



A MESSAGE *from the Provost*

August 10, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the beginning of a new academic year. As we anticipate the launch of the 2021 fall semester and a planned return to on-campus classes and activities, we once again face uncertainty brought about by rapidly changing public health conditions.

I understand that recent news regarding the delta variant has raised many questions and concerns about how the USF plans to prioritize the health and wellbeing of our campus communities as we begin fall classes. As you will have read in the [latest university-wide communication](#), leadership continues to be guided by the USF COVID-19 Taskforce while adhering to [parameters set by the Florida Board of Governors \(FL BOG\)](#) and other government entities.

As previously stated, USF strongly urges all community members to get fully vaccinated and will continue to make [vaccines available](#) for free to USF students, faculty, and staff. We also expect that all members of our community vaccinated and unvaccinated to wear a mask on campus indoors or in crowded outdoor settings. Please report all positive cases or possible exposures you learn about immediately to assesscovid@usf.edu.

In the meantime, I invite you to join President Rhea Law, Dean Donna Petersen, Chair of the USF COVID-19 Task Force, Angie Sklenka, Chief Human Resource Officer, and myself at our upcoming town hall meeting planned for Friday, August 13th, from 10-11 a.m. Please visit www.usf.edu/townhall.

Looking ahead

As you are aware, [the USF Board of Trustees recently approved Rhea Law](#) to serve as interim President while we engage in a national search for USF's next permanent leader following President Currall's recent retirement from the presidency. As a proud and accomplished alumna and former USF board chair, President Law has long been a passionate advocate for USF and is a highly regarded community and business leader across Tampa Bay and throughout the state. While I am quite sure you will hear more from President Law in the coming weeks and months, I hope you will join me in welcoming her to this new role.

As part of our continuing commitment to the professional growth and success of each and every one of our faculty members, I am pleased to invite you to visit our new [Faculty Success website](#). This comprehensive resource is designed to provide you with the tools needed to strengthen and sustain instructional effectiveness and student learning, increase research,

scholarly and creative productivity, and build even deeper and more meaningful levels of engagement with the communities we serve, across all three campuses and 13 colleges. As USF's *Faculty Success* initiative evolves so too will these resources be enhanced.

Preparing for the start of the Fall 2021 semester

Before classes start on Monday August 23rd, please visit your assigned classroom(s) and familiarize yourself with the instructional and learning technology platforms. For some of you, this may be your first time on campus since the start of the global pandemic, so I encourage you to get reacquainted with your surroundings. Classrooms opened beginning August 9th and will be accessible from 10:00 a.m., to 8:00 p.m.

In accordance with Board of Governors' guidance, USF continues to plan for a return to in-person classes and activities in the fall. It is important for me to point out that instructional faculty must continue to deliver classes in the modality published in the class schedule. Additionally, all instructional faculty must be prepared to transition to temporary remote instruction at any point in the coming semester. Just last month, as we have done on prior occasions, we paused in-person classes due to tropical weather conditions in the region. With the global pandemic adding further complexity, we all need to be prepared to shift to temporary remote instruction should university leadership decide to do so, under direction of the Board of Governors. Faculty also need to be prepared to support students' academic progression in the event they need to isolate or quarantine. Please visit the [Faculty Toolkit](#) for guidance and resources regarding temporary remote instruction.

Moreover, consistent with our commitment to Student Success, it is imperative that you comply with [USF Policy 11-008](#), by uploading your course syllabus to Canvas no later than seven calendar days before the start of the first day of the term, which is next Monday, August 16th, 2021.

If you have questions or need additional support as you prepare for the start of the fall semester, I ask that you please contact your department chair, school director or college dean.

Legislative updates

The 2021 state legislative session was an active time for postsecondary education policy. Florida's [Intellectual and Viewpoint Diversity Act](#) was signed into law by Governor DeSantis and took effect on July 1st, 2021. To provide students and instructional faculty with a clear and consistent understanding of the provisions of this new state law we have prepared a [guidance document](#) including a proposed syllabus statement, general guidelines, and a set of frequently asked questions. As we hear more from the legislature and/or the FL BOG we will continue to update this guidance.

Even though I have previously underscored USF's fundamental commitment to, and rigorous defense of, academic freedom and diversity of opinion, it bears repeating. As provost, I am deeply proud to re-state the central importance of these non-negotiable core values that are explicitly embedded in USF's *Principles of Community*. USF's leadership has always believed that a free exchange of ideas through vigorous debate, civil discourse, and the necessity of both presenting and challenging opposing viewpoints in a thoughtful, respectful and tolerant manner, represents the very bedrock of a great university and a strong democracy.

Indeed, each one of us has a responsibility to present and encourage a balanced diversity of opinions in our classroom and scholarly work while, at the same time, promoting critical thinking in preparing our students to succeed as thoughtful, civic-minded leaders. As you may know, [USF Policy 10-050, Academic Freedom and Responsibility](#) affirms our collective responsibility to pursue “truth and wisdom in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom.” and “to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression...” Some of you may also recall that, in 2019, all state university presidents in Florida signed a [Statement on Free Expression](#) which reminds us that, “A fundamental purpose of an institution of higher education is to provide a learning environment where divergent ideas, opinions, and philosophies, new and old, can be rigorously debated and critically evaluated...” and that “individuals are free to express any ideas and opinions they wish, even if others may disagree with them or find those ideas and opinions to be offensive or otherwise antithetical to their own world view.”

The language in Florida’s *Intellectual and Viewpoint Diversity Act*, further underscores the importance of “... the exposure of students, faculty, and staff to, and the encouragement of their exploration of, a variety of ideological and political perspectives.” I fully expect that we will continue discussion of how we can most effectively promote these important principles and practices at USF in the year ahead.

In closing, I hope you will allow me to once again thank you for your continued dedication and tireless efforts to support our students and to both generating and applying new knowledge through your research, scholarly and creative activities. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at provost@usf.edu.

Best regards,

Ralph C. Wilcox

Provost & Executive Vice President
University of South Florida