

July 26, 2013

To the USC Community:

The University of Southern California takes very seriously the crime of sexual assault. We do not tolerate sexual misconduct in our community in any form, whether it is sexual violence, abuse, harassment, or discrimination; stalking; intimate partner violence; gender identity violence; or intimidation.

In light of recent news stories about an inquiry by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) concerning the cases of three USC students, I am writing to underscore what our University does to protect our campus community in this realm.

There has been a great deal of misreporting in the press about the scope and basis of the OCR inquiry. There are not 100 students who have complained to the federal government about the process, as some have claimed. Instead, a student alleged that USC had not responded appropriately in 16 cases; the OCR accepted three of those cases for further investigation. What you may have heard in the news about these cases contained other inaccuracies, including mischaracterization of statements attributed to USC Department of Public Safety (DPS) officers. While we cannot publicly discuss the details of these three cases, any complaints of sexual assaults made to DPS were forwarded to the Los Angeles Police Department for its investigation. We welcome the opportunity to have the OCR review these cases.

The OCR dismissed the charge that there is a “hostile environment” at USC because it determined there was not sufficient evidence to pursue that claim, but it agreed to look into our grievance procedures, as well as the three specific cases. Our process is always open to review and improvement, and we will collaborate fully with the OCR and look forward to suggestions it might have.

USC has become a national leader in procedures to deal with sexual violence and sexual harassment. As part of our ongoing process of improvement, in both of the last two academic years I asked task forces to comprehensively review our policies and practices. In addition, federal guidelines for universities change, and we update our policies accordingly. We are proud of our compassionate, professional leadership team. USC’s Title IX Coordinator, Ms. Jody Shipper, is a nationally respected consultant and trainer for other universities in best practices in sexual assault cases. Within my office, USC’s response is ably led by Dr. Lynette Merriman, Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Our newly appointed director of the Center for Women and Men, Ms. La Shonda Coleman, possesses pertinent experience in victim advocacy from her work at the Santa Monica Rape Treatment Center. Dr. Ilene Rosenstein, Director of the USC Student Counseling Center, oversees a staff of 16 professionals and 11 graduate interns to provide counseling and mental health services to our students.

USC’s processes include education and training, full and fair investigation of complaints, punishment of those found to be guilty, and support for those affected by assault. Let me provide some detail:

- We are committed to continuing to do all we can to promote a respectful culture, prevent sexual misconduct and provide our students a safe environment. There are awareness programs for all students during Welcome Week and throughout the year on sexual violence and other forms of sexual misconduct, as well as on the effects of alcohol and drugs. There are also valuable programs by the Center for Women and Men, the Women’s Student Assembly, and Men CARE, seeking to end sexual violence in the USC community through education, cultural change and leadership development. Our activities also include an annual Take Back the Night week, and an annual Clothesline Project which promotes awareness and documents violent sexual crime. Moreover, we conduct regular training

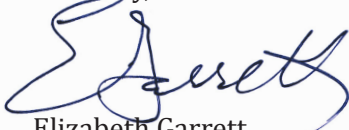
programs for staff and faculty. These programs are strong, and we continually seek to improve them. Beginning this fall there will be additional student programs in the residential colleges and Greek community and expanded training for employees, including the Department of Public Safety and others who deal with these matters. Issues of sexual misconduct deserve the attention of every member of our community.

- USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (SJACS), which can be reached at (213) 821-7373, conducts full investigations of sexual misconduct, in cooperation with our Title IX Coordinator. These investigations are fair to both the complainant and the accused, and provide to both equal rights and access to counseling. This summer we have added steps in our procedure to better document the equal treatment aspect of our process. As part of our continuing improvement efforts, we decided earlier this year to employ an additional specialist for the investigation of sexual misconduct cases, who will be responsible to both SJACS and our Title IX office. Some situations are complicated, and we are sensitive to the wishes of the complainant with regard to whether to proceed with a formal university investigation.
- When an investigation determines by a preponderance of the evidence that sexual misconduct has occurred, we impose fitting punishments up to and including expulsion. We also take measures to protect victims throughout the process, and cooperate fully with the LAPD in any criminal investigations.
- We are committed to providing empathic support and assistance for those affected by sexual assault. Confidential counseling and advocacy, and advice on obtaining medical care, are available through our Sexual Assault Resource Center. Students can call the Center at (213) 740-4900 (24 hours). In addition, information on how to report sexual assault is explained at its website, http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/report_assault.html. We are expanding our steps to publicize this pathway to all students. To report a crime, a student should call the Department of Public Safety's 24-hour emergency line, (213) 740-4321; any student can choose to interact with a female officer. USC has a written agreement with the LAPD mandating that we forward to the police every report of sexual assault that DPS receives, and we do not discourage a victim of sexual assault from reporting it to the police.

Our goal is to make USC among the safest urban universities in the nation. We have one of the largest campus public safety departments in the United States, over 400 emergency blue light phones, 121 cameras both on and off campus with more being added this year, and an agreement that LAPD will patrol our campus in addition to our own public safety officers.

I have a deep personal commitment as Provost that our community will be safe for all our students, free of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and violence, and supportive of those affected. I call on our students, faculty and staff to actively work together to prevent sexual assaults. It is essential that we do this both to protect the personal integrity of every member of our campus community and to make sure that our campus culture reflects our highest values.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Garrett

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

cc: USC Board of Trustees
President C. L. Max Nikias