

TO: The USC Community & The Trojan Family
FROM: Graduate Student Government & Undergraduate Student Government
DATE: September 13th, 2018
RE: Importance of Student Participation in the Presidential Search Process

Executive Summary

Dear Trojan Family,

Undergraduate and graduate students must be included on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee. Students are an integral part of any college or university community, and USC is no exception. Despite multiple scandals with major impacts on students over the past year and despite pledges to prioritize student needs, the Board of Trustees and the administration continue to exclude students on major decisions on how to move the University forward and increase transparency.

From the start in May, students have had minimal input in this search process. Since the story on Dr. George Tyndall first broke, Graduate Student Government (GSG) and Undergraduate Student Government (USG) have repeatedly and persistently requested that there be student representation within decision-making bodies — particularly, two seats on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee.

Despite our efforts to engage with the Board (pages 1-2), neither GSG nor USG, which represent the 45,500+ current students, were involved in the appointment of Dr. Wanda Austin as interim president, the recommendation of select faculty nominated by the Academic Senate, or the final selection of the Presidential Search Advisory Committee. **This exclusion of student input in critical decisions regarding USC is remnant of the campus culture we have all aimed to change and rebuild.**

Students deserve a larger voice in the presidential search process for the following reasons (pages 4-5):

- ❖ Students have a vested interest in the University
- ❖ Students should be treated fairly, in accordance to University bylaws
- ❖ Students provide a unique perspective, which is supported by literature in Higher Education
- ❖ Students serving on the committee will ensure true transparency
- ❖ Students must be involved to reestablish lost trust and foster true collaboration

Peer institutions that have encouraged student participation in committees include the following (page 6):

- ❖ Duke University (2016): 19 Total Members - 2 Student Representatives
- ❖ New York University (2014): 23 Total Members - 2 Student Representatives
- ❖ Princeton University (2013): 17 Total Members - 3 Student Representatives
- ❖ Stanford University (2015): 19 Total Members - 1 or more Student Representatives

At a time where the USC community is fractured and its constituents are highly distrustful of the Board of Trustees and the upper administration, a solution to ensure accountability and strengthen the relationships between the significant stakeholders of the University is to include those traditionally left out — the students and the staff who maintain the University — at the table. We hope that the Board of Trustees will seriously reconsider excluding students and staff on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee.

Graduate Student Government Executive Board 2018-2019
Undergraduate Student Government Executive Team 2018-2019

Timeline of Correspondence Between Students and Chairman Rick Caruso

On **May 25th**, before Dr. Max Nikias stepped down as president, we asked University administrators to “[i]nclude GSG and USG as partners in the creation of any and all decision-making bodies that establish boards, task forces, committees, or coalitions” and to “[i]nstate multiple student representatives as full participating members of any and all decision-making bodies and their established parties, as defined above.”¹ On the administration end, we had one meeting with Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Office of Equity & Diversity and Title IX, Student Health, and Student Engagement; however, GSG and USG had no line of communication or chance to connect with the Board of Trustees regarding Dr. Nikias’ resignation or plans to find a replacement.

On **June 6th**, after receiving no communication from Board of Trustees Chairman Rick Caruso, GSG reiterated our request to the Board of Trustees and upper administration to “include us — the students — in critical decision-making processes or groups.” We added: “We are eager to play a role in the process of identifying a new president for USC, and engage with the student body to better represent their expectations and thoughts. Please let us know when we can contribute to this collaborative effort.”² Only after this prompt from the students did Chairman Caruso’s office begin scheduling a meeting with student leaders.

On **July 18th**, leaders from GSG and USG met with Chairman Caruso and requested the inclusion of two student members — one graduate and one undergraduate — on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee. Chairman Caruso responded that he was “open to that”³ and stated that he would bring our request to the rest of the Board of Trustees during their all-hands meeting on August 7th.

