A USC Blueprint for Expanding the College Pipeline

USC University of
Southern California

Universities need to be catalysts for large-scale positive change

As one of the country's leading private research universities, USC has built diversity into the heart of its operations. USC today has students from 128 nations around the world and all 50 states, representing 90 different religious views. Among our peer group of the nation's top private research universities, we rank first in Pell Grant recipients; second in Latino students; and third in African-American students. We recruit these students from across the country and offer the most generous financial aid packages in the nation — a total of $320 million per year from our own sources. About two-thirds of our students receive some form of aid.

We believe these efforts prove that academic excellence and diversity are not mutually exclusive priorities. Yet while we are proud of what we have achieved, we recognize that there is much work to be done — by us, and throughout the higher education community.

Each year, about 3 million students graduate from high school in the United States. Of these, roughly 250,000 — only 8 percent — have the GPA, test scores and the academic preparation to be considered for admission to our nation's top 50 academically elite universities.

There are only 11,000 African-American students and only 24,000 Latino students in this group every year: 35,000 students overall — or just 14 percent of the 250,000 qualified pool. Meanwhile, African-American and Latino students make up 40 percent of overall school enrollment in the United States. And while the nation's top universities compete to recruit them, the sad truth is that this effort amounts to a zero sum game — the pie, as it were, is not growing.

The K-12 system is, in many cases, failing a broad cross-section of our population. Despite the ongoing conversations about diversity in American higher education, there is little attention being paid to the drivers behind this crisis. So, if we are to make any kind of step toward change, universities will have to recognize their role in addressing the high school-to-college pipeline. Pay attention to the pipeline. Partner with K-12 schools. This is where we can make a difference.

At USC, we have a three-pronged approach to college pathways that reaches students at distinct stages of their academic careers — in middle school, in high school and part way through their postsecondary studies. These efforts have yielded demonstrable results.

NEIGHBORHOOD ACADEMIC INITIATIVE

USC's Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) is the centerpiece of our various community outreach programs. We partner with K-12 schools around our two campuses to identify, support and prepare students as part of a rigorous, seven-year pre-college preparation program. USC provides resources and welcomes middle school and high school students to its campus every weekday and on Saturdays during the school year for additional instruction. USC trains teachers, provides tutors and learning materials and supports parents so that they can be active participants in their children's academic pursuits. The NAI students don't have to wonder if they can compete for a spot in a selective college. They are being prepared to compete beginning in the sixth grade.

The model works. We currently have nearly 900 students enrolled in NAI and graduate about 70 every year. The program has a 98 percent success rate in terms of its graduates going on to four-year colleges. We are expanding the program to approximately 1,100 students by 2020, at which point we expect to be matriculating nearly 130 students into four-year colleges every year.

CHARTER SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Another college preparation program we have put in place comes in the form of a charter high school network managed by a nonprofit partner, Ednovate Inc., which was designed and developed by our Rossier School of Education. The instruction model emphasizes college preparation and combines technology with personalized instruction to promote the idea of Positive Multigenerational Change.

USC Hybrid High, the first of these charter high schools to graduate a cohort of students, reported very encouraging results in spring 2016, with 100 percent of seniors being accepted into at least one four-year college or university.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECRUITMENT

Adding to these efforts to widen access to higher education is our community college recruitment program. USC is the only university among its private research university peers to widely recruit and admit community college transfer students. We view community college transfers as a creative pathway to attract qualified students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Nationally, fewer than 1 of every 1,000 students at the most selective private universities is a community college transfer; but each year, USC admits more than 800. Importantly, our transfer students graduate at the same rate as all of our other undergraduate students.

RESULTS

Each year, NAI and the charter schools are adding hundreds of students — most of whom are underrepresented minorities and first-generation college students — to the four-year college pipeline. Some of these students attend USC, while others are accepted at University of California and Cal State campuses, as well as to institutions such as Harvard, Yale, West Point, the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, MIT and Stanford.

With our community college recruitment program, roughly half of the 800 transfers we accept annually come from challenging socioeconomic conditions, and more than 36 percent are the first in their families to go to college.

