

**MEMORANDUM**

To: USC Faculty

From: Ginger Clark, President of the Academic Senate 

Date: June 21, 2016

Subject: Senate Summary: Faculty Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Access

Last Fall, a national crisis around the issue of campus climate erupted on colleges across the country. Indeed, activism here at USC helped bring wider attention to this issue. There was a call for universities to transform their campus communities into fertile, welcoming environments for all faculty, students, and staff. This included the cultivation of growth, success, and leadership, while also attending to the need for resources and policies that were more inclusive of our evolving and diverse populations.

USC's Academic Senate had heard some of these concerns over the past few years, and recognized the need for open dialogue and change on campus. As a result, even before the events of last fall, the Senate began to engage faculty in events and create Senate structures to address these issues from a faculty governance perspective. The Senate kicked off a summit around equity and social justice with a Spring 2015 mini-retreat. The retreat began by addressing policing in the context of the national #blacklivesmatter movement, and then focused more locally on the racial climate on our own campus. We then held a planning retreat in the Summer of 2015 where it became clear from the campus climate panel discussion that there were many opportunities for the university to improve and position itself as a leader in the cultivation of a rich, diverse, and dynamic academic environment. This led to campus climate becoming one of the Senate's primary agenda items for the 2015-2016 academic year.

The first action item was the creation of a permanent Senate Committee on Campus Climate. The Committee crafted a campus climate resolution that passed the Academic Senate unanimously (*see attached*), calling for a provost-level position overseeing diversity initiatives; diversity data transparency; a campus climate survey; better diverse faculty and student recruitment and retention initiatives; a DPS commission; increased diversity competency education; reinstatement of the GE diversity requirement; and increased support for USC's cultural centers. The Undergraduate and Graduate Student Governments submitted their own climate resolutions around the same time, creating strong university-wide support on this issue.

There was a *convergence of wills* that occurred on this campus leading to meaningful and measurable change around diversity and inclusion. Provost Quick responded to these governance efforts by creating a Diversity Task Force made up of faculty, students, and staff to address the requests within the faculty and student resolutions, many of which were granted (*see his memo attached*). He sponsored open forums to discuss issues of diversity on our campus and asked the deans of the various schools to create "diversity liaison" positions to address climate within their respective schools. His office instituted diversity initiatives for graduate students,

and the Office of Student Affairs made important changes in their funding and structures to improve inclusivity for all students. The Deans committed to working with the diversity liaisons to create 5-year diversity plans for each school. Provost Quick also appointed three associate provosts to lead initiatives campus-wide to enhance equity, inclusion, and access, and to train and work with the diversity liaisons to cross-pollinate best practices across schools. Most importantly, President Nikias called for a focus on improving pipelines through access initiatives and addressing critical campus climate issues in his annual faculty address.

This progress was due, in large part, to the efforts of our faculty. The level of faculty participation and leadership on this issue was something I have not seen before. The two-day Provost/Senate retreat on access, opportunity, and campus climate was packed with close to 150 people. Faculty engaged in the provost's open forums on campus climate. They attended the Real Talk Faculty Forums on campus climate, sponsored by the Academic Senate and the School of Social Work. They participated in the Provost's Diversity Task Force which met every Monday morning, and its larger advisory group which met every Friday afternoon. The Senate Campus Climate Committee helped craft most of the faculty input to the proposals put forth by the Provost's Diversity Task Force. And that does not capture all of the individual conversations and emails that contributed to the discussion about the best path forward for USC.

There will be many more opportunities to engage in the discussion about the direction the university should take around equity and inclusion, and I encourage you to take advantage of them. Even if you aren't sure you have something to contribute just yet, being a part of the dialogue has taught me a great deal, so I encourage you to participate.

Universities should be places that represent what the world can be if we rely on research from diverse perspectives to guide us, if we put concerted effort into understanding the spectrum of human experience, if we support innovation, creative thinking, and if we work to form an open, just, and respectful community. We can test the ideas and systems that could improve the lives of people all over the world right here in our own living laboratory. We can model for our students the kind of just and inclusive behaviors and dispositions we want them to take out into the world, including open debate, critical analysis, implementation of new knowledge, and a willingness to alter our approach mid-course according to what the data tell us. I believe the work all of you have done this year on access, inclusion, and campus climate has turned this big ship more quickly and more definitively than any of us thought possible, and has moved us many leagues closer to creating the conditions that we want our students to replicate as they leave us to go make change in the world. While there is a good deal of research in the area of equity and inclusion, much of it done by faculty here at USC, and while we have some best practices to build upon, the relative newness of this endeavor leaves a lot of room for discovery and innovation. Our agility and entrepreneurial spirit are well suited to this challenge. We have the potential to be a real leader in this area, and I believe we are well on our way.