On **July 23rd**, to prepare Chairman Caruso to share our request with the rest of the Trustees, we wrote to him:

“As representatives of the undergraduate and graduate student populations, we truly believe that we are also serving in the best interests of our constituents. We would like to continue emphasizing the importance of student input and participation in critical decision-making bodies, including the Search Committee and the Board of Trustees... Please let us know how we can actively participate in your committees and working groups! We look forward to meeting with you and other Trustees again soon. Perhaps we can get together after your August 7th Board of Trustees meeting to get an update on the potential search firms and overall plan? Are you available August 8th?”⁴

¹ GSG and USG Statement - Support for Affected Students at USC, May 25, 2018.

gsg.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/08/GSG-and-USG-Statement-Support-for-Affected-Students-at-USC-May-25-2018.pdf

² Email from GSG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, June 6, 2018.

³ USG and GSG Minutes from Meeting with Chairman Rick Caruso, July 28, 2018.

⁴ Email from GSG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, July 23, 2018.

Chairman Caruso confirmed that he wanted to meet again and that his staff would reach out with his availability, but Chairman Caruso's office failed to schedule anything.

On **August 1st**, the GSG president wrote yet again, stating:

“I wanted to follow up on scheduling our next conversation. To my understanding, the Academic Senate has begun their selection process for the faculty representative for the Presidential Search Committee. GSG and USG are interested in further discussing the role of students with the Board of Trustees and this committee. If we can get a clearer picture of how we can be involved, we can begin our own search and nomination procedures for selecting student representatives.”⁵

We were guaranteed that a follow-up meeting would be arranged soon. However, a second, follow-up meeting was never scheduled.

On **August 23rd**, the USG president wrote one more time to Chairman Caruso, saying:

“I wanted to follow up on scheduling another meeting with you since our previous one in July. To be fully honest, I have heard and am rather disheartened that students representation will be excluded from the Presidential Search Committee. For a community that needs transparency and a restoration of trust among all groups on campus, I would be grateful if USG and GSG representatives could meet with you soon to further discuss and clarify this. While I do appreciate that there are opportunities for student voices to be heard during this process, I as well as the student representatives on this email would also love to offer ways that students can proactively play a role throughout the entirety of this search process.”⁶

On **August 27th**, we received a substantial email response from Chairman Caruso, confirming that that the Presidential Search Advisory Committee would only be comprised of Trustees and faculty.

Neither of the student governments have had the opportunity to speak with any of the other Trustees. Although Chairman Caruso stated he was “open” to our request to having student involved in the search committee, this promising notion was never expressed again. Additionally, neither of the student governments were involved in the appointment of Dr. Wanda Austin as interim president, the recommendation of select faculty nominated by the Academic Senate, or the final selection of the Presidential Search Advisory Committee.

From the start in May, students had minimal input in this search process.

⁵ Email from GSG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, August 1, 2018.

⁶ Email from USG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, August 23, 2018.

On **September 4th**, the USG president sent a follow up email⁷ to Chairman Caruso and Interim President Austin looking to establish a “better line of communication” to understand the Chairman’s thoughts regarding student representation on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee before releasing this statement to the USC community. The following morning, the Chairman’s Chief of Staff invited student leaders to travel to his home in Brentwood to discuss our concerns.

On **September 10th**, GSG and USG met with Chairman Caruso for an hour advocating for two seats on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee. Student leaders firmly expressed that students believed it to be in their best interests to have functional, meaningful seats on the committee. Chairman Caruso — a non-student — countered with his belief that student representation on the committee would not actually be in the best interest of students. He also said that at this point, it would be too difficult to go back and add student representatives (a situation he created by not adding students representatives in the first place).

Chairman Caruso stated that he was open to listening to our concerns that student had no trust in the committee that our interests would be fairly and accurately expressed. He also stated that despite all of the recent scandals where student trust had been repeatedly broken, students should still take a “measured” leap of faith to trust in the committee and the scheduled listening sessions. We explained that the complete lack of trust on the part of students and the presence of a barrier through which students had no guarantee that their interests would delegitimize the process in the eyes of many students. We subsequently requested that we have the opportunity to make our case in front of the members of the Board of Trustees. Chairman Caruso only replied that he would consider everything we had expressed in the meeting.