BEYOND USC: A NATIONAL VISION

USC has proven that these programs have a tangible, measurable impact. The purpose of this blueprint is to tell the world about what has been working at USC. But more than that, we want to generate even greater impact. Although we are a large, private research university, we are still only one institution in one city in the United States. We can only imagine the scale of the impact on diversity in higher education if more of our nation's private research universities launched similar initiatives.

C. L. Max Nikias
President of USC

> "Pay attention to the pipeline. Partner with K-12 schools. This is where we can make a difference."
>
> — *C. L. Max Nikias, President of USC*

Higher Education Means Upward Mobility

Individuals with a Bachelor's Degree

Are about 24% more likely to be employed

Experience an increase in job safety

Earn up to 132% more in annual salary

Have a lower incidence of poverty

Are 50% more likely to have health insurance

Collect more than double in retirement income

Source: Perna, 2015

"Students who are the first in their families to attend college have all the skills to be successful students — before they even get here. They are driven, resilient and eager to learn. They are exactly the type of students who succeed in higher education."

—*Provost Michael Quick*

The benefits of higher education are undisputed (Trostel, 2015). Equally important, people who attend college are less likely to rely on social welfare programs, have greater civic engagement, are more philanthropic and are more likely to vote (Perna, 2015).

Yet, there is a huge economic disparity in who attends college. Laura Perna, in a 2015 testimony to the United States House of Representatives, argued that even "when they do enroll, students from low-income families tend to attend less selective postsecondary educational institutions and complete degrees at lower rates" (p. 1).

Perna and Jones (2013) found that a comprehensive and multifaceted approach from various committed players is required to increase the college access and success of first-generation and low-income students.

This comprehensive approach includes (Perna, 2015, p. 2):

» Financial resources to pay college costs
» Adequate academic preparation for college-level requirements
» Information and knowledge required to understand and navigate the complicated pathways into, across and through higher education institutions

For the benefit of individual students and for the benefit of society as a whole, it is essential to understand how we can create the conditions for low-income students to enroll and thrive in higher education.

The Opportunity Gap

30%

In 2012, students from the highest income families were 30% more likely to enroll in college than students from the lowest income families.

9%

In 2013, only 9% of students from the lowest income families earned bachelor's degrees.

77%

77% of students from the highest income families graduate with bachelor's degrees.

Source: Perna, 2015, p. 2

An Opportunity for Universities to Take the Lead

"While the core mission of USC is to educate students and perform research, improving the lives of people, particularly the people in nearby communities, is equally important. This is truly an engaged university."

— *Senior Vice President of University Relations Thomas Sayles*

STRENGTH-BASED PATHWAYS

What is the role of the institution in facilitating student success? One school of thought is that students are responsible for their own success: They are expected to break down barriers and navigate college by relying on their own "self-determination and internal motivation" (Shumaker and Wood, 2016, pgs. 10–11).

The other school of thought argues that the responsibility for student success is in large part a function of the institution. To what extent can the institution help reduce and minimize the struggles these students are likely to have? In other words, higher education institutions should be proactive in the roles they play as students transition to college, helping them negotiate new and old identities of what it means to be a college student (Shumaker and Wood, 2016, p. 10; Rendón, 1995; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Within higher education, strengths-based pathways — as opposed to the traditional deficit-oriented focus — enhance underrepresented and first-generation student success (Murrell, 2016).

Strengths-based pathways view students in a holistic, asset-centered manner. Youth, their families and the communities in which they originate are resilient. Their educational experiences, academic development and, ultimately, academic success are both short- and long-term processes (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

This strategy identifies outcomes like meaningfulness, engagement, relationships, resilience and general well-being relevant to students' educational process (Murrell, 2016).

Through this shift in orientation, students are an extension of their communities and are encouraged to thrive in their academic environments rather than simply survive those environments (Liesveld & Miller, 2005).

STRONG CONNECTIONS

Since its inception in 1880, the University of Southern California has held a special place in the literal and figurative heart of Los Angeles. That strong connection continues today, with USC serving as the hub for a multi-layered network of partnerships with its surrounding communities.

