

Listening to Students

Fall 2006-Spring 2007 Findings

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October 18, 2007

Introduction

In 2006, as part of an ongoing effort to better understand students' perceptions of the undergraduate experience, USC's Division of Student Affairs continued its "Listening to Students" research project, in which staff members held informal interviews with undergraduate students. Initiated in spring 2006 as a part of strategic plan objective to create a "culture of evidence," this research focuses on one-to-one conversations between undergraduate students and key Student Affairs staff to allow the university to further understand students' perceptions. In addition to yielding potentially valuable student data, the project would also allow students to meet and develop advisor/mentor relationships with Student Affairs staff. For more information regarding the history and background of the Listening to Students project, please see the spring 2006 report, available online: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/sor/>.

This report addresses the second and third continuous semesters of Student Affairs Listening to Students research, summarizing findings from interviews conducted in fall 2006 and spring 2007. Following the spring 2006 research, changes to the interview questions and protocol were developed based on the analysis of the data and suggestions from interviewers and stakeholders. Overall, the number of questions was reduced in order for the interviews to more realistically be completed within 30 to 45 minutes, the suggested interview time. In addition, to further assess effective teaching and learning as it relates to student success, as well as students' satisfaction with general education courses, we added specific questions to capture their favorite instructors and the courses they taught. The revised 2006-2007 interview protocol, containing questions and discussion points, is provided in Appendix A, *Listening to Students Interview Guidelines*.

Methodology and Sample

In fall 2006, 52 Student Affairs staff members were invited or nominated to participate in the interviewing process. Each individual was asked to dedicate up to five hours per week to the Listening to Students project. A web portal was designed to allow interviewers to schedule available time for interviews. Following this, a random sample of 3,000 currently-enrolled undergraduate students was selected from the undergraduate population (excluding first semester freshmen, due to their limited experience in college) of 13,404. These students were invited to volunteer to take part in the project via email (see *Appendix B, Listening to Students Email Text*). Students were directed to the project website, where they could schedule an appointment with participating Student Affairs staff. Students had the choice of being randomly assigned to an interviewer or to select their interviewer from a list. This choice was given in order to encourage student participation, in case there were students who were interested in speaking to particular staff members. Confirmation emails were sent to both interviewers and students.

The process of selecting interviewers and sampling students was repeated in spring 2007. One difference, however, was that 25 graduate students taking a course in the Rossier School of Education also participated as interviewers, as part of a course assignment. These graduate students were given background information on the Listening to Students project, guidance regarding how to conduct appropriate research interviews, and instructions for using the project website to schedule and complete interviews.

Interviews conducted by Student Affairs staff members usually took place in

their offices or in conference rooms. Interviews conducted by graduate students took place in a location agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee. Generally, interviews were expected to take between 30 and 45 minutes. Following each interview, interviewers were directed to enter their documented interview notes in a web-based data entry form on the Listening to Students web portal.

Of the 3,000 students invited to participate in fall 2006, 78 students completed an interview, resulting in a response rate of 2.6%, the same response rate achieved in the spring. In spring 2007, an additional unique group of 3,000 students were invited to participate and 92 students completed an interview, resulting in a response rate of 3.1%. As with the spring 2006 sample, which had a response rate of 3.0%, there are many possible reasons for the low response rate:

- ◆ Students’ reluctance to complete a 30- to 45-minute interview with a university staff member
- ◆ Students feeling that they already have contributed feedback to the university through other surveys and research methods
- ◆ Use of email as the primary means of reaching out to students to solicit their participation, which may be easily dismissed and deleted

The student interviews included three sections:

Section I	Student Experiences and Perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences students valued most/least • Reason for applying to/selecting USC 	Approx. 10 to 15 minutes
Section II	Areas of Specific to the Student Affairs Strategic Plan	Approx. 15 to 20 minutes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering an Intellectually Centered Student Culture • Preserving and Advancing the Unique USC Student Experience • Inventing the Future of Student Services • Promoting Local and Global Citizenship • Creating a Culture of Evidence 	
Section III	<p>Exploration of areas of interest to staff member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program-specific questions • Opportunity for students to address any area of interest 	Approx. 5 minutes

Prior to the first question, each interviewer was expected to describe his or her role within the Division of Student Affairs. Interviewers could ask the students about their year and major – and any appropriate introductory information to start the conversation. (Information regarding students’ academic year and major was provided to interviewers based on available data in SIS.)

