

July 7, 2020

Dear USC Viterbi Undergraduate Students:

I am writing to follow up on USC Provost Zukoski's announcement of July 1, 2020. It is surely disappointing to learn that the most recent predictions for the increased intensity of the COVID-19 spread have required the substantial scaling down of the number of classes that could be offered in a hybrid mode. USC Viterbi had prepared for an agile, hybrid and flexible modality of class instruction, using its nationally recognized DEN@Viterbi system, which has led to its online graduate programs being highly ranked (e.g., being the top program in Computer Science, and in the top four, often ranked at the top, in all engineering disciplines, for the last 8 years in a row). However, the new health policy guidelines have required us to now offer most of our classes strictly online. At the same time, please also note that we are fully aware of the very recent requirements for our international students, which we will endeavor to accommodate.

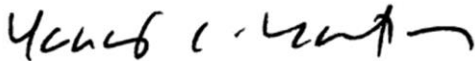
I share many of your frustrations on the disruption that COVID-19 has brought to your education, your growth and development, and your plans. My faculty and staff colleagues and I will miss seeing many of you on campus, and we can't wait to return to a more normal situation. Allow me to offer, however, three positive, and I hope, exhilarating perspectives that might help us look beyond the narrow Fall 2020 horizon:

1. Your future as engineering graduates is brighter than ever before. Indeed, an important lesson we learned during this unprecedented crisis is the vital role that science and technology play. We have learned lessons not only on how to combat this pandemic, but also on how to help us all work, innovate and create a better world as we exit the COVID-19 crisis. The world will impatiently need you, your skills and your mindsets as soon as possible. I agree on this eagerness. There is a necessity to prepare the engineering talent—namely, *you*—for the immediate future, particularly because it comes with the Viterbi mindset of Engineering + which encapsulates how engineering enables so many other disciplines. I understand that this anticipation is mutual: you can't wait, either. And we want to ensure that we can help you reach your plans and dreams promptly and with the highest fidelity possible.
2. While spatially disconnected, in many ways we are better connected than ever before. It is almost certain that the future will involve a creative combination of both spatial and online connectivity, in forms we can only imagine. Those who can successfully predict such a blend, one that is likely to redefine what it means to work, create, innovate and play, will win the future. I view this intriguing challenge with great anticipation, and I believe that the experience we will have in the Fall, unanticipated as it is, will nonetheless not only help us understand how to leverage it, but also to use it to invent the future. To this goal we will explore many different avenues for your active engagement with fellow students, student groups, activities outside the curriculum, and other means of probing as far as possible the boundaries of connectivity. In many ways, you will be the co-creators of such inventions.

3. All of you joined USC Viterbi because of our mission to *engineer a better world for all humanity*. This mission is more important than ever before. It is one that the present crisis has strongly reinforced. The Viterbi School is fully committed to keep advancing in this overarching objective with activities that not only develop technical competence, but also character; as the two together result in the forming of *trustworthy engineers*. The COVID-19 crisis has inadvertently helped us focus on things that matter, things we value, as individuals, and as a society. In many ways, it has challenged our true character. I see the Fall Semester as yet another opportunity for us to further nurture these qualities, and grow as individuals. And in the process continue changing the conversation about engineering—who we are, what we do and what we look like. And with an incoming class for Fall 2020 very close to gender parity for the second consecutive year; with the advance of mindsets, such as those reflected in the Grand Challenges Scholars Program, cofounded at USC Viterbi; and with the reimagining of engineering as the enabling discipline of our times, we are making important strides to fulfilling our mission.

In the next few days, we will send specific programs that we hope will help make your Fall experience intellectually stimulating, inspiring, full of connection and engagement, and as exciting as it can be. Please look for such updates in the very near future.

Thank you, and Fight On!



Yannis C. Yortsos
Dean, USC Viterbi School of Engineering