

MEMORANDUM

To: USC Faculty

From: C. L. Max Nikias 

Date: April 30, 2007

Subject: University Committee on Academic Review (UCAR)

Office of the Provost

**C. L. Max Nikias**  
Provost and  
Senior Vice  
President for  
Academic Affairs

Over the past eight years, UCAR has completed reviews of nearly every unit at USC that grants graduate degrees. These reviews provide essential guidance for administrative decisions as we strive to enhance the excellence of our academic programs.

Last spring, UCAR engaged in its own self-study. A subcommittee of UCAR collected input from a number of sources: chairs of units that had been evaluated; faculty who served on internal review committees; deans; and members and past members of the UCAR committee itself. The committee also reviewed procedures followed at other universities. We ultimately revised our procedures, having circulated a number of drafts for feedback and approval.

This spring, UCAR is conducting three reviews using its revised procedures ("UCAR II"). The units currently under review are the Rossier School of Education, the Mork Family Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, and the Neuroscience Program, which spans both USC campuses.

UCAR II has several notable features:

- The entire review cycle for a unit will be completed in less than one year—from designation to participate in a review to post-review meeting. This timetable assures that the results of the review are relevant;
- There is a single review committee that includes one internal member and two or three external members (from other reputable institutions). Additional members are added if the unit is considerably large and complex. All members are independent of the unit under review;
- Prior to the review, a memorandum of understanding is completed that involves the chair of the unit, the appropriate dean(s), and a representative from the Provost's Office. This MOU sets out the focus of the site visit in advance and ensures the commitment of all the parties involved;
- The UCAR executive committee reviews the committee's report and the unit's response, and then forwards these materials to the Provost's Office with its comments;
- The Provost's Office uses these reports as part of its annual planning cycle.

We used UCAR II last semester, and our revised process received positive feedback. I am convinced that this process is more efficient, will provide useful input to units that participate, and will be integrated into the university's planning processes.

I appreciate the leadership that the UCAR Chair, Professor Margy Gatz, has provided over the last several years. She presided over the process of devising the new UCAR guidelines and oversaw the first reviews under this system. I also want to acknowledge Vice Provost Jean Morrison, who works closely with the UCAR committee and provides the oversight of this process from the Provost's Office.

I encourage all faculty to read the review guidelines in more detail, along with the outline of a memorandum of agreement. These can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/admin/progreview/>. UCAR II promises to provide us valuable information about the stature and quality of our academic programs as the university continues its ascent into the highest ranks of research universities.

cc: Elizabeth Garrett  
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