Summary of Findings

The following offers a summary of the findings in response to key interview questions.

Student Experiences and Perceptions: Academics Come to Forefront

The first series of interview questions address students’ experience and satisfaction with the university.

What have you experienced at USC that you find most valuable?

As in spring 2006, academic experiences were the most common response to this

question in fall 3006 and spring 2007. Of the 149 students who provided a complete response, 49% indicated an academically-related experience as most valuable. Several students noted the opportunity to learn from other students and to engage with professors during class discussions. In the words of one student, “[class discussions] have really opened my mind.” Another student cited her experience in the Thornton School of Music: “I love the interaction with the faculty and the ability to perform with wonderful guest artists.” Other examples provided by students included the following:

- ◆ Developing friendships with professors outside of the classroom
- ◆ Conducting research with professors
- ◆ Effectiveness of faculty teaching
- ◆ Willingness of faculty members to talk with students

Approximately 23% of students said that the people they met and the social interactions they had were most valuable, citing the following specific examples:

- ◆ Participation in activities such as Welcome Week, Pre-Rush, and residential housing programs, helped promote self-awareness
- ◆ USC’s friendly social environment and the ease of meeting new students on campus
- ◆ USC’s networking opportunities for career pursuits
- ◆ USC’s many campus speakers and events

In particular, a common theme among the students is that USC “feels like a small campus even though it’s big.” One student said that at USC, “it’s really amazing how you get the chance to really connect with other students and faculty members.”

Another theme among the responses – cited by approximately 13% of

interviewees – is students’ appreciation of opportunities to participate in different academic and social organizations on campus, including cultural clubs, musical groups, recreational sports, volunteer programs, and fraternities and sororities. One student who became a mentor in a volunteer program said her participation has improved her “leadership and citizenship skills.” Students’ responses to this question seem to suggest an engaging academic and social environment exists at USC, considering that half of all students cited academic experiences as valuable and many other students mentioned social interactions, clubs, and organizations. Other students who responded to this question mentioned campus diversity (7%), housing (3%), the surrounding community (3%), and athletic programs (2%) as their most valuable experiences.

The distribution of responses to this question was similar to that of the spring 2006 findings, when 48% of students cited academic experiences as most valuable, followed by 20% of students selecting people and social interaction, and 13% selecting clubs and organizations. These three categories made up 85% of the responses in fall 2006 and spring 2007 and 81% of the responses in spring 2006. Table 1 shows student responses to this question in fall 2006 and spring 2007.

Table 1. Experiences Valued Most by Students

Category	Number	Percentage
Academic experiences	73	49.0%
People and social interactions	34	22.8%
Clubs and organizations	20	13.4%
Diversity of students	10	6.7%
Housing	5	3.4%
Community surrounding USC	4	2.7%
Athletic programs	3	2.0%
Total	149	

What have you experienced that has been less valuable?

When the interviewers asked students what aspect of the university they found less valuable or disappointing, 41% of the respondents to this question were dissatisfied with an academically-related experience. Examples provided by students included:

- ◆ Large lecture classes that hinder student learning
- ◆ Limited number of discussion-based courses (as opposed to lecture-based courses)
- ◆ Ineffective teaching styles; inability to engage students during class

In describing the class size issue, one student said that “it is difficult to engage with professors in classes of several hundred students.” In describing the teaching style issue, one student said her professor “taught right from the book,” while another student said her professor “didn’t make the subject matter come to life.”

Some students pointed to dissatisfaction with departmental priorities, as described by one student who indicated that her school “favors graduate students over undergraduates.” Other students expressed dissatisfaction with academic advising in their departments. As illustrative examples of this, one student said the advisement he received “was really just class selection,” while another said she doesn’t get “correct information” from her advisor.

Following academic experiences, the next most common responses to this question concerned USC services, with 17% of students finding little value in student programs and services. One common theme among the interviews was inadequate space and campus resources for students, including the following examples:

- ◆ Insufficient recreational and parking facilities
- ◆ Lack of a common area where students can eat or study together
- ◆ Declining quality of service, with technology increasingly being used to replace

human interaction

- ◆ Welcome Week activities that do not respond to transfer students' needs

Other categories with which students expressed dissatisfaction included people and social interactions (10%), housing (9%), and transportation and parking (8%).

