

Provost Charles F. Zukoski

November 13, 2019

Thank you for that gracious introduction, Carol, and thank you to Shelly and Ofer.

After having driven east on Route 1 from western Canada to New Jersey where I started graduate school at Princeton 40 years ago, Barbara and I completed the loop by driving from Buffalo to LA in late September of this year. In the intervening time we raised our family in Urbana, Illinois, I built a research and education program in Chemical Engineering at the University of Illinois, and I cut my teeth as an administrator of great universities at Illinois and Buffalo. Barbara and I and my sons Andrew and Nick traveled the world, worked with imaginative and creative people and gained a sense of appreciation for humanity's common search for joy.

In a sense, my last 35 years in higher education have prepared me for the position I now hold. Activities at Reed where I went for my undergraduate degree, Princeton where I received my PhD, Illinois and Buffalo – not all successful but many of which led to positive progress – were learning processes that culminate in landing me at USC.

Barbara and I have felt the warmth of welcome from students, faculty, staff and the Trojan family. In the face of recent heartbreaks, I have been amazed and pleased at the way this Trojan family pulls together and that under President Folt's leadership we are gelling as a strong team. Barbara and I are enormously pleased to be here. Thank you for our welcome. And thank you to our family and friends who are here from near and far to be with us today.

Installations mark new beginnings. President Folt and I arrived at the start of the fall 2019 semester. This is a new chapter in USC history and I look forward with great anticipation to see what unfolds. These remarks are my attempt to peer into the future and to imagine what this chapter will contain.

USC is one of the world's great universities – innovative and ambitious. We are recognized as a global leader because of achievement, because of the quality of the education we deliver, and because of the on-the-ground impact of our research, our scholarship, our clinical care, and our creative activities. We have a proven history of excellence. We attract creative minds who are passionate about undertaking their mission. USC is inclusive and our student population is one of the most diverse in the nation. Our students, faculty, and alumni are recognized for their accomplishments.

We are innovators in the degrees we offer, in how our degrees are constructed, in the breadth, creativity, and collaborative nature of our research, and in the way, we engage Los Angeles and the world. We are an assembly of astonishing talent and we have a tradition of doing great things.

And as a global leader, we are always being watched.

This is the USC I am charged to lead. As we enter the new chapter of the history of this great institution, I recognize that USC is poised for change.

Among the reasons for this is a thirst of faculty, students and staff to face the issues of the past few years, learn what went wrong, develop strategies to avoid repeating them, and move forward, united to address the opportunities of our age with intention, creativity, and energy.

The high-visibility cases of the past several years have led to a sometimes critical view of this university. Despite the enormous contributions made by faculty, staff and students to improving the human condition, the reality and the visibility of these cases means that USC has shown up as an exemplar of bad behaviors. To alter this dynamic, there is a profound need for reflection and humility, and steps that clearly demonstrate that our actions are consistent with our core values. President Folt and I are committed to understanding the issues and putting in place policies and practices that demonstrate institutional commitment to moving forward in a framework that sustains the excellence that is embodied in USC, and where actions are values-based, and doing these things with all due speed.

The need for immediate action in dealing with these specific concerns often obscures how higher education is being altered by macro scale pressures impacting society around us. These pressures include alterations in demographics, the shifting basis of our economy, and climate change. These pressures are compelling – they must be faced. Our society will be altered by these pressures and, in the process, USC will also change.

In characterizing what we see in society around us, we often use “challenges” as a code word for forced, uncomfortable and, perhaps, undesirable change.

I take a different perspective. I see opportunity.

We are undergoing climate change. We are in a society with widespread injustices, and our population faces increasing disparities in health, in wealth, and in access to education. In the face of all this, creating the sustainable and just society of tomorrow is indeed a challenge.

But in a more interesting way, the pressures we are feeling provide enormous opportunity. By addressing the realities of our time, USC will continue to be recognized as a thought leader - as the institution to which scholars and students flock because USC will be the source of ideas, solutions, technologies, and creative processes. By addressing these realities, USC becomes the place where one must go to be educated or one is simply not at the leading edge.

The opportunities and excitement lie not in dogmatically replicating the past but in being excited to tackle the issues we face as a planet and society. There is an adage that people need to lead, follow or get out of the way. I see USC leading. We aspire to change the world.

USC enjoys an abundance of talent, resources, and commitment. With these assets, we will take advantage of the opportunities we are presented and advance toward our goal of being

force for good, for providing the next generation of leaders and professionals with the foundation they need and, as important for our society, for advancing joy.

