

FIGHTING ON.

DAILY TROJAN

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the world ... unfortunately, those offices have been shut down,” Garry said. “This is the time for universities to carry that work forward.”

Faith Armstrong, a sophomore majoring in international relations, said she was excited to learn more and potentially get involved with the center’s initiatives. She said the center will help stop the spread of misinformation by educating its attendees.

“Ensuring that students are informed about the basics of human rights law in such a critical time where we’re seeing constant violation of human rights would be incredible,” Armstrong said.

Neena Harris, a senior majoring in legal studies, said she hopes the center will bolster civil discourse and raise opportunities for individuals to conduct legal research, receive research assistance on international human rights and refugee law, and participate in workshops.

“Conversation[s] [are] where we grow. It’s where we are able to thrive and where we’re able to understand each other. But if those conversations aren’t happening, then ... everybody is fighting against each other,” Harris said. “This clinic specifically will help foster that dialogue between different groups, and I think it will ultimately help us to grow and to progress.”

Garry said that universities must step up with initiatives to offer creative resistance to human rights violations.

“We need to harness the intellect, and the passion and the enthusiasm of faculty and students while they’re in their educational formative years to think about ... the weaknesses of the system and how we can strengthen multilateral efforts for promotion and respect for human rights,” Garry said.

SCHOLARS | The program offered one student the chance to be a Ph.D student

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Sustainability Scholars drew her to the program. She said she hopes to combine her research on technologies that improve air quality with the regulatory experience of her advisor, Jiachen Zang, an assistant professor of environmental engineering, to bring about change.

“I’ve seen the proof of how needed these technologies are,” Ramirez said. “Jiachen Zang then has connected me to her colleagues at [California Air Resources Board] and to numerous colleagues and other agencies.”

The most impactful lesson Ramirez learned from her research was that a uniform reduction of emissions doesn’t solve the uneven distribution of emissions in disadvantaged communities.

“I think that was an incredible finding that I saw, because that shows proof that there has to be tailored local isolations specifically for the communities that we work with,” Ramirez said.

Ramirez’s discovery enabled her to more effectively advocate for changes to regulatory standards in her local community.

“I’ve spoken about my research findings to local community organizations. I’ve spoken about my research findings to agencies,” Ramirez said. “It’s been really nice that I’ve been able to apply my research outside of the laboratory.”

Ramirez, who works a full-time job, said she would recommend the program to other researchers because of its flexibility for professionals like herself.



Teo Gonzales / Daily Trojan file photo

Venezia Ramirez, a master’s student studying sustainable engineering, said her research helped her advocate for her local community.

“[The Astani Scholars Program] allows full-time working professionals to pursue their master’s program but also engage in research,” Ramirez said.

The master’s program also gives students the opportunity to gauge their interest in pursuing a Ph.D. program in environmental engineering. After working closely with Wu on his research project, Smith extended an offer to Wu to join as a Ph.D. student.

“[Wu’s] a success story within the program where we have a master’s student that comes in, starts doing research, gets to know a faculty member and then they feel comfortable enough or confident

enough in their abilities, so then [we] make the offer for a full Ph.D. with four years of funding,” Smith said.

Smith said that the ability of the scholars to balance coursework and still excel in their research efforts impresses him, and that he hopes to increase the number of students in the program, as well as their funding, in the coming years.

“We require 10 hours per week of research on average for the students in the program, but I often see them exceed that. They’re so eager to do research and excited by getting that research out there,” Smith said.

MEDIA

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to discrimination — with figures like Kevin Love, Simone Biles and tennis champion Naomi Osaka using their platforms to share personal struggles and advocate for change.

Other examples include athletes turning to YouTube and TikTok to share recovery routines, behind-the-scenes vlogs and business ventures. For Annenberg, the report is also a product of a nuanced research environment and open conversation about athlete-owned media.

“USC, and specifically the [USC] Next Level Sports initiative, have really made us the natural home for sports scholarship and the intersection of sports and media and business and how it impacts marginalized communities and impacts society,” Rogers said.

The research progress also acts as a springboard for future investigations and the student researchers who were involved.

“This is really a big piece that made me rethink how I wanted to look toward my career, and it really made me dive into that strategy aspect from a consumer engagement perspective especially,” Rosenberg said.

In future research, Bay said she is determined to explore more topics in the media space for women athletes.

“I’m really excited to do updates on this study, to go back into the field in another year to see how much growth we can document, and particularly growth where there were gaps that we’ve identified,” Bay said, “I’m hoping to be able to trace the growth of [women-owned] media content, because that’s a persistent inequity that we determined.”

CELEBRATING

25

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Report shows rise in athlete-owned media

New research reveals how athletes are taking control of sports content creation.

By **APRIL MAO**
Staff Writer

When Juju Watkins dropped 51 points in a single game — the most in USC women’s basketball history — she stepped off the court as not only a generational student athlete, but also the main character of content creation. The record-breaking night became an Instagram reel posted by the USC women’s basketball account that has since racked up over 800k views, turning it into a viral celebration of identity, influence and athlete-driven storytelling.

This shift toward athlete-owned media and athlete-driven media is the focus of “Owning the Narrative,” a report composed over the past year and recently released by the Norman Lear Center on Oct. 9. The report found high-profile ventures like LeBron James’ SpringHill Company and Peyton Manning’s Omaha Productions helped athletes monetize their own content across digital platforms up to \$725 million.

“[We’re] trying to map something out that nobody’s really mapped out



Bella Hoffman / Daily Trojan

before,” said Adam Rogers, director of research operations at the USC Norman Lear Center. “We conducted in-depth interviews with critical stakeholders. We did an in-depth content analysis of athlete-owned video podcasts. We put a lot of our research tools in action on this one.”

The study, which includes content analysis and a newly developed

taxonomy of athlete media ventures, framed this movement as a realignment in the media landscape of who gets to speak, who gets heard and who gets paid.

“There has been a continuum of change for athletes as media figures — from appearing in more traditional roles as sports broadcasters to content creators across a variety of

topics, not just sports,” said Willow Bay, dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the co-principal investigator on this research.

Bay, a former co-host of a behind-the-scenes sports television show, said the media landscape and the innovations of the content need to be assessed.