Overall, responses were slightly different from those in spring 2006, when students cited academic experiences (40%), services and programs (18%), and housing (18%) most frequently. Of students citing housing, several were very unhappy with the availability of on-campus housing and quality of off-campus housing. Table 2 reviews responses for fall 2006 and spring 2007.

Table 2. Experiences Valued Least by Students

Category	Number	Percentage
Academic experiences	60	41.4%
Services and programs	24	16.6%
People and social interactions	15	10.3%
Housing	13	9.0%
Transportation and parking	12	8.3%
Athletics and ticketing	10	6.9%
Nothing	5	3.4%
Cost	4	2.8%
Clubs and organizations	1	0.7%
Security	1	0.7%
Total	145	

Why did you choose to apply to and attend USC?

Students offered a variety of reasons for attending USC. The most common reason was the availability of academic programs that students were interested in studying. Among the 143 responses, 30% of students said the availability of programs and/or majors influenced their decision to attend USC. Some of the specific programs students mentioned include Engineering, Architecture, Pharmacy, Communications,

Music, and the Resident Honors Program.

Twenty-five students (17%) cited the location of USC as the primary reason for their choice. Most students who said location was an influence mentioned that relatives lived in the area. The location of the school also related to what the students wanted to study. For example, one student majoring in Cinema wanted to live close to Hollywood. Still, some students who grew up in other areas wanted to move to the Los Angeles area because of the weather.

USC's academic reputation (17%) was also a major factor in students' choice. Within this category, nine students specifically mentioned the Marshall School of Business for its excellent reputation. Two students specifically cited USC's standing in the US News and World Report college rankings. In Table 3, complete results for this question are shown.

Financial aid (12%) and campus visits (11%) were also cited frequently. One student said that USC's financial aid package "sealed the deal" in choosing between several schools. Three students citing the importance of campus visits mentioned that they noticed USC's size during their visit, one of them mentioning that he appreciated the fact that USC is a "small community."

Table 3. Reasons for Attending USC

Category	Number	Percentage
Availability of programs and majors	43	30.1%
Location	25	17.5%
Academic reputation	24	16.8%
Financial aid / scholarship	17	11.9%
Campus visit	16	11.2%
Family	12	8.4%
Diversity	5	3.5%
Athletics	1	0.7%
Total	143	

Student Affairs Strategic Plan Elements

In order to understand students' perceptions in context with elements of the Student Affairs' strategic plan, several questions and discussion points addressed the following plan initiatives:

- I. Fostering an Intellectually Centered Student Culture
- II. Preserving and Advancing the Unique USC Student Experience
- III. Inventing the Future of Student Services
- IV. Promoting Local and Global Citizenship
- V. Creating a Culture of Evidence

Staff members generally addressed each of the five areas, although individual items within each Strategic Plan area were often skipped, primarily because of time constraints. For this reason, responses in this section were less complete.

During your time at USC, what has most engaged, cultivated, and enriched your mind and spirit?

The 128 complete responses to this question primarily fell into one of three categories: clubs and organizations (34%), campus cultural and sports events (29%), and classes and academic opportunities (22%). Of those students citing clubs and organizations as most engaging, three interviewees mentioned Alternative Break trips. Other organizations mentioned by students include the Marshall Women's Leadership Board, KSCR, Program Board, Volunteer Center, and the Taiwanese American student organization.

Among students saying campus cultural and sports events engaged, cultivated, and enriched their mind and spirit, the Visions and Voices program was cited by eight students. USC football was mentioned by four students. It is interesting to note that a

larger percentage of students cited cultural and sports events in the 2006-2007 school year (29%) than cited it in spring 2006. The implementation of the Visions and Voices program in fall 2006 may have contributed to this increase. One student talked about Visions and Voices “forces students to think beyond the classroom.” Other students were impressed with the range of cultural events and the fact they are offered to students for free.

Of those citing classes and academic opportunities, six students specifically mentioned General Education (GE) programs. One student said that GE classes were difficult, but that the information he learned “opened his eyes above and beyond his horizon.” Other students mentioned specific classes and professors.

