

In January, we celebrated
the installation of USC's new
provost and senior vice president
for academic affairs,
Elizabeth Garrett.

I'd like to share a copy of her
speech from that occasion, as it
eloquently captures our academic
priorities for the university's future.

I hope you enjoy it.

C. L. Max Nikias
PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA





A SUDDEN, ALMOST MAGICAL, TRANSFORMATION

AN ADDRESS BY

ELIZABETH GARRETT

ON THE OCCASION OF HER INSTALLATION AS

PROVOST AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 11, 2011

In 1953, after serving as an adviser to Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman during two world wars, including one that starkly revealed the reality and evil of genocide, financier and statesman Bernard Baruch explained his continued sense of optimism for the future:

I believe, above all else, in reason – in the power of the human mind to cope with the problems of life. ... To nothing so much as the abandonment of reason does humanity owe its sorrows. ... I still believe that with courage and intelligence we can make the future bright with fulfillment.

The university's foundation is such a faith in reason – the view that an unwavering commitment to the search for truth is a goal worth pursuing; the belief that the life of the mind is an essential component of a civilized and democratic society; and the dedication to passing on to the next generation the ability to reason critically and creatively.

I am honored to have been selected to serve as your provost. My thoughts today build on the vision laid out by our new president, who

has challenged our community not to rest on significant past accomplishments, but to move forward vigorously to greater academic excellence and expanded influence in the world. The history of USC has been one of consistent progress, marked recently by the remarkable achievements under the leadership of President Sample and his provosts, Lloyd Armstrong and C. L. Max Nikias. Of course, USC's success in the last two decades has depended on the vision, intellectual energy, and talent of its scholarly and creative faculty, many of whom are here today.

Before I turn to thoughts about our future, I must acknowledge some of the people here whose support and guidance have played an important part in my successes. I have been fortunate to have found mentors throughout my life, and among the most influential is President Nikias. We all know of his energy, his commitment to USC, and his passion for academic excellence and innovative approaches to research and pedagogy. I also know that he is an excellent mentor, allowing me to expand my horizons from the law school to that of the entire university, including me in negotiations as this institution acquired two hospitals and

communication, constant stimulation, and immediate gratification. Here we spend time – sometimes a long time – trying to figure out the answers to the hardest problems. As physicist Richard Feynman once wrote, science creates an “expanding frontier of ignorance” where most discoveries lead to more questions.

Accordingly, we are not content to publish the first draft of our initial thoughts and then move to a new topic, but we revise, we invite criticism and collaboration, and we test each statement rigorously. We do not think the best answers are those provided in 140 characters or in sound bites. Crucially, we provide an environment where profound disagreements are examined critically, but civilly; where we learn to respect those who put forward reasoned arguments with which we disagree but that advance the inquiry; and where we teach our students to combat ignorance and irrationality through civic engagement and the pursuit of wisdom and judgment.

In short, universities are spaces for conscious deliberation, a process that USC neuroscientist and University Professor Antonio Damasio defines as sustained “reflection over knowledge.” Universities are an antidote to the extraordinary emphasis we place today on rapid decision-making, to the tumultuous cacophony of information, and to glib pronouncements masquerading as wisdom.

FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND CONSTRUCTIVE SKEPTICISM

Because of their durability and stability, universities are unique places for a certain kind of education. This is the second characteristic of a university I highlight today. Unlike some other institutions of learning, our purpose is not to compel students to memorize facts – although sometimes that is the foundation for further intellectual progress. Nor is it to teach a particular skill that may become obsolete as professions change – although our students leave with key skills that will serve them well no matter their future.

USC visiting scholar and former Xerox chief scientist John Seely Brown describes our

pedagogical objective as educating students to be “resilient,” able to face a changing and complex world and adapt productively. We seek to instill constructive skepticism. To help students become educated skeptics who question and probe, but with the purpose of constructing something new, whether it is art, knowledge, a research project, or even further questions.

Providing such an education to our students is one way we acknowledge the substantial support society accords research universities. Not only do governments provide direct support in the form of research grants and student aid, but the federal and state revenue forgone through granting tax-exempt status to universities and providing deductions for charitable contributions to educational institutions also represents tens of billions of dollars annually.