“My early career in media was in athlete-driven storytelling. I worked for a show called ‘NBA Inside Stuff’ in the 1990s,” Bay said. “Today we see athletes telling their own stories, creating, producing and monetizing their own stories, which is a profound and pronounced shift.”

William Rosenberg, a recent graduate from Annenberg and a student researcher on the report, said that athlete-owned platforms also allow for more diverse storytelling.

“One of the things that really stood out to me was the ‘behind the scenes’ footage that college football programs had begun putting out. Seven of the 10 [teams I looked at] had started putting out week to week behind the scenes footage,” Rosenberg said. “In the world of sports, fans want to feel as close with their favorite teams as possible.”

One example highlighted in the report is sports podcasts creating deeper and richer stories. Former NBA star Carmelo Anthony described his podcast “7PM in Brooklyn” as an “immersive journey” blending sports and culture through intentional storytelling.

This shift has allowed athletes to address topics often overlooked in traditional media — from mental health

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Gould opens human rights center

Professor Hannah Garry is leading the new initiative to better justice education.

By **MIRANDA HUANG**
Assistant News Editor

The Gould School of Law will open the Donna and Spencer Gilbert Global Justice and Human Rights Center on Wednesday with its first event, “Centering Human Rights and Justice,” from noon to 1:30 p.m.

With a \$5 million donation from the alumni family, the new center will train law students to become human rights attorneys, focusing on preventing antisemitism, racism, xenophobia and global persecution. Five of Donna and Spencer Gilbert’s kids attended USC.

In a statement to the *Daily Trojan*, Franita Tolson, dean of Gould, said the center is a crucial part of the school’s global mission to reflect a shared commitment to fairness and human dignity.

“This new center is able to engage students, scholars and practitioners in education, research and policy work that promote an enduring respect for human rights and strengthen the rule of law around the world — values deeply ingrained in our law school,” Tolson wrote.

Hannah Garry, clinical law professor and founding director of Gould’s International Human Rights Clinic, will lead the initiative. Garry said the center will draw from the International Human Rights Clinic’s core pillars.

“Human rights law can be a backstop or protection for individual rights, both domestically [and] internationally,” Garry said. “I want to commit my life to

human rights and protection of individuals, no matter where they are or who they are.”

The center will also incorporate a Justice and Accountability Initiative, aimed at documenting war crimes, genocides and crimes against humanity, among other actions.

Garry plans to host conferences, symposia, visiting scholars and practitioners in projects and policy work, as well as a distinguished lecture series with accomplished legal scholars.

The center is also launching a summer abroad program affiliated with the Howard A. Kaiman “Nuremberg to The Hague” summer abroad program. The program will focus on educating students about the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials, where participants will gain insight into the broader international criminal justice and human rights law

system by visiting historic sites in Poland and Germany.

“The vision that I had for this center predates the Trump administration, predates the current attacks on universities, predates the Israel-Palestine conflict, or at least this version of it,” Garry said. “The focus on antisemitism is not just about antisemitism, but all forms of xenophobia and hate and how those lead to atrocity situations if they are left unchecked.”

The center will also sponsor a fellowship that will provide funding to students to engage in externships with nonprofit, nongovernmental, human rights or United Nations organizations under the guidance of an attorney.

“Atrocity prevention has traditionally been a key part of the U.S. government. In fact, we’ve had whole departments and sections working on atrocity prevention efforts around

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Jake Berg / Daily Trojan file photo

The Donna and Spencer Gilbert Global Justice and Human Rights Center will also incorporate a Justice and Accountability Initiative.

Inaugural Sustainability scholars finish first year

Students worked alongside faculty to find solutions to environmental problems.

By **JACK FARRINGER**
Staff Writer

As Hang Wu researched the effects of the toxic chemicals found in Los Angeles’ drinking water and air, he considered his motives every day.

“From a research perspective, it’s very important to think [about] why you did this,” said Wu, a former master’s student and current first-year Ph.D. candidate studying environmental engineering. “It’s not only about research, it’s also about life.”

Wu and two other graduate researchers, Venezia Ramirez and Lisa Staugaard, make up the first cohort of Astani Graduate Sustainability Scholars, a program that gives USC master’s students in the civil and environmental engineering department financial assistance and opportunities to work alongside a faculty member on a research project. The inaugural 2024 cohort has just started its second year.

Adam Smith, the director of the environmental engineering program and Wu’s faculty advisor, said students choose a topic they are interested in and are then paired with an advisor working in the same area.

The three students each pursued separate research projects focused on sustainability efforts. Wu focused on the presence of chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl

substances, or PFAS, in Los Angeles’ drinking water. PFAS are toxic, long-lasting chemicals found in water, air and soil that have been linked to harmful health effects.

Ramirez, a master’s student studying sustainable engineering, researched the distribution of truck emissions, looking specifically at how emissions impacted disadvantaged communities, while Staugaard took a deep dive into food contamination on a molecular level.

As he researches, Wu said he tries to go beyond the confines of his project and figure out how the information he learns can positively impact lives in a real-world setting.

“Maybe I can use this technology to remove the PFAS from the environment, [or] scale up this technology to products so people can remove the PFAS from their drinking water,” Wu said. “We always need to think about how we can apply the knowledge we learned [on] the campus to the real world.”

This academic year, Wu will continue this research on PFAS and their impact on the community. He has already begun researching PFAS in the dust and air, and said he hopes to find real-world solutions beyond the laboratory.

Smith said the students’ research project typically lasts throughout their time in the master’s program, meaning the Astani scholars could work on the project from one and a half up to two years.

Ramirez said the career opportunities provided by the Astani

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A Brown New Yorker’s reflections on hope

Zohran Mamdani’s win in the New York City mayoral election uplifts immigrants.

By ANAHITA SAXENA
Assistant Opinion Editor

If you know me, you know I love my city. And this November, I love my city more than I ever have. On Tuesday, Zohran Kwame Mamdani — an immigrant, Indian, Muslim, socialist — won the role of the next mayor of New York City.

And there is absolutely nothing that is more New York than that.

Growing up in New York, the first thing I learned was loving humans. Every day, you stumble upon the goodness of humanity healing the same hurting within it. Empathy is ingrained into your world perception solely off of the commute you take filled with stories of lives you share 20 minutes with daily.