Students answered this question by citing specific people or characteristics of the USC community. For example, four students appreciated the diversity of people on campus; in particular, one student stated that she appreciated meeting people from different walks of life, adding that she appreciates the pride that some students have in their mixed race heritage. Other students mentioned people with whom they have interacted on campus: classmates, professors, advisors, and fellow students in residential housing. Only one student indicated that her mind/spirit had not been enriched during her time at USC. Table 4 shows responses for all categories.

Table 4. What Has Most Engaged, Cultivated, and Enriched Your Mind and Spirit

Category	Number	Percentage
Clubs and organizations	44	34.4%
Cultural and sporting events	37	28.9%
Classes and academic opportunities	32	25.0%
Other / Nothing	9	7.0%
Interactions with People	6	4.7%
Total	128	

What were your expectations of the academic experience at USC? Have these expectations been met?

Most of the students interviewed (82%) said they expected their academic experience would be difficult. One student anticipated that her classes would be challenging and that professors would be intimidating. Another student, who had good grades in high school, expected it would be more difficult to achieve those same grades at USC. Another student believed his classmates would be more competitive because he knows USC attracts the top students from different schools. Of the 19 students who did not specifically say that their academic experience would be difficult, only two expected USC to be relatively easy. The others either did not have specific expectations or could not remember their expectations.

Of the students who gave specific responses to the second part of this question (whether expectations have been met), 60% mentioned their expectations were met and an additional 24% students indicated their expectations have been met, but with exceptions. One student, reporting that his expectations were met, said that accounting classes have been difficult and that the professors assign many group projects. Most students who cited exceptions to their expectations said some courses were more challenging than others. One student said some of her professors have pushed her to “think about stuff” while other instructors “just use PowerPoint and multiple choice tests.” Another student expected that classes would be hard and that this expectation has been met but she has been disappointed with some students’ work ethic.

Sixteen percent of students believed their expectations have not been met. One student said she was surprised to discover that her science classes at USC were less difficult than the Advanced Placement (AP) courses she took while in high school.

Other students with unmet expectations were surprised to be doing so well, one saying, “I expected it to be more challenging. I expected to be in the lower level of my class and yet I have a 3.6 GPA.”

Who have been your favorite teachers thus far? What classes have you taken from them?

This question was added to the interview protocol based on feedback to the spring 2006 report. Most students were eager to answer this question, with 142 of them citing 192 different teachers and/or classes. The results demonstrated the wide range of faculty that students favor: no teacher was mentioned by more than three students. A list of the faculty mentioned by students is provided in Appendix C.

Several students specifically cited GE courses among their favorites, including Writing 140 (6 students), Anthropology 200, and War and Memory in Korean Literature. The three most commonly reported departments or academic areas were Writing (17 students), Architecture (11), and Business Administration (10).

What do you consider to be unique about the USC student experience?

Responses to this question varied greatly, with a few common themes emerging. The Trojan Family, or a sense of campus community, was students’ most common response regarding what makes the USC experience unique, cited by 21 of 143 students who responded to this question. One student said that “at USC I am not just a number. There is a real sense of family.” Another believed that “once you’re a Trojan, you’re always a Trojan.”

One student cited the history and tradition of USC, saying “when you step on the

campus you can feel it. “ Another talked about the independence among different schools and departments at USC. She said that, although the schools are independent, “they know how to work collaboratively.” Another mentioned the balance between social life and academics.

Thirteen students mentioned football as what they consider unique about the USC experience, specifically mentioning the “game day atmosphere” and overall university support for the team. One student said that USC’s relationship to the football team is “cult-like, but in a good way.” In spring, only three students mentioned football in response to this question; the increase may be due to the fact that fall interviews were held during football season.

Ten students mentioned USC’s location in Los Angeles and connection to the rest of the region as a unique feature. These students cited proximity and connection to the entertainment industry, as well as collaborations with the downtown business community.

What does the concept of “the Trojan Family” mean to you? Is it important to you?

Regardless of their response to the previous question, students were asked about the importance of the Trojan Family concept. Most students associated the concept with the alumni and networking opportunities that would be available to them upon completion of their studies at USC. Several students said that this concept was not meaningful at the present time, but would be important upon graduation. Other respondents mentioned specific events and interactions with alumni as valuable

experiences.

Of the 106 students answering the second part of the question, 90 (85%) said that the concept of the Trojan Family was important to them. One student reported feeling “secure to have this special connectivity.” Another said, “It’s important because the spirit makes you feel proud.” Finally, one mentioned that “without the Trojan Family, USC would just be another educational institution.”