On **September 11th**, after receiving a follow up email⁸ from the USG president, Chairman Caruso emphasized that “student interests and perspectives are a critical component of the presidential search process,” but stated that “it is not feasible to delay the process in order to obtain Board approval for additional search advisory committee representatives.”⁹ We were offered a “special student leader subcommittee” to meet with the Presidential Advisory Committee, but have no part in the substantive discussion that establish the criteria, review and interview candidates, and be an active part of the conversation in which the formal recommendations are made. Again, further discussion through official channels with other Trustees and committee members was hindered by a single gatekeeper.

The GSG Senate voted on September 10th to maintain the position that the inclusion of students on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee is the most effective and direct expression of student voices throughout the search process. The USG Executive Team echoes a similar sentiment.

⁷ Email from USG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, September 4, 2018.

⁸ Email from USG President to Chairman Rick Caruso, September 11, 2018.

⁹ Email from Chairman Rick Caruso to GSG and USG, September 11, 2018.

Lost Opportunity for True Collaboration and Transparency

In his communications to the public, Chairman Caruso has promised to “have stronger collaborative engagement among the board, the president’s office, the Academic Senate, Staff Assembly, the student body and alumni”¹⁰, referenced having “candid and constructive dialogue...with so many students, faculty, staff, and alumni”¹¹, and ensured that this “historic and consequential” search “will be framed by our community’s collective academic and cultural aspirations for the University.”¹²

These statements run contrary to the fact that Chairman Caruso has met with the student governments only twice (together), and the Staff Assembly for the first time after the announcement of the committee. When we consider the former statements with Chairman Caruso’s minimal actions to meet with student leaders, it clearly signifies a lack of oversight in upholding student and staff interests. By not including students on these committees, **accountability and collaboration at USC is limited.**

Chairman Caruso insists that the voice of students is “critically important,” yet pointedly described the Presidential Search Advisory Committee as only “well representative of the faculty, of the deans and the Trustees.”¹³ The largest populations of the USC community include:

- ❖ 19,000+ undergraduate students
- ❖ 26,500+ graduate and professional students
- ❖ 15,000+ staff
- ❖ 4,000+ full-time faculty
- ❖ 412,000+ alumni.¹⁴

The current composition of 13 Trustees, 8 faculty, 1 dean, and Dr. Wanda Austin (USC’s interim president) fails to reflect this reality, and reaffirms the belief that the Board of Trustees is prioritizing what they believe is in the best interest of students over the actual interests of the student body.

The sparse information that we have collected indicates that candidates will not meet with any USC students during the entire selection process. **Without any firsthand student interaction, this incoming president might be left with the lasting impression that engagement with students is neither a priority, nor a necessity.**

¹⁰ Message regarding Independent Investigation and Presidential Transition, May 31, 2018.

boardoftrustees.usc.edu/message-on-independent-investigation-and-presidential-transition

¹¹ Message regarding Presidential Transition, Interim President, and Presidential Search Process, August 7, 2018.

boardoftrustees.usc.edu/message-from-board-of-trustees-chairman-rick-j-caruso-august-7-2018

¹² Message regarding Presidential Search Committee and Presidential Search Website, August 28, 2018.

boardoftrustees.usc.edu/message-from-board-of-trustees-chairman-rick-j-caruso-august-28-2018

¹³ ‘Denied a seat at the table’: Presidential search committee fails to include students, August 28, 2018.

dailytrojan.com/2018/08/28/denied-a-seat-at-the-table-presidential-search-committee-fails-to-include-students

¹⁴ About USC | Facts and Figures, 2017-2018 Academic Year. about.usc.edu/facts

Reasons for Student Participation on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee

- ❖ Students — the University’s future alumni, potential donors, and reason for existence — have a **vested interest** in who will be the next leaders of the University. Students will directly experience the decisions made by the Board of Trustees and upper administrators every day on campus, and they will continue to be affected by them once they become alumni. Excluding students on the committee is not only a disservice to the very individuals the University failed to protect^{15,16}, but also a failure to provide students an opportunity to advocate for presidential candidates who will strive to protect students to the best of their ability.
- ❖ Second, the governance organizations should be treated in a **fair and equitable manner**, as put forth in the University’s bylaws. The governing documents of both USG and GSG — texts approved by the Division of Student Affairs — as well as the governing documents of the Academic Senate all state that they have the “power to make studies, reports, and recommendations to the President of the University in any and all matters pertaining to the well-being of [their constituent bodies].”¹⁷ A presidential search affects students, staff, and faculty alike, yet only students and staff have been barred from having a substantive say in the future of USC.
- ❖ Third, universities value research and collaboration to achieve the best possible outcomes and have as much knowledge as possible. Excluding students and staff immediately removes possible sources of **knowledge and unique perspectives** that are crucial in selecting USC’s next leader, and undermines the benefits of true collaboration. Additionally, in contrast to Professor William Tierney’s assertion that “[t]his is a committee that would pass muster at any major university”¹⁸, excluding students goes against a large body of literature in Higher Education that highlights the benefits of student participation in university governance.^{19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26}

¹⁵ LA Times, ‘We have failed’: Top USC officials try to reassure students amid gynecologist scandal, June 2, 2018. [latimes.com/local/education/la-me-usc-cleanup-notes-20180602-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-usc-cleanup-notes-20180602-story.html)

¹⁶ Huffington Post, USC Failed To Protect Us From Our Abusive Doctor, June 7, 2018. [huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-allen-prasad-usc-doctor-sexual-abuse_us_5b16bab6e4b0599bc6dd776c](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-allen-prasad-usc-doctor-sexual-abuse_us_5b16bab6e4b0599bc6dd776c)

¹⁷ Bylaws of the University of Southern California, last amended May 31, 2018. policy.usc.edu/university-bylaws

¹⁸ LA Times, Developers, philanthropists, and a Pulitzer-winning novelist will help choose USC’s next president, August 28, 2018. [latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-usc-president-search-20180828-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-usc-president-search-20180828-story.html)

¹⁹ Lozano, J. M., THE RISE OF STUDENT TRUSTEESHIP IN THE UNITED STATES: A case study at indiana university. *American Educational History Journal*, 43(1), 93-109, 2016.

²⁰ Maria Eliophotou Menon, M. E., Student involvement in university governance: A need for negotiated educational aims?, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9:3, 233-246, 2003.

²¹ Josephine A. Boland, Student participation in shared governance: A means of advancing democratic values?, *Tertiary Education & Management*, 11:3, 199-217, 2005.

²² Maria E. Menon, Students’ views regarding their participation in university governance: Implications for distributed leadership in higher education, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11:2, 167-182, 2005.

- ❖ Fourth, a willingness to host “listening sessions”²⁷ for major decisions does not demonstrate a vested interest in student opinions and **real transparency**. If “listening sessions” were enough, the faculty would also have listening sessions instead of committee seats. Blocking student and staff participation is the opposite of transparent, and cements the public perception that there may be conversations or information to hide. Given the silence from the Board about how they reached their previous decisions, students have no reason to believe that concerns raised in these listening sessions will be seriously defended by the full committee. As students on the ground at USC’s many campuses, we listen to the active community every day. Expertise in student needs, student expectations, and student values cannot be developed in just a handful of these public and private open forums.

- ❖ Finally, and most notably, the search for a new president was triggered by a complete breakdown of trust between students and administration. It was students that were —and still are— most affected by the deplorable events that led to Dr. Max Nikias stepping down as president. If restoring this trust is a primary goal of the new presidential appointment, students must be heard and be active participants in the search. By excluding students, the Board of Trustees risks signaling that the presidential transition is a mere corporate function and not a good faith attempt at restoring the well-being of the USC community. Including students on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee would demonstrate a commitment to **reestablish trust and strengthen our community**.

The Trojan Family is hailed as being a community like no other. Students are not merely customers — which would imply that USC is little more than a corporation — but important members who are part of the future of the University. USC strives to invest in students through providing them with a world-class education, as well as a myriad of professional, social, and leadership opportunities. In turn, students invest themselves back into the University through participation, research, and, later in life, mentorship and financial support for the next generation of Trojans.