When our beloved high school security guard Richie passed away while trying to break up a gun fight in the subway, our community petitioned together to rename the street after him. When a stressed, stroller-pushing mother’s paper bags fell apart one weekday evening on the subway, the entire train came together silently to collect her groceries from the floor and help repack her bags.

New York is impromptu bachata in the rich orange light of the sunset. It

is the man with kind eyes and a soft accent who operates the dosa cart in Washington Square Park. It is the aunties and uncles who set up lawn chairs on the sidewalk, smoking cigarettes and conversing in their mother tongue because the air outside is fresher than in their apartments upstairs. It is the white-bearded man who plucks the guzheng in Central Park.

And as Mamdani preached, holding his voice steady and strong in his victory speech, “New York will remain a city of immigrants: a city built by immigrants, powered by immigrants and, as of tonight, led by an immigrant.”

Mamdani’s platform was rooted in creating a more affordable and inclusive city, from emphasizing a future of free and fast busses, freezing rent for the two million New Yorkers in rent-stabilized housing, and “Trump-Proofing” New York City by expelling United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement from all city facilities and increasing legal support. He films reels in kurtas and suits, speaking Hindi, Arabic, Bengali. He is a man of the people.

In the past few months immigrants across the country have been stripped of hope. From the Supreme Court’s justification for the use of racial profiling by ICE to the various restrictions on visas and immigration, the growing sentiment for immigrants is that they are no longer wanted here.

Mamdani’s overwhelming support, not just within New York but



Anahita Saxena, assistant opinion editor, writes about her experience growing up in New York City as the child of immigrants.

across the world, has made it outrageously clear that immigrants are in fact needed in this country. The stories they tell and the spaces they create define our country.

Mamdani speaks for the millions of Americans practicing joyful resistance when they came together to stand by immigrants and those oppressed by the current administration for the No Kings Protests. “In this moment of political darkness, New York will be the light,” said Mamdani during his speech.

New York, even preceding Mamdani’s victory, has always been a light of joyful resistance. My childhood was composed of frequenting the same immigrant owned South Indian restaurant on Lexington, dim sum place in Chinatown and Ethiopian eatery in Harlem. I was lucky enough to grow up in a city where my parent’s accents went unquestioned, a city where you hear a new language on every block.

New York is beautifully represented by Mamdani. It is the kind of place where in the face of staunch, hateful

authoritarianism, there is a smiling brown man who befriends his bodega owner and goes on 15-day hunger strikes with taxi drivers, who will lead the greatest city in the world, and the most important one in the United States of America.

The minute his victory was announced, I ran out of the newsroom to call my father, a man 15 years older than Mamdani, with politics not entirely similar to his, who followed his campaign with a passion. Tears flowing down my face, he congratulated me. What I would’ve told him, if I was able to speak without breaking down further, was thank you.

If it wasn’t for my parents’ commitment to this country, despite their homesickness that has weathered out the years and the 7,000-mile separation from their families, I wouldn’t have known love in the New York way. Their refusal to move into the suburbs when many of their friends did, their long debated decision to become citizens and their effort to create a true home for us in Manhattan made way for Mamdani’s victory.

Immigrant parents like them are the reason that people like Mamdani and his supporters exist. Their unwavering faith and love for the city is the reason why “the dreams we’ve dreamt together, become the agenda we deliver together.” This city has always been ours, and it will always be ours.

We can’t let the United States become a theocracy

Religion can be a wonderful thing, but the advent of the Christian right threatens all.

By CHARLOTTE DEKLE
Staff Writer

One of my earliest memories is of a classmate telling me to go to hell because I don’t believe in God. This terrified me; eternal damnation was not something I had conceived of in elementary school. In hindsight, since I don’t believe in hell, the threat is rather hollow. But now, it seems like whenever I leave my dorm, there is a missionary or sidewalk preacher ready to convert me to “save my soul.”

There is nothing inherently wrong with religion or, more broadly, belief in a higher power. If your religious beliefs inform your moral code and fill you with purpose, more power to you. Many religious communities have been at the forefront of progressive political advocacy. Christianity, Judaism and Islam all played crucial roles in the Civil Rights movement; engaged Buddhism has long supported anti-nuclear and prison reform campaigns.

However, religious belief is not the same as religious power. As organized religion has declined in the

United States, Christian nationalists have sought to regain political power in pursuit of total religious control.

They falsely claim that the United States is a “Christian nation”—this falls apart when you consider the Founders were a mix of religious beliefs, some Unitarian, some Christian, some just deists — whose laws must reflect “Christian values,” and that deviations from their beliefs represent moral decay. Their obsession with a heavenly afterlife threatens to make life on Earth hell.

USC is no stranger to religious extremism. The USC College Republicans were accused by Trojan Democrats of Islamophobic rhetoric toward New York Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani by linking his election to the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. College Republicans justified this bigotry, saying they “serve a Risen Christ,” offering an example of how religious language could be wielded to shield bigotry.

Christianity, or any religion, cannot be used as a battering ram against others. Believing in God does not make you inherently virtuous.

This extremism exists not in spite of a religiously dominant political culture, but rather because of it. Although there’s a

conception of “pious” Republicans and “godless” Democrats, the predominance of religion exists throughout the political spectrum.

The Republican Party — traditionally associated with capitalistic values rather than biblical — became co-opted by the Christian right starting in the 1980s. Ronald Reagan actively courted Evangelical leaders like Jerry Falwell and his “Moral Majority,” establishing the GOP as the vehicle for conservative Christian power.

In a 1984 address to evangelical leaders, Reagan praised the merging of church and state. He claimed that the church’s influence on government “worked to our benefit as a nation.” He derided critics of school prayer as “intolerant of religion” and “Marxist.” Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention characterized Reagan’s speech as “transformative” when “the evangelical involvement in public policy” came to fruition.

Today, the movement has gotten its way electorally under its messiah, President Donald Trump. In his executive office, Trump created the “Anti-Christian Bias Task Force,” established a “Faith Office,” and appointed far-right Catholic Supreme Court justices who overturned Roe

v. Wade and are poised to do the same for same-sex marriage.

