Finding the Right Fit and other Admission Thoughts...

a conversation with Dean Katharine Harrington

It’s a fact that admission to highly selective colleges and universities has become increasingly competitive. More college-bound students means more applications at top ranked colleges and universities. With that in mind, we talked with Katharine Harrington, now entering her third year as Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, to get her perspective and advice for counselors, parents and students.

In many ways, the tremendous number of qualified applicants has to be a dream come true for selective colleges and universities. Is that how it feels to you?

At USC, we have experienced a dramatic change over the past 10 years, as the number of applications from highly qualified students has soared and our admission rate has dropped down to 25%. That means we have to say “no” to three out of every four students who apply, which is certainly no fun. This kind of environment makes it very tough for our high school counselors, who are on the front line, dealing with students and their parents day-in and day-out. And often students and/or parents are focused on being admitted to “The Right School” rather than the school that is right for that student.

How do you address that “right school” mindset?

Tim Brunold and I both love to speak at high schools, usually at gatherings of parents and students. At each presentation, I begin by saying to the parents, “With all due respect, ladies and gentlemen, the college admission process is not about you.” And then we talk about the real goal of the process, which is for students to find a college or university that is right for them. It’s hard for some families to understand that there really is no such thing as The Right College for a particular student. Sure, students and parents may have preferences. But there are lots of options out there. And it is really important for students to think carefully about what they want (and need) in a college experience. Do they want to be near home or far away? Attend a small school or a big school? Be in an urban environment or not? Do they want a constellation of academic opportunities, or a more traditionally focused curriculum? These are all important questions. And if families skip these questions and go right to that mythical List of Prestigious Schools, they may not even consider some schools that would be absolutely perfect for their student.

What steps can universities take to mitigate college application stress?

I believe our best hope for moderating this craziness is by the development of strong relationships with the counseling community and by carefully considering each application we receive. That is why we have admission counselors assigned to geographic territories – so they can get to know specific schools and counselors, and the students attending those schools. It’s why we spend so much time and resources on visiting high schools – last year, we visited over 750 schools in 33 states. And it’s why we spent over 18,000 staff hours last year considering the applications we received. It’s not easy with the volume of applications we have. But we are committed to giving each application our complete attention throughout the process.

How about financial aid concerns? What do you hear and how are you addressing this pivotal aspect of college?

There is a growing crisis of confidence across the country about the ability of families to pay for college; and with good reason. College is expensive. At its best, the financial aid process is continued on next page
“We cannot build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

“In America, each generation is a new people.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville

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intrusive, and at its worst it is frightening and mysterious. I am personally devoting a lot of attention to how we manage the financial aid process at USC. We have made some changes in our leadership team. Cathy Thomas retired in June and was succeeded by Susan Ikerd, who has been actively involved in enrollment management, including admission and financial aid, for the past twenty years. We want to be as open and clear as possible with USC families about the process of applying for financial aid and about all of the resources that are available to help pay for college. I am enthusiastic about our ability to accomplish these goals under Susan’s leadership.

Are there other trends you see on the horizon that will be impacting college admission in the next 5 years – at USC and around the country?

Demographers tell us that we should expect the number of college-going high school graduates to decrease slightly in the coming years. There is some controversy about just when that decline will start. But we do know that it will not be spread evenly across the country. Colleges and universities that draw their students from only local populations may struggle in certain areas where the declines will be significant.

USC has been a national and global university for some time now. About fifty percent of our students come from outside California, and nearly ten percent of our freshman class is international. So we do not expect to be hurt as the population of college-bound students decreases.

I’d love to see the decline have some leavening effect on the competition to get into college. But realistically I don’t think that will happen.

How is the high school college counselor’s role changing?

One change that is constant across public and private schools is the increasing constraint on resources. Counselors are asked to do more and more with less and less. Student-to-counselor ratios are increasing. Budgets are tight. And the pressure to help students get into college is tremendous. We are doing all that we can to be good partners to counselors. One way we are doing that is by fully funding an annual USC Counselor Fly-In. Last year we had over thirty counselors from public and private schools all across the country spend three days with us. This year I think we will have over forty counselors participating. It’s a great way for counselors to really get to know USC. And by paying for everything we make sure cost does not prohibit counselors from joining us.

Finally, what would you most like to change about the admission process?

Well, I’d like for us to be able to admit every qualified applicant. There is a real double-edge to becoming a highly selective institution. On the one hand, it is a great testimony to the value of a USC degree, which I think is well earned. But we also have to disappoint a lot of people. Though, given the quality of our applicant pool, those students have many, many good choices. And that is what the college admission process ought to be about.
CQ interviewed three USC alumni about how their undergraduate experience helped them to get started in their professions. One is now in graduate school, and the other two are launched in careers. Yes, there is life after USC – and a good one at that.