The positive feeling regarding the Trojan Family concept was not universal, however. One student said that the Trojan Family was important but, as a commuter student, she did not feel that the “family” always reached out to her. Other students said it was not that important and one student had not heard the term before.

What campus offices/services have you found most helpful?

Responses to this question were wide-ranging, with more than 60 different offices and services cited by 110 students. Most students cited multiple offices and services. Academic advising offices accounted for the greatest number of responses (24% of students), with advising in the Annenberg School mentioned by five students. Many students also discussed clubs and organizations (18%), non-academic advising offices and programs within academic units (15%), and the Career Planning and Placement Center (7%).

Other campus departments or offices mentioned in response to this question included the Counseling Center and the Financial Aid office.

What campus offices/services have you least helpful?

In response to this question, 73 students mentioned 34 different offices and

services. The only office cited by more than three students was the Student Health Center (8) and, of these responses, half discussed the limited hours that the center is open, a situation that has partially been addressed with the addition of weekend hours for 2007-2008. The other offices who were mentioned multiple times by interviewees are Registration, Career Planning and Placement Center, Department of Public Safety, Financial Aid, Housing, and Transportation.

What experiences outside of the classroom have you found engaging?

Responses to this question were difficult to categorize. Students mentioned a variety of topics, with 82 students identifying more than 100 different experiences. The most frequently cited program was Visions and Voices, mentioned by 16 students, with the Spike Lee and Quincy Jones events mentioned three times each. Also, 14 students mentioned volunteer opportunities, including Alternative Breaks, Friends and Neighbors Day, Joint Educational Project (JEP), and working for the Volunteer Center. Other experiences mentioned in the interviews include guest lecturers, career fairs, Greek events, Take Back the Night, Recreational Sports programs, and USC football and basketball games.

Do you feel you have been challenged at USC to get involved or make a difference in the local community? In the international community?

Regarding the local community, of the 118 students who gave a specific answer to the first question, 75 (64%) said yes. Students specifically cited programs such as Friends and Neighbors Day and Joint Educational Project (JEP). One student said, "There are always people who are getting involved in community service projects. It's

hard not to get involved.” However, several students said that, while volunteer opportunities are plentiful at USC, they do not always feel challenged to participate. Some students expressed an interest in getting involved in the community, but said they have not done so yet because of time constraints.

Only 18 students mentioned engaging with the international or global community – most citing specific programs in which they have been involved. Three students said that USC needs to do more internationally; one of these individuals added that most of the emphasis on international service comes from professors as opposed to campus programs.

Do you feel that faculty and administrators at USC are knowledgeable about what students experience here?

Most of the 123 students responding to this question answered positively, with 65 (53%) answering yes and 17 (14%) answering no. The remaining 41 students (33%) gave a mixed response. Typical of these mixed responses was the student who said, “Yes and no – some more than others.” One student who gave a mixed response elaborated: “Some do, but not everyone. Sometimes I think they understand but don’t know how to respond. They get what you tell them, but there are so many people here who have different needs that it’s difficult to know how to fix a problem.”

Of the students who answered yes to this question, some provided more detailed responses:

- ◆ “They are usually understanding when they work with students.”
- ◆ “Yes, people are experts in their fields and seem to ‘get it.’”
- ◆ Professors are generally understanding about busy student schedules and try

to accommodate student needs when possible.

- ◆ Faculty who were students here at one time are more knowledgeable about student needs and experiences.

Areas of Interviewer Interest: Time Constraints and Limited Data

In the final section of the interview, interviewers had an opportunity to follow-up on topics pertinent to the specific interviewee that may yield valuable information. Interviewers could ask questions triggered by a student's response earlier in the interview or based on information about the students' major, year, etc. In this section, there were some interesting responses that did not directly address a specific question. In particular, one of the recurring themes of this section involved parents' involvement in students' lives, with specific references to the following:

- ◆ Encouragement to participate in the Greek system
- ◆ Involvement in the application and decision-making process to attend USC
- ◆ Parents Weekend and the level of attention that parents and family members receive at USC, when "college is not for parents"

This theme is consistent with current literature in the Student Affairs field, which indicates that parents are playing an increasingly more active, and important, role in students' college experience, ranging from admission to decisions regarding academic majors to internship selection and post-graduation employment.