On the statewide level, Louisiana and Texas recently passed laws requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in every classroom. Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry justified the law, claiming, “If you want to respect the rule of law, you’ve got to start from the original law giver, which was Moses.” State and federal governments are taking a jackhammer to the wall separating church and state.

Allusions to God are ubiquitous on the political left as well. At the 2024 Democratic National Convention, former President Joe Biden invoked God seven times, only two fewer than Trump during the Republican National Convention.

Even without explicit Christian reference, the expectation remains: People ought to have a religion. At the DNC, Vice Presidential Nominee Tim Walz made a rousing plea for unity with those who “may not pray like you do,” presupposing that everyone prays.

This cultural expectation produces deep distrust of non-belief. In a 2014 Pew Research Survey, 53% of Americans said they would be less likely to support an atheist for president. Only 35% said the

same about a candidate who had an extramarital affair.

Atheism is more disqualifying than infidelity: Affairs are more perceived to be a personal failing, while atheism uproots society’s perception of morality. The fear is not about belief itself, but about what happens when morality is understood as human-made, rather than God-given.

Atheism and agnosticism present an alternative way of belief, challenging ingrained beliefs about morality and the nature of existence. It shows that people can be moral without reliance on religious dogma; that humility for the unknown can coexist with care for others; and that reverence can be directed toward human dignity rather than a hypothetical afterlife.

Solvency here does not lie in a staunch anti-religious government stance. Rarely is it fairly applied to all religious expressions, and religious freedom is a better alternative. Instead, there needs to be a concerted effort to quash religious fundamentalism and extremism. Christian nationalism is dangerous not because it is Christian, but because it uses faith to legitimize exclusion and control.

We do not need less faith. We need less theocracy.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Ace Singhal / Daily Trojan

As a journalism student, my life feels riddled with distressing news headlines, ranging from the government shutdown, to a crackdown on immigration, to citizens fearing their own elected officials. It's difficult to find those still moments of optimism. Even our campus seems to be in a state of constant flux, where the integrity of our institution is both under attack and enduring.

Over the past year, we have faced intense budget cuts, layoffs and a rebranding of our diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, sparking deep unease among members of our community. We have also witnessed the rejection of an authoritarian compact offering preferential treatment in exchange for our academic independence, Trojans showing up in protests across Los Angeles and moments of real community, like when voters passed Proposition 50

on Nov. 4 to redraw California's voting maps against partisan gerrymandering across the country.

This inflection point, a time between hope and despair, has made it hard to see how various parts of our L.A. and USC communities continue to thrive despite real setbacks. Bad news is often louder than good news.

This supplement speaks to the various issues at the forefront of our minds and highlights the prevailing spirit of tenacity seen all around us from local immigrant businesses, professors, creatives and more.

— Anya Motwani,
Features Editor

Higher education faces wave of faculty layoffs

USC faculty and students remain concerned over cuts across various departments.

By **DANIELA MATTSON & HANNA KARASINSKA**

Features Staff

In recent months, mass layoffs among faculty and staff have emerged at USC, tied to its operating deficit and threats to federal funding. By the end of October, the University cut more than 900 positions, including significant layoffs of academic advisors at multiple schools as part of departmental restructuring.

The layoffs have brought about uncertainty among the community about the University's future. The layoffs were first signaled by the University in a July letter to staff and faculty from interim President Beong-Soo Kim. In the letter, Kim acknowledged a more than \$200 million operating deficit from fiscal year 2025 and warned that the gap was "unsustainable" without transforming USC's operating model.

"Everyone is extremely concerned about the impact that these layoffs will have," said Aro Velvet, an associate professor of history at Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and vice chair of USC's chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

The fallout at USC mirrors a wave sweeping higher education nationwide. In a July letter similar to the one written by USC's Interim President Kim, the administration at Northwestern stated the need to reduce the university's budget attributable to staff by 5% and thus eliminate approximately 425 staff positions.

"These are very rich, very wealthy institutions," said Mia McIver, the nationwide executive director of AAUP. A *Daily Trojan* article published in March reported that USC budget cuts don't align with the high level of hiring of administrators.

Similarly, Professor Howard Bunsis of Eastern Michigan University analyzed USC's finances and found the university to be in "very strong financial condition." His analysis showed that USC's net assets have grown from \$7.5 billion in 2014 to \$11.7 billion in 2024.

Bunsis described the administration's portrayal of its finances as

"overly pessimistic," citing positive cash flow margins, a strong primary reserve ratio, and stable bond ratings as evidence that the university remains financially secure despite its claims of hardship.

McIver said colleges should put faculty members at the forefront of budget reconsiderations.

More faculty and staff have been laid off while tuition and fees have increased, making USC one of the most expensive schools in the nation, according to an article by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Poluk Sharma, a sophomore studying computer science and business, said she has already felt the impacts of the layoffs.

"Last semester, I had my specific [computer science] advisor reach out to me, give me my course plan [and] get everything settled," Sharma said. "This semester, I wasn't given any of that."

With fewer academic advisors, the ones remaining are left to cover more students, according to Velvet.

"The more people move out of departments and into a model where they're serving several departments that they perhaps don't know as well, also means that they won't be able to give individual, specific attention to students," Velvet said.

Non-tenure track faculty, in particular, remain the most vulnerable, as sudden layoffs with little warning create what McIver described as a "real chilling impact" on morale.

Looking ahead, McIver said the AAUP recommends that USC focus on budget transparency and prioritizes open communication with its faculty and staff as opposed to unilateral decisions from the upper administration.

Sharma also said the University should communicate more with students about layoffs.

"At the moment, on the student side, admin hasn't been too terrible about [transparency], but if it continues, I can see it being a lot more messy," Sharma said.

McIver pointed to the AAUP guidelines, which require institutions like USC to provide true financial urgency before resorting to faculty layoffs, and that faculty should be involved "from start to finish."

As a solution, McIver said institutions like USC could aim to avoid job

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Upholding free speech on campus

USC community strives to uphold diversity of thought in and out of the classroom.

By **LANGSTON JAMES WILKINSON & CHELSEA LATTA**

Features Staff

Members of the USC community seem hesitant, yet hopeful about the endurance of free speech and diversity of thought in the classroom. This is despite a seemingly dark time for human rights and democracy not just in the United States, but the world as a whole, according to Steve Swerdlow, an associate professor of the practice of political science and international relations.

