

January 22, 2019

Dear President Austin and Members of the USC Board of Trustees:

Throughout the tumultuous past year, the Board of Trustees has taken bold steps to move USC into the future, and has laid the groundwork for continued progress. In our communications with you, Concerned Faculty of USC has advocated for changes that will bring us all—faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni and trustees—together as a community, and enable USC to continue its spectacular progress. These changes include: true shared governance, by which we mean a significant faculty voice in all matters relating to the University’s central academic mission; an end to the top-down style of administration that has led to the current problems; an administration guided by a strong sense of ethics and academic values, and led by a new president of proven integrity and academic distinction; and the greatest possible openness and transparency in decision making. The Board has taken important steps in this direction, although the university administration is still falling short of the transparency and shared governance we hope for.

Appointment and dismissal of deans are ultimately decisions for the President and Provost, and the Board of Trustees was correct to reiterate its support for President Austin’s authority to dismiss the Dean of the Marshall School. Moreover, we agree with the principle that Deans—like all of us—are accountable for the climate of diversity and inclusion they create around them. Nevertheless, this episode shows the distance we still have to go on transparency and shared governance.

On transparency: while we accept that confidentiality and legal considerations constrain what the President could say about the grounds for this dismissal, our university leadership must find some way to communicate the nature of these grounds. The total silence of the university’s leadership is all the more regrettable if it is a matter of policy differences.

And on shared governance: . At a minimum, the President and Provost should have consulted in advance the President and Academic Vice President of the Academic Senate, along with elected representatives of the Marshall School faculty. In the absence of faculty participation and transparency, the strong Marshall School faculty reaction against the decision should have surprised no one. Too often “confidentiality” regarding “personnel matters” has served as a pretext for excluding the faculty from decisions whose legitimacy and success depends on the faculty’s acceptance and support. Confidentiality in important personnel matters such as promotion and tenure is a routine part of faculty life.

Although much needs to be done for our common ideals of transparency and shared governance to be fully realized, we applaud and strongly support the efforts of the Trustees to appoint a president with the qualities that the university urgently needs; to reform the governance and structure of the Board for the twenty-first century; to respond to the needs of our students who have been hurt by Dr. Tyndall; and to take the lead in implementing reforms throughout the university. For this reason, we are deeply troubled by the choice of a few Trustees to undermine the leadership of the Board in these matters, and to risk great harm to the university by using the Marshall School controversy as a vehicle to obstruct the reform

process underway. Taking their disagreement public and attempting to get the Board to overrule the President's decision seems to us irresponsible and counterproductive.

The university is facing a decisive moment. We urge the Board of Trustees to continue in the directions it has begun to take and to implement the changes that will take USC to the next level of excellence.

Sincerely yours,

Concerned Faculty of USC