On climate change, we know how to reduce CO2 emissions. We know how to alter land usage to produce better foods. We know how to alter water usage to save streams. Certainly, we need better understanding and technologies to make doing these things easier. But many of the technologies exist and yet we are making very slow progress. Social, cultural, and political structures bar the way. USC will lead in lowering these barriers.

The density of humans in urban environments brings social and economic advantages. However, the resulting density results in new problems. LA experiences these issues deeply. By continuing to focus on the problems of LA, USC can expand itself as a beacon for those who seek solutions to the thorny issues faced by cities globally.

USC has exceptional health sciences capabilities. As the cost of delivery of health care increases, new mechanisms of compensation are being put in place to help mitigate the financial burden health care places on society. There's a growing need for community-based wellness initiatives and translational research that focuses on ensuring not simply that, for example, diabetes is treated but that the social and environmental factors leading to diabetes are addressed.

As an anchor institution, USC must continue to embrace its leadership position in collaborative and translational research. We can lead in building partnerships. We can lead building partnerships that work within communities on health issues, educational issues, safety concerns and access to jobs.

USC is dedicated to building a society in which we all thrive – a sustainable culture in which disparities in wealth contract, where access to better health outcomes expand, and where despondency and radicalization give way to inspiration.

But in the process of building this bright future, USC will also change. And one catalyst for that change will come in how the macropressures we feel impact our finances.

Now don't kid yourselves. USC has abundant resources. We have talent, support and creativity that are the envy of the world. We have students and philanthropists who support programs that lead to fabulous outcomes. We know how to grow resources.

At the same time, there is no question that USC is faced with some challenging financial times. Our operational costs are increasing faster than our revenues. This is not ideal and we will have to adjust.

This fact is the catalyst for the change we will undertake. Mitigating the stresses we are beginning to feel might lead to disruptive outcomes. However, I would like to emphasize that USC has been disrupting for many years in all the activities we undertake. We are a leader

because we have been disruptive. This is part of who we are and part of the culture of the community in which we live.

From my perspective, USC has the capacity to deliver a wonderful future. With the abundance that is around us, I encourage us not to be bogged down by notions of scarcity but to embrace the “and” proposition: that we can work within and expand the financial framework that constrains us and we can accelerate into a fabulous future where USC continues to be known for astonishing programs, in research, education, health care, and creative endeavors.

In describing the activities of universities, we often speak in terms of multidisciplinary programs focused on grand challenges. This focus on problems is driven by the enormity of issues we face and that resolving these issues requires expertise beyond a single discipline. Timelines from discovery to implementation have been shortened, the competition for making progress is ever growing. The consequences of not making rapid progress are enormous. Thus, rather than sequentially passing issues between disciplines, there is a growing call to have individuals with deep disciplinary knowledge work together. Much that we do in the next chapter of USC’s history will be multidisciplinary.

At the same time, great universities must continue to inspire. Inspiration comes in many forms and is, intrinsically, individualistic. At USC we have the talent and the capacity to remain in the business of undertaking activities that are inspirational and motivational. Often these inspirational activities have a narrow, deeply disciplinarily focus.

Our society is only rich enough to have the rare, creative mind pursue its passions. As faculty at USC we are given that freedom, but in enjoying this privilege, we also must accept the obligation to deliver inspiration and joy at the cutting edge.

Colleagues and friends, there is so much opportunity to inspire, to build towards a sustainable and just future, to engage with the problems of dense urban environments, and to face the challenges of educating the next generation. USC has grappled with and will continue to grapple with these issues. We embrace the opportunities before us. The next chapter in USC’s history will be born from our passions and our capacity to make choices.

I started these comments with reflections on how I arrived at USC and the experiences that shape how I perceive the world. These experiences have made me a believer in observing, listening, hearing and debating. I am also a believer in setting priorities, and making decisions, in a timely manner, based on those priorities. I believe in processes of continual renewal and the excitement of shaping programs of impact. I believe the priorities should be values-based and that decisions should be consistent and predictable. My experiences have given me a belief in the joy of discovery, the pleasure of educating and a great satisfaction in doing.

In my short time at USC, I have learned much about the passions of the Trojan Family, our capacity to be innovative and our desire to change the world. I see an abundance of resources

with which to build. I feel the wonderful opportunities of our times and believe USC is the place where the future will be developed. I am excited to be here and proud to be your provost.