



Vision for the USC Race & Equity Center

By Shaun R. Harper, Ph.D.

Over the next five years, the University of Southern California will amass a national reputation for its leadership on racial equity in the United States. Its Race & Equity Center will be the epicenter for interdisciplinary scholarship, resources, and meaningful activities that significantly benefit the University, other institutions of higher education, and the broader society.

Interdisciplinary Engagement and Collaboration

The Center's strength will reside in its interdisciplinarity. Dozens of faculty affiliates who do research, creative activities, and other forms of scholarship pertaining to race will be recruited from every academic school at USC. These professors will collaborate on grant proposals, publications and research reports, the production of digital media, colloquia and performances, and a range of signature events. The Center will help strategically promote each faculty affiliate's scholarship. Given that most are likely among the few faculty members in their respective schools and departments who do work on race, this will be a thoughtfully constructed space that addresses their feelings of academic isolation and marginalization. Lastly, faculty affiliates will serve as a resource and feedback group to senior USC administrators as we all aim to make the University more racially diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

The Center will also unite Ph.D. students across academic schools who share intellectual interests in the study of race and equity. Doctoral fellows will meet twice each month to talk about racial issues in the U.S., brainstorm opportunities for academic partnerships, offer feedback on each other's ideas and written work, and collaborate on research projects that ultimately lead to conference presentations and publications. These students will benefit from having a space in which to connect academically and socially with other doctoral fellows, faculty affiliates, and center researchers who are pursuing interesting race-related research questions. Each will be introduced to theories, concepts, and methods from fields beyond theirs, and afforded opportunities to think comprehensively about how social and structural forces work together to reproduce racial inequities.

A Strategic and Reliable In-House Resource for USC

The Center will bring to USC much of what it offers to colleges and universities across the country. Professor Shaun Harper, the Center's executive director, will be available to advise the USC president, provost, and deans on complex matters concerning race, equity, and diversity. Center staff will also be a resource for the Provost's Diversity Council, specifically helping its members plan, assess and improve their work, and effectively communicate progress and priorities. Additionally, the Center will host a series of workshops on a range of topics for USC academic department chairs, faculty search committee members, and colleagues in the student affairs division and athletics department.

A Nationally Recognized Resource for Higher Education

The USC Center will build on the brand established for the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education. The Penn Center is known foremost for its qualitative campus racial climate assessments. Institutions pay teams of researchers to spend 3-4 days on campus conducting focus groups and individual interviews. Professor Harper and other researchers at the Penn Center have completed climate studies at more than 40 colleges and universities, and interviewed more than 10,000 college students. This will continue to be a signature activity of the Center at USC.

The USC Center will also launch the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC), a quantitative survey instrument that will be annually administered at hundreds of colleges and universities across the country. Institutions have an urgent need for data about students' feelings of belongingness and inclusion, the extent to which they interact meaningfully with diverse others, where and what they learn about race and other aspects of diversity, and their feelings of readiness for participation in a diverse democracy. And they need to know how different groups of students (women, students of color, Muslims, LGBT students, and students with disabilities, to name a few) uniquely experience and appraise the campus climate. Hence, the NACCC will be a useful quantitative survey tool that provides data to institutions and allow postsecondary leaders to benchmark their campuses against peer institutions. In Year 3, the Center will launch an annual national survey focused on climate for faculty and staff at higher education institutions. And in Year 5, we will release a climate survey for workplaces and organizational contexts outside of higher education (corporations, government offices, etc.).

In addition to qualitative campus climate studies and the trio of national quantitative surveys, the USC Center will rename and continue two important activities from the Penn Center:

Penn Equity Institutes – This is a five-week virtual education series for 20 administrators and faculty members on a single college or university campus. Each Institute has 10 modules that focus on strategic and responsive leadership for racial equity, talking comfortably about race, productively resolving racial tensions, understanding and closing equity gaps in assorted outcomes (e.g., student performance and faculty retention), and other related topics. This series will be renamed the USC Equity Institutes.

Penn Summits – These are 1-3 day professional development events for faculty members and administrators at colleges and universities across the country. Occasionally, Summits are offered in a multipart virtual format. Over 20,000 educators and leaders have participated in Penn Summits. This will be renamed the USC Equity Summit Series.

Staffing and Affiliates

Staff Coming from Penn

Dr. Shaun R. Harper, Executive Director and Clifford and Betty Allen Professor in Urban Leadership

Dr. Charles H.F. Davis III, Director of Research and Assistant Professor of Clinical Education

Wilmon Christian, Director of Professional Learning and Campus Partnerships

Dr. Nichole Garcia, Research Associate

Dr. Peter Tan Keo, Research Associate

Dr. Nathan M. Castillo, Research Associate

Sy Chen Stokes, Research Associate

New Hires

Director of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates

Director of Marketing and Communications

3 Full-Time Data Analysts for the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates

2 Administrative Assistants

Affiliates

25-40 Full-time faculty members across USC schools and departments

30-50 Ph.D. students across USC schools and departments