



MEMORANDUM

Office of the Provost

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

To: Academic Deans, Department Chairs and Faculty  
From: C. L. Max Nikias *C. L. Nikias*  
Date: March 19, 2007  
Subject: Reconfiguration of the USC Annenberg Center for Communication and the Establishment of 100 USC Annenberg Fellowships

On behalf of President Sample, I am proud to announce that USC and the Annenberg Foundation have agreed to reconfigure the Annenberg Center for Communication in a manner that will allow USC to achieve its strategic plan objectives and accelerate its pacesetting role in cross-disciplinary communications-related graduate research and education.

The USC Annenberg Center for Communication was established by an historic \$120 million gift from the Annenberg Foundation in 1993 to foster collaboration among three schools: The USC Annenberg School for Communication, USC School of Cinematic Arts and USC Viterbi School of Engineering. Since that time we indeed have seen cross-disciplinary excellence and innovation take root in these schools, a testament to the vision of the foundation and the enthusiastic participation of many outstanding scholars.

That now makes this an ideal time to strategically re-invest the funding in order to reflect President Sample's strong commitment to creating some of the world's best graduate programs; this can allow us to make the deepest and most enduring impact on a major frontier of knowledge.

Effective July 1, 2007, the primary focus of the USC Annenberg Center for Communication will be on creating a unique and elite cadre of at least 100 world-class graduate student fellows in these three schools, supported by at least \$4 million a year in new funding for graduate student fellowships. These students will be collectively known as the **USC Annenberg Fellows**, and will enjoy an unprecedented level of funding and support. They will work with outstanding faculty on a broad range of projects and on cutting-edge communication and digital media research.

Given that we have made the creation of new Ph.D. student fellowships a top priority, this change will help spur the further transformation of graduate research and education at USC. Combined with the university's recent commitment to triple Ph.D. fellowship funding to \$11 million, this brings the total university funding for graduate fellowships to a minimum of \$15 million annually. These funds are now available for the recruitment of the most talented graduate students—women and men who will advance our research mission and who constitute the next generation of academic and professional leaders. Few universities -if any- in the United States can match this level of commitment.

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The campus-like setting on West Adams Boulevard that has been home to the USC Annenberg Center for Communication will continue to be available for the three schools' research programs and for the USC Annenberg Fellows. The schools will be able to use this space for conferences, seminars, visiting scholars, and interdisciplinary research projects—including many such activities that have already been established with financial support from the Center. In order to preserve and enhance these programs, each of the three schools will continue to receive \$600,000 annually from the Center endowment.

Under this decentralization of USC Annenberg Center activities and funding, a director of the USC Annenberg Fellows Program will be appointed in the Graduate School to administer this new fellows program, and other activities will be coordinated by the three individual schools. As such, the Center will function without an executive director.

We are deeply thankful to Professor Jonathan Aronson for his contributions in that role over the past two years. He has carried out USC's mission through his leadership, his scholarly accomplishments in international communications and emerging communication issues, and his vast network of relationships with leading scholars and organizations across the nation. We are also grateful that Professor Aronson has agreed to continue to serve USC in new academic leadership capacities.

Under Dr. Aronson's direction, the USC Annenberg Center grew into a cross-disciplinary intellectual community with a unique level of energy and vigor, drawing top minds from around the world for seminars and other programs (efforts that will continue in a decentralized way after this reconfiguration); the Center performed cutting-edge scholarly work on emerging forms of digital media and the adoption of such media by youth; it has helped revolutionize interactive gaming technology for serious scholarly and pedagogical purposes; and it has fostered impressive immersive aural technologies.

Finally, we are especially grateful for the continued support of the Annenberg Foundation, USC's closest partner in leading the communications revolution. Indeed, the Annenberg family has shown rare vision over the decades in recognizing the imperative to explore and address—and successfully guide—the flow of communication and information in our world. They understood, earlier than most, that a change in how we communicate is a change in what it means to be a human being, at the level of individuals and as a society. Now we move forward again as partners, eagerly anticipating how the USC Annenberg Fellows and related programs will bring further excellence to this crucial academic realm.

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