abeles
    Al Checcio
    Todd Dickey
    Tom Jackiewicz
    Tom Sayles
    Carol Mauch Amir