The privileges we enjoy demand of us a commitment to this kind of teaching as a way to keep knowledge alive, human, and relevant. Our research, scholarship, and creative work contribute directly to the excellence of our Ph.D. programs and flagship professional degrees, and help us attract post-doctoral fellows in all disciplines who are beginning to pursue their own research supported by more senior scholars.

Our search for knowledge must also shape the undergraduate curriculum. USC’s undergraduate students are now among the very best in the nation – not just in terms of objective scores, but also in terms of curiosity, engagement with the world, and ambition. We must help them achieve their potential through teaching that is rigorous and stimulating, and that provides them interdisciplinary breadth as well as the capacity to delve deeply. We continue to review our General Education curriculum, a process we began a few years ago and on which we collaborate closely with the College. We are working now to ensure that our very best teachers – whether tenure-track or non-tenure track – teach GE classes, which should provide our students with a common experience in foundational courses while also accounting for their heterogeneity of backgrounds and interests.

Although we are a large university, we must craft our upper-division curriculum so that every undergraduate student has a capstone experience that allows her to synthesize, create something new, and engage with a problem. There are many ways to do that:

- from performances in our arts schools to a global experience helping introduce a micro-business to a developing country;
- from an integrative seminar using multimedia techniques to communicate more deeply to the new USC Academy for Polymathic Study, bringing students and faculty together to experience how interdisciplinary approaches can provide traction on enduring questions;
- from the many hands-on undergraduate research fellowships to an internship in Sacramento applying analysis to a question of policy facing our state.

We may need to be more flexible in scheduling classes, organizing teaching loads, and crossing school boundaries, but surely we are nimble enough to achieve this kind of academic excellence. Our goal should be that every student who graduates has at least one such experience, often one that involves faculty and students from several disciplines.

We will also further enhance undergraduate life, continuing the successful Visions and Voices program, and using the Tutor Campus Center as a place for members of our community to interact. I ask that all faculty find ways to participate with students outside the classroom in the increasingly robust intellectual and cultural life on our campus: attend a symposium of Ph.D. students, go to lunch or coffee with a group of undergrads, or drop by a master's dinner in the residence halls.

In that respect, I'm pleased to announce that we will be able to house all our freshmen in residential colleges by academic year 2012-2013. Moreover, next year we will be designating a residential college as the University Residential College for our Trustee and Presidential Scholars, as well as

other honor students. We will continue to focus on improving the residential college experience, ensuring that faculty masters set the intellectual and cultural tone for the colleges.

NOURISHING RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND CREATIVE WORK

The third aspect of a university like USC is that it allows outstanding faculty to produce consequential scholarly and creative work. In his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, urban studies theorist Richard Florida notes, "[C]reativity flourishes best in a unique kind of social environment: one that is stable enough to allow continuity of effort, yet diverse and broad-minded enough to nourish creativity in all its subversive forms." This is precisely the institutional design of research universities, so it should not surprise us that many of the contemporary advances in technology, medicine, understanding of organizations, digital communications, and more have their roots in a university. USC has played an influential role here, leading the way with research in the fields of engineering, communications, and the physical sciences.

With the rise of the life sciences and medicine as the primary focus for national research, USC is again poised to become a leader. Indeed, our work is enhanced because the expertise we have developed in engineering and chemistry is a basis for a powerful intellectual convergence with the work of those who study biology and medicine – giving us the capacity to excel, for example, in bioinformatics or personalized medicine that applies a systems approach to cancer and other diseases. The bold decision to purchase two hospitals nearly two years ago has provided a foundation for translational research that has already paid dividends. Our success in obtaining \$56.8 million from the NIH for a Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute depended on our relationship with the hospitals, as well as our location in an urban neighborhood with underserved populations. The ability to bring together stellar faculty from eight schools on both campuses

and Children's Hospital Los Angeles was also instrumental in our obtaining the only CTSI in the Los Angeles area.