One of USC’s core values is “free inquiry, an institutional commitment to the search for truth.”²⁸ Student participation in the Presidential Search Advisory Committee would be just that.

²³ Thierry M. Luescher-Mamashela, Student representation in university decision making: good reasons, a new lens?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 38:10, 1442-1456, 2013.

²⁴ Ratsoy, Eugene W., and Zuo Bing. "Student Participation in University Governance." *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 29(1):1-26, 1999.

²⁵ Anna Planas, Pere Soler, Judit Fullana, Maria Pallisera & Montserrat Vilà, Student participation in university governance: the opinions of professors and students, *Studies in Higher Education*, 38:4, 571-583, 2013.

²⁶ Witt/Kieffer, Do we need a student on the search committee? November 5, 2017.
chronicle.com/article/Do-We-Need-a-Student-on-the/241677

²⁷ Message regarding Presidential Search Committee and Presidential Search Website, August 28, 2018.
boardoftrustees.usc.edu/message-from-board-of-trustees-chairman-rick-j-caruso-august-28-2018

²⁸ The 2018 USC Strategic Plan: Answering the Call, February 7, 2018.
provost.usc.edu/files/2018/02/180216_Strategic_Plan_.pdf

Inclusion of Students in the Presidential Search Committees at Peer Institutions

Peer institutions have validated the importance of their students and given them the opportunity to learn about the operations of the University by actively including them in their own presidential searches.

In the following examples, all of these schools have at most 23 seats on their committees (USC's currently has 23²⁹), and all of them have **at least 1 full-voting seat for students**.

- ❖ Case Western University³⁰ (2006): 13 Total Members - 1 Student Representative
- ❖ Dartmouth University³¹ (2008): 15 Total Members - 1 Student Representative
- ❖ Duke University³² (2016): 19 Total Members - 2 Student Representatives
- ❖ New York University³³ (2014): 23 Total Members - 2 Student Representatives
- ❖ Northwestern University³⁴ (2008): 23 Total Members - 2 Student Representatives
- ❖ Princeton University³⁵ (2013): 17 Total Members - 3 Student Representatives
- ❖ Stanford University³⁶ (2015): 19 Total Members - 1 or more Student Representatives

These peer institutions have chosen to build collaboration and foster a culture of transparency, equality, and involvement. Instead of acting upon what their Trustees and their administration believes is in the best interest of students, they let students speak for themselves and bring value to the table.

Again, the events of the past year has created a lack of trust between the constituents of USC and the administration and the Board. Only when the USC Board of Trustees truly incorporates student voices in University structures and processes can we really begin this joint effort to “rebuild our culture.”³⁷

²⁹ Message regarding Presidential Search Committee and Presidential Search Website, August 28, 2018.
boardoftrustees.usc.edu/message-from-board-of-trustees-chairman-rick-j-caruso-august-28-2018

³⁰ Presidential Search: Case Western University | Committee Members, 2006.
case.edu/president/search/members.html

³¹ DartmouthLife: Presidential Search Committee, October 2008.
dartmouth.edu/~dartlife/archives/18-5/committee.html

³² DukeToday: Duke Trustees Name Presidential Search Committee, May 18, 2016.
today.duke.edu/2016/05/presidentialsearchlist

³³ The Members of the NYU Presidential Search Committee, July 2, 2014.
nyu.edu/about/leadership-university-administration/board-of-trustees/the-members-of-the-ny-presidential-search-committee.html

³⁴ Northwestern Presidential Search Committee Named, April 8, 2008.
northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2008/04/searchcommittee.html

³⁵ Princeton University: The Presidential Search: Committee, October 23, 2012.
princeton.edu/presidentialsearch/committee

³⁶ Stanford News: Members of Presidential Search Committee Announced, August 12, 2015.
news.stanford.edu/2015/08/12/search-committee-names-081215

³⁷ Important Message from Mr. Rick Caruso and the USC Board of Trustees, August 25, 2018.