Today, USC emphasizes strengths-based approaches through programs and projects that have a positive impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Altogether, more than 400 community initiatives are supported, many of them focusing on education and family wellness.

Staff and faculty play instrumental roles in administering these programs, but to maximize the impact of these efforts, USC also deploys student volunteers who earn academic credit while supporting community initiatives. Each year, more than 2,000 USC students enroll in one of the Joint Educational Project's Service Learning Courses. Through these programs, USC students have worked directly with middle school students, high school students and aspiring transferees to help them gain the skills and confidence to achieve their higher education dreams.

Five Principles to Strength–Based Education

1 Instead of exclusively focusing on academic behavior and achievement, educators should value characteristics like hope, active engagement and personal well-being.

2 Educators should personalize student learning and expand assessments of academic performance to include students' strengths, evolving interests and developing needs.

3 Networking with peers and other institutional agents generates praise and resources that can leverage student success.

4 Educators should model strengths-based practices inside and outside of the classroom.

5 Educators and students should actively seek out novel experiences and practice their strengths through strategic course selection, extracurricular activities, internships, mentoring relationships and other targeted growth opportunities.

Source: Lopez & Louis, 2009

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The USC Blueprint

Among USC's various college access programs, three flagship initiatives have built on the strengths-based pathways model.

| NEIGHBORHOOD ACADEMIC INITIATIVE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL | EDNOVATE CHARTER SCHOOLS HIGH SCHOOL | COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECRUITMENT POSTSECONDARY |

Celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2016 and now has 990 graduates, with 836 scholars currently enrolled.
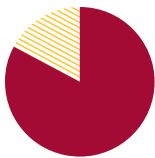
Comprehensive, seven-year pre-college preparation program. Students self-identify as wanting to go to college and need to maintain a C+ average.

Students supplement their academic studies with early-morning tutoring on weekdays and daylong Saturday classes at USC.
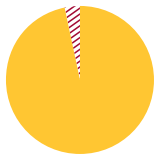
Students also have access to after-school tutoring, remedial and enrichment sessions, workshops on time management and study skills, PSAT and SAT preparation, cultural field trips and recreational activities.

The NAI Family Development Institute ensures parents or guardians are involved and that the home is optimized for successful academic pursuit.

NAI scholars commit at least 250 additional hours to their academic studies per year.
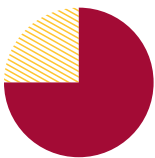
Currently operating 3 high schools, which will graduate 300 students per year when they reach full enrollment in 2019–20.

Part of a charter network operated through a partnership between the USC Rossier School of Education and Ednovate Inc., a charter management organization founded by USC Rossier.

Ednovate's personalized learning model is informed by the belief that students can excel when they receive 1-to-1 instruction.

The curriculum is aligned to the ACT College & Career Readiness Standards.

Ednovate develops a schoolwide culture in which every student has a sense of community and belonging. Each student is part of a four-year advisory cohort, and parents have more than 16 1-on-1 meetings with student advisors over four years.

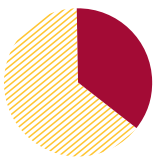**Every year, USC enrolls over 800 community college transfer students.**

Community college transfer program is an important component of USC's overall efforts to have a balanced, diverse student body.

USC is unique among its private college peers from the Association of American Universities in its commitment to recruiting and admitting community college transfer students.

The university maintains relationships with community colleges throughout Southern California by collaborating on transfer pathways.

USC actively maintains articulation agreements with nearly 100 community colleges in California.

Regular seminars and presentations for prospective transfer students are hosted on campus.