Carlos Olivares,
Bachelor of Architecture Spring, 1997
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Current Position:
Project Manager,
KKE Architects, Irvine, CA
I’d been drawing since I was four years old. I’d always wanted to work in a design position, so when I enrolled at USC it was for the architecture program. It offered great amount of creative freedom and I was exposed to a wide variety of design philosophies. We were encouraged to just let our imaginations flow. Of course in the professional world it’s less theoretical and so I really had to build up my practical experience when I started to work in the field. Fortunately, it was a time of growth in the architecture field so through a friend, and because of USC’s reputation, I found work right away at a firm called Rocha Nuez and Associates in Woodland Hills, CA. I was there for four years and since then I’ve worked for KKE in its Irvine, CA office. My job as a project manager requires that I take design sketches and help translate them to reality by supervising all the working drawings and oversee the project through construction management. It’s my job to get it done and to make it look nice. Based on my experience, what I’d recommend to students is that they get internships during school, but also spend as much time as possible traveling, especially internationally. There are different ways of problem solving around the world that we don’t even try in this country and this is something that students need to see. In terms of experience, be sure that you learn CAD (Computer Aided Design) because you absolutely need it to get a job. But you should also keep your manual drawing skills sharp, so you can design projects from the ground up. With all these tools and experiences, if you love what you do, you’ll be successful.

Stephanie Waidelich
Bachelor of Music in Trombone Performance, 2007
Hometown: San Diego, CA
Current Position:
Graduate student
By my junior year of high school I knew that I wanted to be a musician and USC seemed to have the best balance of things that I wanted; it offered both top notch academics and a challenge in musical performance. The other student performers at USC were so strong, it was really good for raising my own level of playing. And the scholarship really helped.

I’ve just moved to Pennsylvania State College in western Pennsylvania, where I am taking a Master of Music degree in Trombone Performance. As a performer in classical music, it is really important to have the level of your playing be as high as possible and this will give me some more time to get ready to enter the profession. Here, I also have a job as a teaching assistant, which will give me a broader range of skills such as music library work and possibly coaching small ensembles.

Being in the music school is quite different from being in the liberal arts. First of all, since the admission is by audition, everyone entering is already very committed to music. Secondly, I took maybe one general education course per semester because the vast majority of units were in my major – I was in music classes from day one, as well as theory and performance sequences.

I would really encourage students who are interested in majoring in music to be proactive by talking with several current students at each prospective school. Pick their brains. Contact the professors on your instrument at school that you are seriously considering and if possible set up a lesson with the professor. It’s important to see how you get along with them personally.

Jason Berman
Bachelor of Arts in Cinema, 2006
Hometown: Baltimore, MD
Current Position:
Assistant to Talent Manager,
Management 360, Beverly Hills, CA
I’m pleased I got to be part of the Cinema program at USC because there is none better for teaching students about the entertainment business and making the connection to a real job after you graduate. After all, the entertainment business is centered in Los Angeles. The Cinema program teaches you the basis of the entertainment industry from creative story development to production to business issues. My habit of asking questions in class really helped at USC because I developed close relationships with faculty and as a result they helped me get professionally. Of course, you have to be aggressive as well. Mentioning that you attend USC Film School, it often opens doors and while still in college I had internships at several well-known production companies. After college, I was in William Morris Agency agent trainee program and that led to my working for a talent manager. My USC network not only includes my professors but also my classmates, and other USC alumni. In my current position, I’m working for Management 360 in Beverly Hills, which is a company that manages up-coming writers and directors. This makes the company a great place for a young person to be. Now that I’m here, I can confirm that managers seem to get more involved in the creative side of their clients’ careers and they can often move into developing movie projects and producing their clients’ films. Also, I’ve always liked sales, and that’s what managers do. They communicate with their clients and they help their clients get jobs. There’s no single path to becoming a manager yourself. You just have to work hard as an assistant and be willing to deal with a challenging workplace and put in long days to learn the ropes and help your boss in whatever way you can. I love my work, and USC made it possible.

Your Admission Counselor

USC attracts applicants from every part of the world and it’s often the Admission Counselor assigned to your school who is the key USC link for prospective students. Admission Counselor area assignments are listed in the Admission Directory on the back page of this newsletter, and following are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

1. What role does the Admission Counselor play in the actual admission process? Admission Counselors visit over 750 schools and cities from late August through November, in order to give information about USC to as many students as possible. They also play an important role in initially reading applications from their region and making recommendations to the Admission committee.

2. How can I find out Admission Counselor will be visiting my area? You can write to s counsel@usc.edu or call or e-mail your Admission Counselor directly.

3. Can a student arrange to have an interview with an Admission Counselor during a high school visit? While Admission Counselors often do not have time to conduct individual interviews, they do enjoy talking with students as much as time permits, and one of their priorities is to be on the lookout for students who would do well at USC. We do offer a limited number of interviews, both on and off campus, throughout the fall. More information is available online at www.usc.edu/admissioninterviews.