Limitations

Sample Size, Self-Selection, and Generalizability

Student interviewees served as a fairly representative cross-section of the USC

experience in terms of age, program of study, and opinion. The exception was the exclusion of first-semester freshmen. Student interviewees were generally enthusiastic about participating in the Listening to Students project. Many interviewers reported that many students stayed longer than expected and gave thorough and informative answers to all of the questions they were asked. Some students were reluctant to talk about their USC experience, but most students seemed to feel comfortable opening up about themselves. Several interviewers mentioned that some students were reluctant to speak at first, but opened up after a while. Given that this is a unique process – students are usually not interviewed by staff members for research purposes – this initial hesitation is understandable. Some students were concerned about answers they had given, realizing later in the interview that they wanted to give a different response to early questions like those asking what students found most and least valuable about their USC experience.

It is important to consider the impact of self-selection as it relates to the findings. Even though respondents were part of two separate random samples of 3,000 students each, given that the response rate was low, the 170 participating students may be a unique group – both in terms of their initial decision to participate and their commitment to complete the interview. (An additional 95 students signed up for interview times but did not show for their appointments.) Finally, among the students who were interviewed, it is possible that the more talkative and passionate students are the ones whose thoughts are more likely to be recorded by the interviewer and whose direct quotes are included in this report.

For these reasons, the findings from the Listening to Students report will have limited generalizability to the USC undergraduate student body at-large. However, the

purpose of the Listening to Students research is to elicit a depth of response not ordinarily achievable on traditional measures of student satisfaction and experience. Compared to traditional student surveys, these interviews are more student-driven and will lead to response details not normally accessible with a survey.

Open-Ended Questions: Academic Experiences and Student Organizations

Due to the open-ended nature of some of the questions, it is difficult to quantify many of the responses. Still, a compelling theme did arise from the fall interviews, specifically the prominence of the USC academic experience. This is the same primary theme that arose in the spring 2006 report findings. When asked to name what they found most and least valuable about their experience, more students addressed specifically academic experiences and issues. Given the university's commitment to learning in all environments, educational experiences occur in wide-ranging contexts at USC, which may contribute to this result. The next most common theme involved student clubs and organizations and other social experiences. Students spent a lot of time discussing their positive and negative experiences with organizations, both student-run groups and other campus organizations. Also, students stressed the social experiences they had within these organizations and in other settings. Finally, out-of-the-classroom events also resonated with students. The relatively new Visions and Voices program was cited often. This program did not exist in spring 2006 so its prominence in student responses after such a short time is notable.

When asked general, open-ended questions, students were primarily interested in relaying feedback about the varied learning opportunities available to them. Unless prompted, they usually did not talk about more practical issues, such as finances,

registration, campus facilities, safety, and parking. Instead, students opted to discuss their intellectual experience in the context of their specific academic programs and the vast array of non-classroom learning opportunities. Also, students were more enthusiastic and detailed in talking about these opportunities than they were about practical issues.

Final Analysis and Next Steps

Notably, in the three semesters of our Listening to Students research, a clear theme persists in students' value of their academic experience at USC – and they perceive academically-related programs and resources as paramount to their success and satisfaction in college. Particularly when aggregated with findings from previous reports, we learn valuable information relating to students' opinions and experiences:

- ◆ Students cite academic experiences and challenges most often when discussing what has been most valuable and, to a lesser degree, least valuable, during their time at USC.
- ◆ Students are excited to offer specific positive feedback about their favorite professors, courses, programs, and events.
- ◆ Students are generally satisfied with USC programs and services but are more than willing to offer suggestions for improvements.
- ◆ Although the response rate for the Listening to Students project is lower than desired, the students who do participate are generally enthusiastic about offering opinions about their unique USC experience.

If the Listening to Students project continues, this set of 170 interviews – along with the 102 interviews conducted in spring 2006 – should be considered part of a

longer-term research project designed to assess student learning and satisfaction.

Through our nearly two years of experience with this project, we have captured valuable, and more nuanced, data that will add to our growing body of student research on the needs, expectations, and experience of USC students. Ultimately, this information will support our divisional and institutional strategic planning and assessment processes, allowing us to provide a learning environment that better provides for students' development, persistence, and academic success at USC.