82.8%
of NAI graduates are first-generation college students

96.9%
underrepresented minorities

75%
of Ednovate graduates are first-generation college students

95%
underrepresented minorities

36.2%
of community college transfer students are first-generation college students
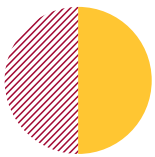
50%
Pell Grant eligible

"We try to help students learn to advocate for themselves. It's a skill set that not a lot of college students have. We really try to set up our students for success; to teach them to be self-aware and recognize their strengths as well as their areas for growth."
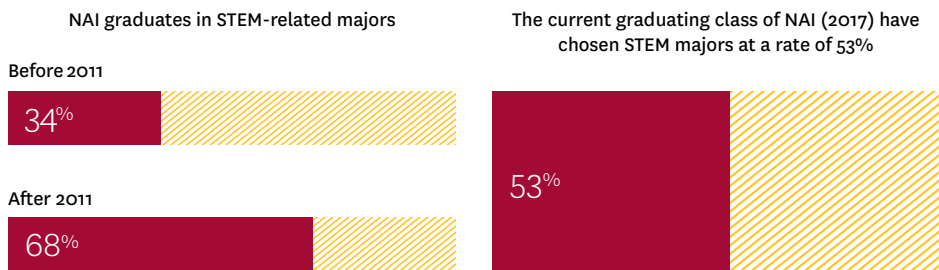
— *David Hernandez, Teacher and Advisor, USC Hybrid High*

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# Impact and Evolution

Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI)

» NAI's strong graduation and college attendance rates correlate to a significant percentage of graduates attending USC.

» The most represented high school among USC's entering freshman class in fall 2016 was the Foshay Learning Center, home of the NAI and a public school in a predominantly low-income area near USC.

100%
high school
graduation rate

98%
college
attendance rate

41%
of NAI graduates have
attended USC
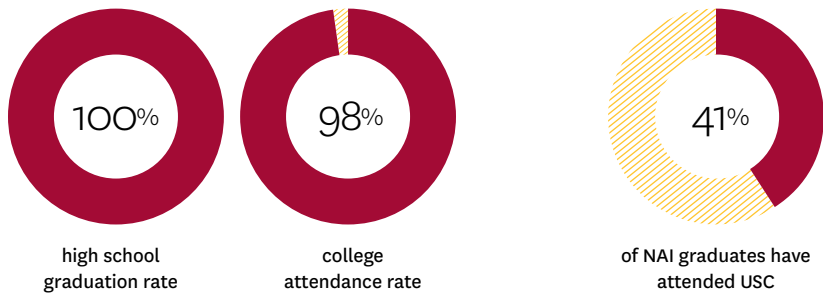
» Students entering STEM majors have doubled since the launch of a Saturday Academy for Science in 2011.

NAI graduates in STEM-related majors

Before 2011
34%

After 2011
68%

### The current graduating class of NAI (2017) have chosen STEM majors at a rate of 53%

53%

» For NAI middle school students, boys and girls now learn separately during Saturday Academy, based on research (Gurian and Stevens, 2005) that suggests boys require more movement and physical activity. This initiative resulted in the boys catching up to the median SAT scores that girls had been achieving in the program.
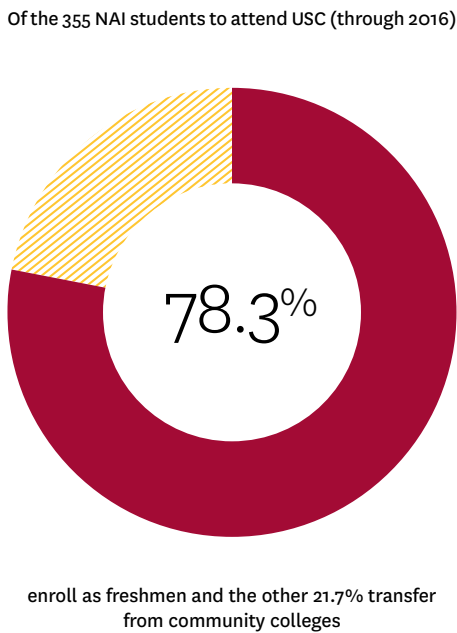
» The Kinder to College Initiative was added as an even earlier intervention program targeting boys, who tend to fall behind earlier than girls (Alloway et al., 2002). The program focuses on reading proficiency and serves as a feeder for NAI.

Of the 355 NAI students to attend USC (through 2016)

78.3%

enroll as freshmen and the other 21.7% transfer from community colleges

» NAI's expansion into East Los Angeles, near USC's Health Sciences Campus, will nearly double its impact by 2020.