Faculty are the most important element in creating the right environment for creativity, and USC is fortunate to have some of the very best faculty in the world. They have been responsible for our tremendous gains in externally funded research over the past years. Our faculty are also committed to a culture of mentoring and collaboration that provides the best training for Ph.D. students and students in our top professional graduate-degree programs, establishes the foundation for the cultivation of post-doctoral fellows, and creates an environment where outstanding assistant professors can thrive.

Our current aspirations demand that we attract additional transformative faculty to USC. We see the impact of transformative faculty in all parts of our university, from the multi-school group in health economics – which is playing a role in the national health policy debate – to the researchers in molecular microbiology and immunology who seek a better understanding of and treatment for viruses such as AIDS, hepatitis C, and influenza; from the cluster hire in marine biology that led to a \$25 million NSF Science and Technology Center in deep ocean research, to our renowned creative writing professors whose work transports us to new worlds and helps us understand this world better. Transformative faculty are catalysts for intellectual and creative energy.

We will continue the initiatives underway to attract transformative scholars, including the Provost Professor hiring initiative and the commitment to recruiting and retaining excellent scholars who add to the diversity of our university. The faculty we target are not just active researchers who have already won prestigious prizes. We are also focused on rising stars who are in the early-middle stages of their careers. These are the scholars who will be the recipients of the prizes in the future that acknowledge the work that they will do here at USC.

We will be expanding programs designed to provide support to the deans and schools in the recruitment of transformative faculty. Tomorrow, I will announce a further university-level commitment to our neurosciences program – a program unique in the breadth of its inquiry, touching on disciplines as diverse as biology, business, economics, engineering, gerontology, law, medicine, philosophy, and psychology. Last year, a group of faculty reorganized the neurosciences Ph.D. program; this year, a faculty committee will help me and the relevant deans identify and recruit transformative scholars in the area of neurosciences, including neurogenetics and neuroimaging.

A university is uniquely suited to the pursuit of knowledge in the life and physical sciences because such inquiry occurs in the same place that nurtures social scientists and humanists. The institutional design of a university ensures, for example, that the work of scientists who pursue breakthroughs in stem cell research, or a better understanding of disease through epigenetics, is subjected to critical inquiry about the ways these advances will change human behavior and social organization, as well as about the ethical implications of scientific progress.

The strength of a research university is the proximity of those who study in many disciplines: life, physical, and social sciences together with the humanities and the arts. In our academic community:

- Researchers study Alzheimer's disease and other consequences of aging, and playwright Velina Hasu Houston demonstrates the effects of the disease by rendering characters of the past more vividly than interactions in the present in a play about an aging mother's relationship with her daughter.
- Architects design buildings here and in Asia, and novelist T. C. Boyle reveals the many facets of Frank Lloyd Wright through the story of the women in his life, narrated by a Japanese architect who studied with him.

- Public policy experts, urban planners, and engineers work to improve transportation so that it brings us closer, and poet David St. John gives us a glimpse of how a train ride over the prairie shaped the lives of a boy and his grandmother.
- Political scientists and neuroscientists describe how framing affects decision-making in politics and the Internet, and a student curator's discovery in the Fisher Museum of the history of the Jinks Room murals fundamentally alters the way we perceive and evaluate those murals.

These studies need not be self-consciously linked to propel our inquiries forward because the physical and intellectual closeness invariably produces consequences.

Accordingly, I am also announcing tomorrow an initiative to help schools attract transformative faculty in the social sciences and the humanities. With the guidance of committees of outstanding faculty in these disciplines, we will ask schools and departments to recruit faculty or groups of faculty who will propel them into the very top ranks of scholarly achievement. To do that, the proposals for provost support will include explanations and evidence of the impact of such hires on the department, the steps taken to ensure excellence in Ph.D. or other graduate training, and the momentum within the program with respect to the research and creative work of current faculty.

To sum up the first three characteristics of a university like USC: First, the institutional design of a modern research university provides durability, continuity, and an element of insulation. Second, this design allows faculty to educate students to be resilient in the face of uncertainty and complexity and to develop the qualities of constructive skepticism. Third, the design also nurtures creative work and consequential research and scholarship, providing an environment where faculty from different disciplines and with different perspectives work in close proximity. Let me now conclude with the fourth and final characteristic.