Listening to Students Interview Guidelines

Student Affairs' conversations with undergraduate students are intended to discover what is uppermost in students' minds about their experience at USC, both positive and negative. Accordingly, the conversations ideally involve mostly listening, with appropriate prompts to keep the student engaged. The conversations are intended to run 30-45 minutes. We recommend scheduling an additional 20-25 minutes to immediately record your report of the conversation, for a total of one hour scheduled time per conversation.

The conversation should be guided by the student's expressed experiences and priorities with the staff member's knowledge and experience serving to help the student reflect on and refine their expression.

We recommend structuring the conversation to have three parts:

- I. Solicitation of student experiences and perceptions (10 to 15 min.)
- II. Exploration of areas specific to Student Affairs Strategic Plan (15 min.)
- III. Exploration of areas of interest to staff member, based on student comments (5-10 min. or as time permits)

We recommend that the first 10 to 15 minutes involve encouraging the student to talk about their positive and negative experiences at USC.

We recommend the next 15 minutes be used to explore topics of interest to Student Affairs, particularly with regard to the Strategic Plan.

As time and the nature of the interview permits, we recommend the last 5 to 10 minutes be used to further explore topics the student has raised and to discuss areas of interest to the Student Affairs staff member conducting the conversation.

Attached are more details of the recommended structure.

Please keep in mind that this is not a classical "survey" in the sense of having asked every student the same questions so as to ensure comparability. These are genuinely conversations intended to engage students on the topics of importance to them. Also, see the "Suggested Prompts" at the end of this document for possible follow-up questions and prompts. Space is provided for additional questions you may want to ask students. Please provide both the questions and responses to any additional questions.

Conversations with Students
Structure and Questions

Section I Student Experiences and Perceptions (10 to 15 minutes)

Questions:

1. What have you experienced at USC that you find most valuable?
*(If student mentions coursework or classroom experience, ask for specific classes/courses.
Follow up by asking if these courses were inside or outside his/her major.)*

2. What have you experienced at USC that you found disappointing (or least valuable)?
*(If student mentions coursework or classroom experience, ask for specific classes/courses.
Follow up by asking if these courses were inside or outside his/her major.)*

3. Why did you choose to apply to and attend USC?

Section II Exploration of areas specific to Student Affairs Strategic Plan (15 min.)

Fostering an Intellectually Centered Student Culture

4. During your time at USC, what has most engaged, cultivated and enriched your mind and spirit?

(If this is unclear, mention that a central mission of USC is "the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit." If student mentions "classes" in general, ask for specific classes/courses. Follow up by asking if these courses were inside or outside his/her major.)

5. What were your expectations of the academic experience at USC? Have these expectations been met?

6. Who have been your favorite teachers thus far? What classes have you taken from them?

Preserving and Advancing the Unique USC Student Experience

7. What do you consider to be unique about the USC student experience?
(If this is unclear, ask the student to compare his/her experience with that of friends at other schools or, in the case of transfer students, previous schools.)

8. What does the concept of “the Trojan Family” mean to you? Is it important to you?

Inventing the Future of Student Services

9. What campus offices/services have you found most helpful (in response to needs/ questions)?

10. What campus offices/services have you found least helpful (in response to needs/ questions)?

11. What advice would you give to USC administrators on changes to improve the student experience?

12. What experiences outside of the classroom have you found engaging?

Promoting Local and Global Citizenship

13. Do you feel you have been challenged at USC to get involved or make a difference in the local community? In the international community?
(Ask for examples where applicable.)

14. What kinds of interaction do you have with students who are different from you?

Creating a Culture of Evidence

15. Other than this conversation, have you had any other opportunity to evaluate your experience at USC and provide feedback?

16. Do you feel that faculty and administrators at USC are knowledgeable about what students experience here?

Section III Exploration of areas of interest to staff member, based on student comments (5-10 min. or as time permits)

Some of the student's comments are likely to carry significance to the staff member engaged in the conversation, either as to differing possible interpretations of the student's experience, or as to related issues or experiences. This space can be used to explore these areas. Also, additional notes can be put here.

Notes:

Suggested Prompts (for all questions)

Prompts to continue the conversation are often best when open-ended and non-interpretive:

You mentioned
(as a statement, without probing)

Could you talk a little more about.....?
(without giving interpretation or direction other than the choice as to which of the student's phrases to reflect back to them)

Tell me more about why you feel this way...