590 scholars — 2013 (pre-expansion into East LA)

836 scholars — 2017

1,051 scholars — 2020 (projection)
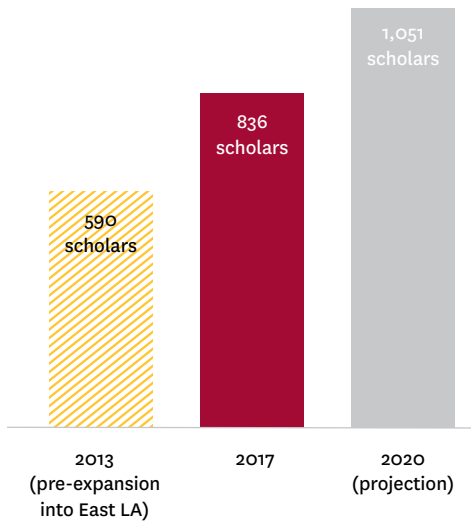
Ednovate Charter Schools

» Ednovate students outperform the Los Angeles Unified School District student average on the ACT.

» 100% of USC Hybrid High seniors graduated on time in June 2016, and each received at least one college acceptance from a selective four-year college or university.

» Collectively, they earned 437 total acceptances, as well as more than $5 million in scholarships and grants.

» Six students were accepted to USC, with four enrolling in fall 2016.

» USC Hybrid High has been joined by two more high schools in the Ednovate network — USC East College Prep, which opened in fall 2015 in Lincoln Heights, near the USC Health Sciences Campus, and USC College Prep — Santa Ana, which opened in fall 2016.
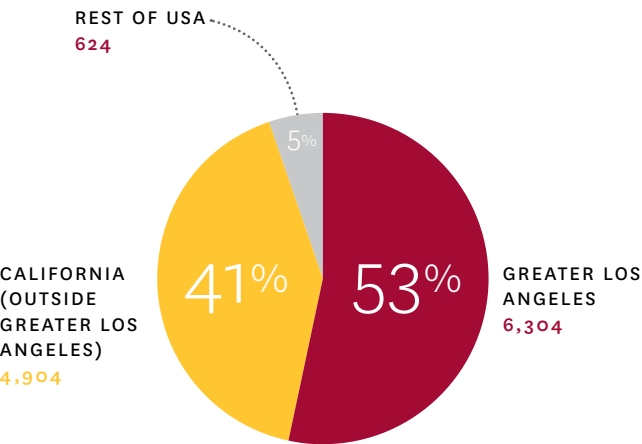
1,500

The three schools will serve 1,500 students when they reach full enrollment in 2019–20.

Community College Recruitment

» From 2003 to 2016, 11,832 students have transferred to USC, primarily from greater Los Angeles and throughout California.
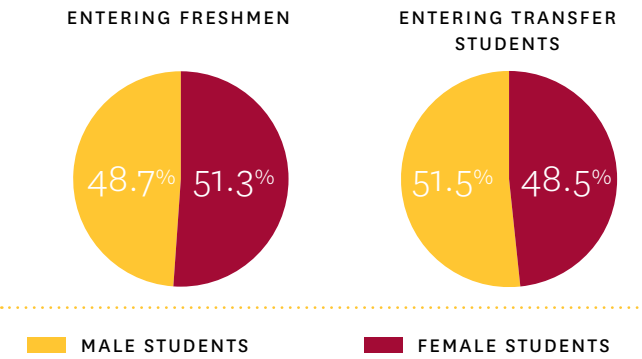
REST OF USA
624

5%

CALIFORNIA (OUTSIDE GREATER LOS ANGELES)
4,904
41%

GREATER LOS ANGELES
6,304
53%

» Community college students transfer into USC at rates that far surpass averages among private universities.

» USC's new Academic Counseling Services unit helps community college transfer students and other at-risk student populations succeed.

» Community college transfer students graduate at the same rate as the rest of the USC student body: 92%.