EXPANDING GLOBAL REACH

The modern university is a global institution. With nearly 8,000 international students, USC has the largest international student population of any university in the country. In this way, we reflect our state. International Relations Professor Abe Lowenthal recounts in his book *Global California* that more than one of every four California residents today was born abroad, in nearly eighty different countries. Our own historian of California, University Professor Kevin Starr, describes Los Angeles as the second largest Mexican city on earth; a Korean, Iranian, Armenian, and Ethiopian city of significance; and "one of the two or three most important centers of Jewish civilization on the planet."

Although a global outlook is part of USC's DNA, as the rest of higher education also embraces global operations, we cannot rest on these accomplishments. We have begun the process of critically assessing our global outreach and making purposeful decisions for the future. This process has been guided by the thoughtful report of a joint Provost and Academic Senate committee, and it will be informed by the work of the strategic planning committees. Even at this early stage, however, new directions are emerging.

Our profile in Asia is among the strongest of any university, and most of our international students come from India and China. We must solidify that position, continuing to attract great students and to connect with our Asia-based alumni. We must also enhance the academic nature of our Asian presence, increasing the ability of our overseas offices to communicate the depth and breadth of our academic excellence and expanding the interactions among our faculty and students with institutions in Asia.

Although we must continue to emphasize our historical strengths in these countries – which have long involved business and engineering and now are expanding to include public administration, education, social work, programs in our College, architecture, and medicine – we should also

consider new bonds we can forge. The deans of our arts schools who meet regularly to create new academic programs under the banner of USC Arts are focusing this year on international connections. I expect that we will be announcing new arts initiatives – some that include connections with Asia – in the spring.

Furthermore, we must also expand our perspective to encompass a serious presence in Latin America. California's international connections have always been focused on both Asia and South America, and our history is intertwined with the history of Mexico. And yet our profile in key countries in South America depends on the relationships of individual faculty or schools, rather than reflecting the full strength of our institution.

Accordingly, my office will begin this semester to work with faculty and deans to devise a multi-pronged strategy aimed at enhancing our connections with South America and highlighting our academic and creative work that focuses on this area, its influence in the world, and the local populations that emigrated here from neighboring countries. We will increase the visibility, expertise, and outreach of our Mexico City office, and we are planning to open our next international office in this region, likely in Brazil, a country enjoying significant economic growth with an expanding middle class.

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As I reread Kevin Starr's one-volume history of California over the holiday break, I was again struck by the parallels between the California experience, particularly the history of our great city, and the evolution of our university:

- Engineering led the way, both in terms of infrastructure and information systems/computing;
- Cinema and entertainment have thrived here, avoiding the monopolistic tendencies of East Coast players;

- Professionals have been civic as well as economic leaders, just as our professional schools first established the strong reputation of USC;
- The arts have flourished, with novelists, visual artists, actors, musicians, and poets finding inspiration in the environment and the energy of this remarkable state;
- The study of the humanities was propelled forward with the arrival of intellectuals escaping Nazi Germany, such as Mann, Adorno, and Horkheimer; and
- The latest additions to the economy are the fields of communications and biotechnology – the first where USC leads the nation, and the second where we are making our mark among the top echelon of research institutions.

Our vast potential – natural, economic, and human – gives me confidence that California and Los Angeles will play a pivotal role in the future, and USC will be the pre-eminent intellectual engine.

At the end of his description of the gold rush, Professor Starr concludes that people from all "corners of the earth," particularly from the Pacific Rim, "ventured everything" to come to California to strike it rich. He writes, "Such a hope, such a psychology of expectation, fused the California experience irretrievably onto a dream of better days: of a sudden, almost magical, transformation of the ordinary."

"A sudden, almost magical, transformation of the ordinary." That is precisely what happens every day on our campus, as the experiences and opportunities found only here, at this unique institution, change the lives of students, faculty, staff, alumni, our neighborhood, and our world. I look forward to working with you all as we reach new heights of excellence and influence, and I appreciate your collegiality and warm support today and in the future.