4. If I have a question, is it preferable to e-mail or telephone the Admission Counselor for my area? Either way of communicating is fine, although with the heavy travel schedules it’s a bit more convenient to use e-mail.

5. Is it OK to share the contact information of the Admission Counselor with my students? Yes, prospective applicants are welcome to communicate directly with their counselors.
The Millennials:
How are they adapting to college life…and vice versa?

It’s been seven years since the first class of the much anticipated “Millennial Generation” of students entered college. Children of the Baby Boomers, these students have been characterized as having values that are very distinct from their predecessors in a number of ways, including: a focus on goals and career success; a more global outlook; a high value on teamwork; a stronger commitment to community service; an expectation that diversity is a given, a feeling of being “special” coupled with a need for recognition, and of course, an unprecedented ease with and mastery of technology.

So, how does that translate to the college experience? We talked with Professor Doug Hammond, who has taught geology and oceanography classes in the Earth Sciences department at USC since 1975, to see what changes he has noted since the arrival of the freshmen of 2000. He had some interesting observations to share, both in terms of how students are changing and how the University has adapted to their learning styles.

First, the difference in technology is unmistakable – the campus is completely wireless, classrooms are now filled with students taking notes on laptops, and there is a constant flow of electronic communication among students and teachers. The faculty has increased its emphasis on technology in teaching, adding options for multimedia activities throughout many courses, where students can create web pages, videos or use other media to convey what they have learned.

USC has always been recognized as a place where students get a head start in launching a successful career, but Dr. Hammond has seen this become an even stronger focus for recent students, who have clear plans for the future, and take full advantage of the fabled “Trojan Family” network for internships and mentorships. The interest appears to be mutual – in fact, he reports that more and more alumni are visiting his classrooms looking for students in the earth sciences to hire, and that the demand exceeds the supply.

And, it’s true - students are committed to teamwork and collaboration, with exciting results. While USC’s culture has always encouraged teachers to act as mentors rather than lecturers, there has been a campus-wide explosion in opportunities for undergraduate students to work with faculty on joint research projects both inside and outside their majors, and often with significant student grants. As an example, he cites a group of non-science majors who spent last summer doing field mapping studies in the high Sierras, along side Earth Sciences faculty. Others have joined on-campus labs as summer interns.

As far as other “millennial values,” students’ global perspective and appreciation of diversity appears to be real and flourishing, both within USC’s increasingly national and international campus community, and in the growing numbers of study abroad opportunities across all disciplines. Community service, always valued at USC, is also on the rise, with over 2400 students participating in community-based learning last year.

And finally, the group that has had more academic success and less unstructured time than any other generation appears to be continuing its energetic approach in a college setting. While he has seen the shock they feel at their first less-than-perfect grade, and worries about the pressure they put on themselves to make the most of every moment, Dr. Hammond also marvels at the efficiency and time management skills, and the continued optimism, of his students – who appear headed for a lifetime of success.

In summary, the Millennials have come, they have seen, they are conquering, and we are glad to have them!

Overview of 2007-08 Important Dates and Deadlines

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>High School Counselor Conference – you’re invited! Watch your email box for an invitation, or reserve your spot at <a href="http://www.usc.edu/counselorevents">www.usc.edu/counselorevents</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 14 - Nov 4</td>
<td>USC World Tour – See back page for dates and locations of this fall’s off campus admission receptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Part I Applications for Freshmen (optional)</td>
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<td>Dec 1</td>
<td>Supplemental application deadline for Thornton School of Music</td>
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<td>Dec 10</td>
<td>Freshman application deadline for scholarship consideration; supplemental application deadline for Schools of Cinematic Arts, Fine Arts, Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 10</td>
<td>Freshman application deadline</td>
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<td>Jan 20</td>
<td>FAFSA &amp; PROFILE filing deadline to receive priority aid consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Feb</td>
<td>Admission notification for merit scholarship finalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 1</td>
<td>Student and family tax returns submitted to Financial Aid office to ensure offer of eligibility before May 1</td>
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<td>Apr 1</td>
<td>All applicants notified</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>National candidate reply date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 20</td>
<td>New student move-in day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 25</td>
<td>First day of fall 2008 classes</td>
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Note: USC does not offer early action or early decision admission programs

Facts of life for Entering College Freshmen (born in 1989)

- They have lived their entire lifetime under either a Bush or Clinton administration
- The Berlin Wall fell and the USSR had ceased to exist.
- The Gulf War was over and the Tiananmen Square protests took place the year they were born.
- Before they were in pre-school, their seminal shared experience was September 11, when they were starting 7th grade.
- They have less unstructured free time than any other generation.
- 20% have an immigrant parent – more than any time since the 1920s.
- Two-thirds say they will go to college.
How to Contact Us  
You can find the USC admission officer responsible for working with your students by referencing the list below. These individuals will serve as your primary point of contact with our Office of Admission. Please note that many new staff members joined our office this year.