Transfer Student Graduation Rate

92%

» While female students have been outpacing male students in overall college enrollment since the early to mid-1990s, USC's community college recruitment model has provided another pathway to bolster the enrollment of male students.

ENTERING FRESHMEN
48.7% **51.3%**

ENTERING TRANSFER STUDENTS
51.5% **48.5%**

MALE STUDENTS   FEMALE STUDENTS

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Achieving Success

740

Number of NAI and Ednovate students who have been added to the college pipeline over the last 10 years (through 2017).

4,000

Number of Pell Grant-eligible community college transfer students who have graduated from USC over the last 10 years (through 2016).

"NAI was the best part of my high school education because it exposed me to the life of a college student before I ever wanted to be one. It gave me the training I needed to succeed in all academic settings and taught me to love learning, which is something I endeavor to teach to my own students every day. Every accomplishment in my life I owe to NAI."

Hiram Sims, USC Class of 2005
Neighborhood Academic Initiative /Foshay Learning Center Class of 2001

Hiram received his bachelor's degree in English and went on to earn a master's in professional writing at USC as well. He is a professor of creative writing at the Los Angeles Film School. He is also editor in chief of World Stage Press and creative director of the Community Literature Initiative.

"Our teachers expected so much of us at Hybrid High. I feel like they taught us well. We're ready. More than anything, they taught us that college is something you can achieve."

Pamela Joya, USC Class of 2020
USC Hybrid High Class of 2016

Pamela, from Gardena, Calif., was a member of the first graduating class of USC Hybrid High School, and one of six Hybrid High grads to be admitted to USC's Class of 2020. She is majoring in psychology.

"Transfer pathways revitalize promises of racial equity within community colleges, and I have benefited enormously from such pathways professionally, academically and, most importantly, as a community member now researching and attempting to improve such transfer opportunities for students just like me."

Adrian Trinidad, USC Class of 2015
Transferred from LA Trade Tech College in 2013

Adrian received scholarship aid from the USC Norman Topping Student Aid Fund, a program that gives preference to first-generation students and those residing in neighborhoods near the two USC campuses. He completed a degree in sociology and is now working toward an even more ambitious goal: a PhD from the USC Rossier School of Education, where he is researching policy and institutional barriers for transfer students.

An Emerging Research Trend

Until recently, research around access programs has focused on exploring the success markers for supporting students through their college preparation and completion phases. This research has been used by program administrators to refine and improve college preparation and access programs. Today however, scholarship in this area is evolving, and the emphasis is shifting to tracking students into their post-academic careers.

USC Rossier's Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice is embarking on a new two-year study of USC Hybrid High School graduates to examine whether the students' high school program experiences translate into greater student success and support their transition into suitable careers.

In the coming years, we will endeavor to replicate and extend the longitudinal nature of this type of study to examine the longer term success of students from all three of USC's pathways by exploring their efficacy in supporting career aspirations as well as academic success.

While the evidence is thus far encouraging, it will be studies like these that ultimately measure the potential for multigenerational change in the communities these programs serve.

Two-Year Longitudinal Study of USC Hybrid High Graduates

» Will serve as a launching pad for conducting longitudinal impact research examining college-going behavior, persistence and graduation for first-generation and underrepresented student populations

» The first step in tracking students through college into their post-academic careers

» Will examine the quality of students' college experiences as it relates to students' overall educational gains that could have far-reaching, multi-generational impact

» Will provide empirical validation for institutions that are willing to invest in strengths-based pathways like those represented at USC

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USC Rossier

School of Education
Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice

Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice
The mission of USC Rossier's Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice is to examine the perspectives and experiences of marginalized students at the intersection of their identities — such as religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and others. The goal is to improve institutional policies and practices that encourage students to be civically engaged toward social justice.

Shafiqa Ahmadi is an associate professor of clinical education at USC Rossier. Her research focuses on legal protection of underrepresented populations in higher education, particularly vulnerable student populations, such as low-income, first-generation college students.

Darnell Cole is an associate professor of education at USC Rossier. He has particular expertise in studying students' college experiences and their educational gains, as well as conducting mixed methods and survey research.

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