This is due to many of President Donald Trump's policies and tactics echoing those of authoritarian regimes, with the aim of controlling political and social narratives, along with controlling what can be spoken about, discussed by Swerdlow.

"I think this campaign against higher education that we've watched unfold since January 2025 presents extraordinary risks, in the funding or scientific research to agree to certain ideological constraints," Swerdlow said. "Once again, that is a classic authoritarian tactic."

One of the aspects in the campaign, Swerdlow talked about is the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education, which was sent by the Trump administration to colleges nationwide, including USC.

The compact required universities to freeze tuition for only American students for the next five years, required standardized testing, and required the school to define men and women only by their biological processes. Additionally, it prohibited universities from commenting on political situations in addition to other demands. The compact stated that if the universities did not accept the compact, the universities would forgo federal funding.

In an Academic Senate meeting, faculty voiced their opposition to agreeing to the compact. It was an important victory from the perspective of the faculty and student body when the University committed to not follow the compact, even more so because an Undergraduate Student Government poll tallied that 93% said to reject the compact. Despite this, concerns about future pressure from the government on universities remain, as associate professor of history Aro Velvet reflected.



Lauren Kim / Daily Trojan

"I believe that the University's commitment to support students of all backgrounds and all statuses, [and] all citizenships is so incredibly, continually important," Swerdlow said. "It is even more important than it has been in the past."

The removal of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from the University's unifying values, as well as requiring cultural and affinity groups to explicitly state that events are open to all, represents changes within free speech guidelines that may have seeped into the classroom setting.

Arielle Cai, a junior majoring in psychology, said she felt both uncertain and hopeful regarding free speech at USC.

"Everyone is trying to contribute to an environment [where] free speech is continuous and protected," Cai said. "But there's definitely a tendency to not speak up ... because there might be a conflict in opinions and there is going to be a discussion on that which we might not want, or it might get us in trouble expressing a different opinion."

With concerns for constitutional rights, such as freedom of speech, becoming evident throughout the U.S., university campuses are a frequent topic of conversation. Past campus protests regarding topics such as divestment from Israel and a free Palestine were also heavily under scrutiny; these events resulted in arrests and academic consequences.

Cai highlighted that concerns around free speech on campus acutely impact international students' experiences. As one herself, she feels it's harder to speak on certain topics than non-international students.

"I do feel like most of the ideas that are hidden or marginalized are from international students or minorities," Cai said. "There's a tendency that if we feel like we're not going to be accepted, we won't speak up."

Chase Gonzalez, a freshman majoring in business of cinematic arts, said he was optimistic about the University's open dialogue and diverse community.

"What I like about USC in particular is that we're all open to talking about our diverse thoughts and opinions, which is amazing," Gonzalez said.

But not all spaces are equally free to have those hard conversations, according to Gonzalez, who said he often feels hesitant to share his opinions in large classrooms. Gonzalez said he feels some settings lack mutual cooperation and openness to understanding, and productive disagreements concerning politics are not always possible.

"To be able to talk about [politics] openly, you have to have cooperation and understanding about that stuff," Gonzalez said. "Especially nowadays, we have to be careful."

Swerdlow specializes in international and domestic human rights, teaching courses at the University that educate his students on how international laws and human rights standards directly impact U.S. laws and vice versa.

Swerdlow said he was concerned about the seeming backslide of human rights globally; however, he had high praise for the University's commitment to its students, faculty, staff and its unifying values.

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AI actress Tilly Norwood sparks Hollywood debate

Students pursuing creative careers face post-grad job insecurity amid AI boom.

By **NINA KREMER**
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Tilly Norwood isn't like other girls. She loves iced coffee and thrifting. She lives in London and goes to "uni." She's an aspiring actress — and she's also artificial intelligence.

The first AI actress debuted at the Zurich Film Festival last month, sparking controversy across the movie industry. Norwood herself is an unimposing brunette, but the drastic shift she represents in the entertainment industry is unnerving audiences and filmmakers alike. Amid budget cuts in the School of Dramatic Arts, students who aspire to have a career in entertainment are going to go into an industry that is changing in unprecedented ways.

In an eerie Instagram post July 30, Norwood said she was excited to have her first role, claiming that she was feeling "very real emotions." Many actors were appalled, questioning the ethical implications of using AI in film, the impact it will have on the future of human actors and the way it could change an emotion-centric art form.

Aspiring actors already face post-grad job insecurity, and this new development in acting technology may stoke even more anxiety about their future in the field.

"In this industry, there's so few jobs and so many talented people out there, and to know that more jobs were taken out by people that didn't exist is frustrating," said Kehara Edirisinghe, president of Trojan Actors for Film and Television. "[It's] just so much about money, even though it's a business that was founded on human connection."

Unlike Edirisinghe, who is majoring in theatre, Norwood never studied acting, but she was trained on the work of actors who did.

"It completely erases people," Edirisinghe said. "Sure, on the back end, they'll be paid for being involved, but they'll completely lose their sense of self."

Norwood's creator, AI production studio founder Eline Van der Velden, defended Norwood's existence in a Sept. 27 Instagram post, writing that she is not meant to replace humans, but rather a "creative work."

"Like many forms of art before her, she sparks conversation, and that in itself shows the power of creativity. I see AI not as a replacement for people, but as a new tool," Van der Velden wrote.

AI is used as a tool at the USC Center for Generative AI & Society, with its "AI for Media & Storytelling" initiative exploring the applications and implications of AI technology in journalism and cinema.

According to Holly Willis, chair of the Media Arts + Practice division at the School of Cinematic Arts, and the co-director of AIMS, the initiative has used generative AI to create previews of what a film might look like, in writing screenplays, and for extending images or scenes. As they research the helpful ways AI can be used, she said they are also looking into the harm it can cause.

"We're thinking about the environment, we're thinking about bias, we're thinking about job loss," Willis said. "Rather than just celebrating these exciting new tools or criticizing them, we're trying to think more deeply about the entire ecosystem and what its impacts are."