U.S.

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee  Michael Gulotta, Assistant Director (213) 821-2165 golutta@usc.edu
Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah  Beza Merid, Assistant Director (213) 821-1882 merid@usc.edu
Arizona  Bruce Grier, Associate Director (213) 740-6630 bgrier@usc.edu
Connecticut, New York  Kim Cragg, Senior Assistant Director (213) 740-5844 kcragg@usc.edu
Delaware, Maryland, North & South Carolina, West Virginia  Angela Whitehni, Assistant Director (213) 740-6613 whitehni@usc.edu
Hawaii  Ben Lah, Senior Assistant Director (213) 740-7449 benjamjl@usc.edu
Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North & South Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin  Lisa Tewksbury, Director, Midwest Region (213) 356-1854 tewksbur@usc.edu
Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont  Maureen Gelberg, Senior Assistant Director (213) 740-8925 gelberg@usc.edu
New Jersey, Pennsylvania  Rakin Hall, Associate Director (213) 740-4019 rakin.hall@usc.edu
New Mexico  Chris Tokuhama, Assistant Director (213) 821-1127 tokuhama@usc.edu
Oklahoma, Texas  Shannon McHugh, Senior Assistant Director (213) 821-1704 slmchugh@usc.edu
Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Virginia, Washington D.C.  Toni Anderson, Assistant Director (213) 740-0865 antoniaa@usc.edu

California

Far Northern California, Valley of the Moon  Toni Anderson, Assistant Director (213) 740-0865 antoniaa@usc.edu
Marin County  Marc Rasic, Associate Director (213) 740-3040 rasic@usc.edu
Alameda County, Contra Costa County, Sacramento County, San Francisco  September Trevino, Assistant Director (213) 740-4752 strevino@usc.edu
San Mateo County, Santa Clara County  Joe Beltran, Assistant Director (213) 740-6611 jbeltran@usc.edu
Central Coast  Marc Rasic, Associate Director (213) 740-3040 rasic@usc.edu
Santa Barbara & West Ventura County  Becky Chassin, Associate Director (213) 821-1128 chassin@usc.edu
Central Valley  Beza Merid, Assistant Director (213) 821-1882 merid@usc.edu
San Fernando Valley (East)  Michael Gulotta, Assistant Director (213) 821-2165 golutta@usc.edu
San Fernando Valley (West), South Bay  Anne Aubert-Santelli, Assistant Director (213) 740-7421 aubertsa@usc.edu
Glendale & Pasadena  Ben Lah, Senior Assistant Director (213) 740-7449 benjamjl@usc.edu
Hollywood & Wilshire  Mel Preimesberger, Associate Director (213) 740-1779 preimesb@usc.edu
West Los Angeles & West Beach  Marc Rasic, Associate Director (213) 740-3040 rasic@usc.edu
Los Angeles (east)  Rakin Hall, Associate Director (213) 740-4019 rakin.hall@usc.edu
South & South Central Los Angeles  Mel Preimesberger, Associate Director (213) 740-1779 preimesb@usc.edu
Covina & West Covina  Angela Whitehni, Assistant Director (213) 740-6613 whitehni@usc.edu
Long Beach  Kim Cragg, Senior Assistant Director (213) 740-5844 kcragg@usc.edu
Orange County (central)  Therese Sandomov, Assistant Director (213) 740-4042 tsandomova@usc.edu
Orange County (north & south)  Chris Tokuhama, Assistant Director (213) 821-1127 tokuhama@usc.edu
Riverside & San Bernardino  Therese Sandomov, Assistant Director (213) 740-4042 tsandomova@usc.edu
San Diego County  Bruce Grier, Associate Director (213) 740-6630 bgrier@usc.edu
Greater Imperial Valley  Shannon McHugh, Senior Assistant Director (213) 821-1704 slmchugh@usc.edu

International

Judith Jurek, Senior Associate Director (213) 740-5684 jurek@usc.edu
It's wild, it's crazy, but in many ways it's our favorite time of year, when we hit the road to meet counselors and students on their home turf around the country.

So, we'd like to most cordially invite you, your students, and their parents, to a USC reception in your area. It's an opportunity to for us to meet in an informal yet informative setting, answer your questions and listen to your perspectives on the college application process. We recognize that you are our most important partners in achieving our mutual goal of matching each student to a college or university that will help them succeed, and hope you will be able to attend.

Receptions will take place in 18 cities throughout October and November.

High school counselors may RSVP to one of these receptions by sending an e-mail to scounsel@usc.edu. Students may RSVP by visiting www.usc.edu/admevents.

We’re looking forward to seeing you!