

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Academic Deans, USC Faculty, and Ph.D. Students

From: C. L. Max Nikias *C-L Nikias*

Date: April 12, 2010

Subject: USC Diploma in Innovation Program for Ph.D. Students

**Office of the Provost**

**C. L. Max Nikias**  
Executive Vice President  
and Provost

Malcolm R. Currie Chair  
in Technology and  
the Humanities

I am pleased to announce a new **Diploma in Innovation**—a highly selective program for current Ph.D. students designed to complement their disciplinary scholarship with the practical skills and creative perspectives that help them become leaders at the vanguard of their chosen fields. At USC, we embrace the principle that innovators can come from all backgrounds, and that their ventures—from new products, services, and companies to scholarship and creative works—bring fresh approaches and creative thinking to bear on global community needs. The USC Diploma in Innovation Program will enable Ph.D. students coming from all areas of knowledge to translate their novel ideas into tangible benefits to society.

This program will begin in the fall of 2010 and will be offered at no cost to USC Ph.D. students. It will specifically encourage students to apply their disciplinary expertise in original and entrepreneurial ways to a range of areas, including science and technology, economics, law, creative works, and social systems. Students will emerge with a greater ability to recognize the broad possibilities for how their academic expertise intersects with pressing societal needs, and to apply their academic expertise to address these opportunities in scalable and sustainable ways. Furthermore, they will learn the role of design thinking, business principles, organizational culture, and intellectual property for achieving maximum impact.

Ph.D. students in all areas of the university—from history to chemistry to engineering to music to medicine and more—should consider the Diploma in Innovation Program. For example, a marine biologist might discover that the function of sticky proteins that hold mollusk shells closed can be turned into a human-made, ultra-adhesive product that releases under specific environmental conditions. Skills learned through the Diploma in Innovation Program would allow her to develop a business plan for bringing the product to market with broad applications from construction to healthcare and defense. Or, a historian might recognize the link between her work on a challenging period of organizational transition—a time when many institutions and businesses were being rapidly restructured in the face of technological change and new political frictions—and the challenges being faced by contemporary organizations. Drawing on the skills she gained in this program, she could develop a five-point checklist for successful

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organizational transformation based on case examples from historical research. She might even open a consulting firm.

With this program, USC is pioneering a novel approach to the Ph.D. experience. It reflects the university's continued commitment to innovation, as well as the inventive spirit of our faculty and students. The academic content was developed by a core group of cross-disciplinary faculty who represent expertise in diverse fields, but who also share the common recognition that the cultivation of entrepreneurial skills will prepare USC students to make a significant impact through traditional academic means and beyond.

The 12-unit structure of the program makes it possible for Ph.D. students to engage in the program without significantly impacting time-to-degree or interrupting their disciplinary work. The **three courses** that comprise the program may be taken in succession or over the course of a few years.

As the first program of its kind, the Diploma in Innovation Program will be housed within and administered by the USC Graduate School and is supported by the USC Stevens Institute for Innovation.

To be considered for this selective program, applicants should refer to the attached document, which describes the program's application procedures in greater detail. Students who have completed the 12-unit program will be awarded a Certificate in Innovation.

As the first university to embark on such an endeavor, USC hopes to create a model for other universities to embrace in the future. This program will significantly enhance the Ph.D. experience at USC, adding a unique dimension to students' coursework.

cc: Elizabeth Garrett  
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Jerome Lucido  
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## **Diploma in Innovation Program for Ph.D. Students Application Procedures**

The Diploma in Innovation Program is offered to advanced Ph.D. students enrolled at USC in good standing who have passed their qualifying exam. Students will submit applications for participation to the USC Graduate School.

To participate, students should submit an application to the USC Graduate School by the last day of classes in the spring semester preceding enrollment (This year's deadline is April 30, 2010).

This application must include:

- (1) a current *curriculum vitae* or resumé;
- (2) a current unofficial transcript;
- (3) a statement of interest of approximately 500 words that addresses the student's interest in the program and describes how completing the program will enhance his or her professional career;
- (4) a brief statement from the student's Ph.D. advisor that acknowledges the student's desire to participate in the program.

Application materials should be submitted online at the following website:

<http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/iDiploma>

For questions please contact the USC Graduate School:  
213-740-9033 or [idiploma@usc.edu](mailto:idiploma@usc.edu)