Willis said AIMS researchers are already seeing job loss due to AI's introduction to the film industry, but simultaneously, more AI



Alexa Esqueda / Daily Trojan

production studios are popping up, which allow storytellers to focus on doing the jobs they love and leave the tedious tasks to AI.

One student involved with AIMS, Xindi Zhang, a graduate of SCA's expanded animation Master of Fine Arts program, created a project called "The Song of Drifters," which went on to win a Student Academy Award this year. Willis said Zhang trained an AI model on her own watercolor artwork to create a shapeshifting animation in wave-like patterns. Her success was an example of how AI can be used as a tool to enhance creativity and artistic expression.

"She was able to do something on a very low budget, on a very short timeframe, to create a project that has a very powerful emotional content and effect on the audience, and she couldn't have done it without AI," Willis said. "It was really an amplification of her own visual language and her own storytelling agenda."

As for actors, Willis said they could also use AI tools to expand their own artistic capabilities, and even license their performance as an asset.

"What we're beginning to see is the ability for actors to create digital doubles of themselves and therefore participate in this shift in a way that sustains their acting and what they bring to the craft that's so important, which is the ability to communicate and convey deep emotional resonance and connectivity," Willis said.

The development of AI technology is one in a long history of "radical shifts and transformations" of the film industry since its inception, Willis said. The current updates in technology will shape the ways that films are made in the future and the stories that studios can produce.

Tomm Polos, the Rodric David Chair in Creator Arts at the School of Dramatic Arts, said major television production companies such as Fox Entertainment Studios and Disney are heavily invested in AI technology, so he doesn't predict AI is going anywhere anytime soon. Ultimately, it is up to audiences to dictate how quickly and enthusiastically it is embraced, he said.

The overwhelmingly negative reaction to Norwood may have actually

secured human actors' future, at least in the short term, rather than posed a threat, according to Polos.

"[Audiences are] going to be so overwhelmed by the use of AI or the sensations they get from the screens that they'll want to go to live theater, or they'll want to go to a live concert, or they'll want to do these face-to-face events," Polos said.

Polos said the entertainment industry relies on connecting with audiences to be successful, so while using AI can be cost-effective, entertainment entities and artists must ensure that they maintain a level of authenticity.

"The challenge is, how do you use the tool without losing your soul?" Polos said.

Studios and creatives will come to answer that question as they develop their own relationship to AI, but Polos said it will never replace the arts. Though those who use AI may be the most commercially successful, he said, artists will continue to be invaluable to the creative process.

"AI is a tool, a possible partner and definitely your competition," Polos said.

LAYOFFS | USC reported over 900 layoffs this year



Bella Hoffman / Daily Trojan

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losses through working with unions that represent faculty on campus.

"I know from my experience within higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic that there are definitely examples of administrators who did take that approach and averted the risk of job losses," McIver said.

By restoring that sense of cooperation, McIver said USC and other universities could build trust in their community, from upper administration to faculty, students and staff.

"Universities should always be providing jobs with dignity and be respectful of their workers," McIver said.

According to Velmet, the primary concern among students and faculty is the worry that students' academic experience could be negatively impacted

by having less individualized support and a higher strain on faculty and staff to support more students.

"[What] faculty are looking for is to have input into this new hub model so that we don't end up in a situation where departments have to work with an administrative model that's not actually tailored for their students," Velmet said.

The new model will focus on training staff to better assist students across multiple disciplines as opposed to individual advisors. In a Nov. 3 email to USC faculty, interim President Kim wrote these changes are part of an effort to "reduce internal friction points and inefficiencies."

"Students will suffer, and the faculty, who then have to shoulder this work that is no longer being done by staff, also suffer," Velmet said.

SPEECH



Tara Su / Daily Trojan

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"I can't speak for all faculty, but in my department there's been no suggestion, no discussion about micromanaging content in classrooms, creating guidelines or guardrails," Swerdlow said. "There has been a strong commitment to academic freedom."

Student and faculty experiences with free speech on campus are not uniform. Identity, political leanings and specific settings in and out of the classroom contribute to a divided view on how such freedoms are enduring on campus, which is reflected in the confidence of Arielle Cai who believes there will be an increase in the expression of free speech over the next year compared to Chase Gonzalez's reserved approach preferring to save these conversations for close friends and not the classroom setting. Nevertheless, there is some hope for the future and for the University committing to maintaining diverse perspectives in a time when they seem to be cast aside.

"Despite lots of turbulent times for this campus and for the world, I've consistently seen the students leading the way in a lot of freedom of thought and a lot of fearlessness," Swerdlow said.

Trojan Farmers Market shows resilience amid financial strain

After nearly two decades, local stands and farmers see rising business costs.

By **MARIA LAGUNA & NIDHI BHOGI**
Features Staff

Every Wednesday, students flock to McCarthy Quad for handmade meals from a range of cuisines and fresh produce from California farms. Local vendors at the Trojan Farmers Market have been a core part of the USC experience for nearly 18 years, creating a core part of the Trojan campus experience.

However, as well-known as the market may be, the vendor's logistical efforts to provide Trojans a place to decompress in the middle of the week may be less noticed.

"If I'm being honest, I'm not profitable," said Larisa Rus, founder of Bee Green Honey. "It's a lot of fees to get [the space] ... I probably have to drop this market off. It's been a while since I had a good day here."

Rus founded her business in 2014 — the same year they joined the Trojan Farmers Market — and

has a presence in other Los Angeles farmers markets, such as one in Larchmont Village. While Rus has formed a community around her honey stall on campus, she faces financial challenges.

Despite these roadblocks, Rus said that members of the USC community have "always been great."

"The committee [at USC], they always come in and check on all the vendors, making sure they're happy," Rus said. "I know there's a lot of support to keep the market open. It's been great. I have a lot of faculty members who, every so often, come and support."

Komal Aujla, a freshman majoring in international relations with an emphasis in global business, was a first-time attendee at the farmers' market.

"It's a great way to get to know local vendors in the L.A. area, and different types of cuisine; this is my first time trying a pupusa and I really like it," Aujla said.

The Trojan Farmers Market has had a good impact on some businesses, like The Fruit Patch — a family-run dried fruit and nuts business. Miles Gama-Kadmas,

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Luis Ochea / Daily Trojan

Vendors have provided a diverse range of cuisines and budget-friendly options for students at the weekly market.