Could you give me some examples of.....?
(if a student has answered yes or no but not provided specifics)

Do you have any suggestions for how to improve.....?
(if a student expresses dissatisfaction)

(Note: Contributions throughout by Prof. Ron Garet, President of the Academic Senate, are gratefully appreciated.)

Listening to Students
Email Text

Dear Student,

You have been selected, as a part of a random sample of students, to participate in Student Affairs' "Listening to Students" project this semester. Through this project, we want to hear directly from you on what is important about your USC experience. And you'll have an opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with a member of our Student Affairs team to share your likes, dislikes, concerns, and suggestions.

To thank you for your involvement, participants will be entered into a drawing to win one of three \$100 USC Bookstore gift certificates!*

Participation is easy. Simply go to <http://www.usc.edu/listening> and log on with your USC email user name and password. You will find an easy to use appointment scheduler that allows you to pick the date and time when you can spend 30 - 45 minutes with one of our staff members to talk about your USC experience. You can make your selection by staff member or by date/time you prefer. Once you have made your selection, you will receive a confirmation email with the name of the person with whom you will meet and the location. If your plans change, it is a simple matter to log in again and reschedule.

Your contribution to this project is valuable to us and to the students who will follow you at USC. If you have questions, please email us at listen@usc.edu.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Ken Taylor

Appendix C

Responses to Question 6:

Who have been your favorite teachers thus far? What classes have you taken from them?

Professor's Name	Department or Course Name/Number
Akishina	Russian 120
Anderson	Geology 108
Becker	Biological Sciences
Bender	International Relations
Bickers	Physics
Biersach	Music 422
Binder	International Relations
Borer	French
Bower	Writing 140
Brandeau	Civil Engineering
Braudy	English Literature
Bridel	Theatre
Brunn	Architecture
Burke	Physics 151
Burlingham	Music 465
Burns	Classics
Campany	Asian Religions
Carnicke	Theatre
Casper	Critical Studies 190
Chrystal	Business Administration
Chung	Architecture
Clarke	Health Communication
Cowan	Journalism 190
Crowley	Computer Science
Dekmejian	Political Science
Dekmejian	Political Science
Derwin	Sports Communication
Fields	Business Administration 403
Fields	Business Administration
Finkle	Microbiology
Finley	Philosophy
Finnegan	GE

Appendix C

Professor's Name	Department or Course Name/Number
Fisher	Record Producer
Fletcher	Production
Gaultier	Women in the Middle East
Gellason	Psychology
Ghirardo	Architecture
Gruber	Production 460
Gustafson	Cinema
Gutierrez	
Herrera	Biological Sciences 120B
Hopkins	Accounting 258
Hopkins	Business Administration 250A
Jackson-Fosset	Core 101
James	Accounting 250B
Jay	Writing 140
Kann	Political Science
Kemp	Core 102
Kincaid	English 262
Koletty	Environmental Studies 100
Koneley	French
Kovacovich	
Lamy	International Relations 210
Lazar	Comparative Literature
Lazare	Drawing
Lobowic	Linguistics 115
Lysak	
Magnum	Writing 340
Malton	Film
Mannis	Psychology
McCann	Philosophy 225
McClure	Neuroscience
Mitchell	Psychology
Palmer	Math
Paprecking	Writing 140
Philadelphia	Writing 340
Platt	Geology 105
Platt	War and Memory in Korean Lit.

Appendix C

Professor's Name	Department or Course Name/Number
Porter	Business Administration
Quick	Neuroscience
Ramirez	Political Science
Redekopp	Aerospace Engineering
Redekopp	
Reid	Religion
Rob	Writing
Rosen	East Asian Studies
Rowe	Business Administration
Safafi	
Schmunk	Music
Schreyach	Art History 255
Seip	History
Siqueiros	Printmaking
Slingerland	Psychology
Smith	Communication 203
Smith	Communication
Smith	
Solitar	Writing 140
Stanford	Anthropology 200
Steele	Architecture
Terrell	Managerial Design
Thalman	Greek
Tyler	Architecture
Wei	Chinese
Willard	Independent Studies
Winston	Religion
Witzer	Biological Sciences
Wolf	Architecture
Zolovsky	Russian