January 8, 2019

Dear USC community,

As we begin a new year, I write to update you on the initial stages of what will be an important journey we all take together. Being the best at what we do – educating students, creating new knowledge through research and creative scholarship, and providing outstanding care and compassion to patients – requires that we lead through our core values. In support of our university-wide culture and core values work, we held our first President’s Culture Commission meeting on Wednesday, November 28, and took important initial steps.

Each Culture Commission member and several members of my senior leadership team shared their hopes for what we will accomplish together. A list of those members can be found at change.usc.edu. There was agreement that the culture and values work is essential and will require all of us to be engaged and to provide feedback. We need to invest time and energy into exploring our shared values, coalescing around a shared vision for this great university, and identifying the key areas for improvement.

To this end, the Task Force on Workplace Standards and Employee Wellness provided its final culture-related recommendations to the Culture Commission. Its primary recommendations were to 1) proceed with a university-wide cultural values assessment using a survey created by Barrett Values Centre (https://www.valuescentre.com), and 2) convene a working group that will help implement culture initiatives and ensure the commission is receiving input from our community.

At the conclusion of the meeting, I asked all Culture Commission members to send their feedback to me personally. Based on their input, I fully support moving forward with the Task Force recommendations. We will begin by convening the working group and preparing for a cultural values assessment this year.

This journey requires each and every one of us to participate, share ideas, and challenge ourselves to focus on values and culture as we strive to achieve excellence in all that we do. This is an ongoing journey, taking time and commitment. We, the USC community, are in this together. If you have thoughts or suggestions that you would like to share with me or the Culture Commission, please feel free to email me at president@usc.edu.

Sincerely,

Wanda M. Austin
Interim President