MARKET

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operations manager for The Fruit Patch, and their brothers have run The Fruit Patch at Trojan Farmers Market since it started.

“It’s been good. There’s quite a decent amount of sales here, and then we meet some people that we’ve known forever,” Gama-Kadrmaz said. “It’s nice to see the change in people. I’ve seen people come as freshmen and [who] now are grad students.”

But for vendors like Gama-Kadrmaz, who don’t grow the products they sell and simply process them, new trade policies and commuting around L.A. regularly pose financial challenges to their business.

“Gas is a little expensive, and taxes; tariffs for stuff that’s not grown in the [United States], like cashews,” Gama-Kadrmaz said. “[It’s] been a little hard. We had to adjust prices.”

Nonna’s Pantry, an Italian-owned business that started in 2021, has also said it was slightly affected when faced with tariffs on imported Italian products, rising prices and taxes. However, since they produce the meals from scratch locally, salesperson Alessandro Rossi said such factors have not posed huge issues.

The business operates out of a ghost kitchen in Mid-City to make fresh pasta and meals from scratch. When Nonna’s Pantry comes to the Trojan Farmers Market, they make their food either overnight or in the early morning, but they really come to “try to educate the community, especially here [at] McCarthy Quad.”

“I try to [have] some relationship with the customer and make [them] more comfortable and try to explain the best about my culture, my food,” Rossi said. “I try to make a good relationship with the customer.”

Neta Shubin, a junior majoring in computer science, has kept the weekly tradition of going to the farmers market with her friends since her freshman year at USC, and compliments what the different vendors have. She said that, depending on the vendor, there are budget-friendly options at the market.

“The pupusas, you get a lot of bang for your buck,” Shubin said. “But the Hawaiian ... [is] a bit more expensive depending on what you get, but I think the food here is better [than eating at another restaurant] and more interesting.”

While prices for the different vendors vary — Delmy’s Pupusas go for \$5 per pupusa, whereas the chicken fried rice at That Pad Thai Guy’s stand goes for \$15 — each stand provides an alternative dining and shopping option for students looking to either splurge or save.

“I would say some of the food here is a little bit pricey, but just being able to have something new makes it worth it,” said Reni Suhr, a freshman majoring in psychology. “You’re spending the same amount of money somewhere [at USC Village] as well, or if you’re ordering food ... so I think the experience makes up for the extra money.”

According to Rossi, student demand has changed.

“This market is still good. ... But, this year, in general, the students or the community spend less money,” Rossi said.

For Daniella Spadaro, a freshman majoring in business administration, the comfort she found at the Trojan Farmers Market was due to its “familiar environment.” Only living 25 minutes away from USC, Spadaro realized a lot of the vendors were the same ones from her local farmers’ market.

Even though Spadaro said she hasn’t looked deeply into the different price points offered, she said she finds the offerings at the market to come at a lower cost than other snack options on campus.

“It’s really important for students from other places to be able to experience and participate in other cultures and learn about their food and try, and maybe they’ll find something they enjoy that they wouldn’t have had before at home,” Spadaro said.

USC research work persists despite budget cuts

Students and faculty keep up their research while their future remains uncertain.

By KEATON TRACY
Staff Writer

In February, cuts in federal funding for research from the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation sparked anxieties among USC researchers. Now, as students have had to experience the effects of these cuts for months, USC’s scientific community is still preparing for what comes next.

Cesar Reyes, a fifth-year doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry, has already seen significant cuts to his research budget.

“I had applied for [a NIH] fellowship, [the] Advancing Research Careers fellowship, and that program was canceled this year before they announced the awardees,” Reyes said.

Reyes never received word on funding despite his 50-page application already having been evaluated with a score given by NIH experts.

These rapid cuts to reward programs have led to a funding



Henry Kofman / Daily Trojan file photo

Students and faculty conduct their research in buildings like Ginsburg Hall, trying to find ways around recent budget cuts to various grant programs impacting their projects.

decrease for student researchers at USC, which Reyes said is necessary for any research lab.

“One student getting funding in a lab would benefit the entire lab,” Reyes said. “It allows more money to go around for supplies, and ... you

could really expand your research ventures, buying the chemicals that might be a risk, [or] might not be worth purchasing. It could lead to some exciting discoveries.”

The impact of funding cuts to students was felt throughout the

entire system of research — not just an individual researcher.

“Even if one student is affected directly, it really affects the entire lab, and in turn, the department and so on and so forth,” Reyes said.

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Finding community in LA’s ethnic enclaves

Two local spots are cultural centers in Koreatown and Chinatown amid hardships.

By **MIRANDA HUANG & SOPHIA KANG**
Features Staff

Walking into Phoenix Bakery, the sweet aroma of pastries and the warmth of churning ovens are wonderfully overwhelming. Bustling workers move in seamless organization past one another as customers eye the cases of desserts, and familiar kitchen noises buzz in the background.

Forget about buttercream frosting or fondant. Sponge cake, whipped cream, strawberries and almonds are all it took for Phoenix Bakery to become a Chinatown staple, according to CEO and USC alum Kathryn Chan Ceppi. For 88 years, Los Angeles locals have flocked to the bakery for its nostalgic goods and familial atmosphere.

“Every day we hear that four generations have come here. My grandmother or great-grandmother brought me here. My mother brought me here. Now I’m bringing my kids here,” Chan Ceppi said.

When they immigrated to the United States, Chan Ceppi’s parents wanted to recreate some of the sweets that their community missed from China. In 1938, they founded Phoenix Bakery, and it has since remained a hallmark of Chinatown. Chan Ceppi said the bakery’s well-known strawberry cream cakes, almond cookies and sugar butterflies are not only its most popular items but also one of the main means of its cultural impact.

“You will see our strawberry cream cakes imitated everywhere you go,” Chan Ceppi said. “If you go to 99 Ranch [Market] or some of the other bakeries, they have a strawberry cream cake that originated right here.”

Although it had long been a part of her childhood, Chan Ceppi did not immediately return to Phoenix Bakery after going to college. She worked as an occupational therapist at UCLA for 40 years before

one of her brothers asked her to take over the business.

“The lessons that we were taught here revolved around family. You help out whenever it’s necessary,” Chan Ceppi said. “When I was at USC and I had a final the next day, there was no one else to close the bakery, so I had to come down ... I’m going, ‘God, I have a final the next day.’ [But it] didn’t matter.”

Youlen Chan, the bakery’s kitchen supervisor and Chan Ceppi’s first cousin, followed a similar trajectory. Despite working in the bakery since he was 12, Chan initially studied economics at a local college. However, he decided to switch to the baking program at Cerritos College after weighing the benefits of returning to a family business. Soon after, Chan re-entered the kitchen.

“It’s a legacy business, it’s family,” Chan Ceppi said. “We were hoping to keep it that way.”

Similarly, Archives Of Us, a new cafe in Koreatown, seeks to act as another communal space for locals — family-inspired founder Nick Kim’s decision to start the business.

“I grew up in a background very familiar with food and beverage, and so the concept of hospitality has always intrigued me, and has always been something that I was around,” Kim said. “It was only natural for me to open up a cafe space to welcome in the community, and we still try to apply the things that I grew up hearing stories of.”

Kim spoke of how his grandmother opened one of the first restaurants in South Korea in 1946, four years before the Korean War. Initially just an invitation for neighbors to eat home-cooked meals, Gukil Ttaro Gukbap became a restaurant by chance.

Without support from a larger corporate entity, family businesses like Archives of Us and Phoenix Bakery face unique challenges.

After combating years of discrimination, adhering to new COVID-19 pandemic regulations and enduring recent tariffs placed on Chinese imports, Phoenix Bakery survived



Teo Gonzales / Daily Trojan

Phoenix Bakery has been a staple in Chinatown for 88 years, sharing Chinese sweets, like cream cakes and sugar butterflies with the Los Angeles Community around them.

because of the loyalty of its customers and their families.

“We get a lot of people that come in and say... I’ve always got strawberry cakes from here,” Chan said. “[There are people] here for only a week, and they had to come here because of the experience they had when they were younger.”

Despite the business’s endurance, both Chan Ceppi and Chan expressed concern for how Chinatown is losing its sense of community as businesses relocate to Monterey Park or the San Gabriel Valley.

“It’s been dead for years,” Chan Ceppi said. “Unless we get things that people are willing to come to Chinatown for, it’s not going to happen. L.A.’s a destination city. If you hear [about] some really good restaurant somewhere, you’re going to drive to it.”

Ryan Geng, a sophomore majoring in human biology, said that these ethnic enclaves — communities with a majority ethnic population — are “getting forgotten.” Geng explained that this could affect immigrants looking for aspects of the homes they left behind.

“My mom came to America by herself. My dad came by himself. It’s very hard for them to connect in the same way, physically, to their families,” Geng said. “You have to do it through places of shared culture, places where you are able to feel like you’re not alone.”

Tyler Chong, a freshman majoring in business administration, said he thinks all the traffic once prevalent in Chinatown has now shifted toward Koreatown.

“I have not gone [to Chinatown] in a while, and that’s because ... there’s nothing in Chinatown,” Chong said. “Obviously, there are restaurants and those good spots to eat at if you want some Chinese food, but the reality of it is, there’s not much there, and the streets are always empty.”

The benefit of Koreatown’s rising popularity is the emergence of another cultural community. For L.A. native Chong, the area offers a space of comfort and connection with restaurants like his favorite Han Bat Sul Lung Tang. It is a home — both literally and metaphorically.

“We go away for a week and come back, and the first meal we have is soup

from [Han Bat Sul Lung Tang],” Chong said. “I’m even forming new memories with the place in college.”

Although he is Korean, Kim chose not to open his cafe in Koreatown because he feels the area is “overly saturated” compared to where it currently stands, bordering Chinatown. Unlike many cafes, which prioritize foot traffic and accessibility, Kim wanted the cafe to be a hidden space, serving as a place of rest.

“When it comes to hospitality, when it comes to cultures mixing and mashing with our menu, we want to go against the grain with a lot of things and be different, but not pretentious,” Kim said.

Regardless of whether these places are new or longstanding, local food establishments continue to impact their customers. With ethnic enclaves disappearing, food has become an essential for building community.

“I think food’s important because there’s a lot of history and a lot of different dishes, and to a lot of these people will feel like home,” Chong said. “It’s really powerful that food is one of those ways that we can speak our differences.”

RESEARCH | Students, faculty navigate cuts to grant programs

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Reyes hasn’t been the only student affected by the funding deficit. Phil Newsome, a third-year doctoral student in clinical psychology, had his personal funding slashed.

“I was funded by an administrative supplement, also known as a diversity supplement, from the [NIH],” Newsome said. “That was terminated in June.”

Without external grants to provide Newsome’s funding, he has had to rely on USC’s pre-existing mechanisms. He’s been able to get some funding back by TA-ing, which has brought some issues to Newsome’s research.

“With TA-ships here, they are required 10 hours a week,” Newsome said. “I teach two lab sections... and then on the side, I have to grade their assignments and prepare the lesson plans and things like that. It’s a significant chunk out of the week where, if I wasn’t doing that, I would clearly be doing research.”

While students continue to find ways to fund their research, professors and students alike are unsure what their future at USC holds. Victoria Petryshyn, an associate professor of environmental studies, questioned how much longer the University would be able to provide for research students.

“We can keep a lot of them covered on stipends for TA-ships and things like that, but there’s a point at which that runs out and they have to go someplace,” Petryshyn said.

Petryshyn noted that, as grants become more limited, grant applications will become more competitive.

“We all have to eat and we all have to pay our students,” Petryshyn said.

While professors struggle to continue funding research students, anxiety is spreading among some students over what will become of academia. Newsome remained concerned for future research students.

“Money is finite, and that goes for our department as well,” Newsom said. “I have to imagine, as our federal budget gets tighter and we’re getting less money in, then less money will be available to give out to new grad students.”

Meanwhile, students like Reyes are weighing funding uncertainties when deciding whether it is worth continuing to pursue academic research rather than finding industry jobs.

“When you limit academic output, that’s going to have this cascade effect where we might not directly feel it this year or next year, but down the road, when you get a lack of innovation, or decreased amount of innovation, it would definitely be felt,” Reyes said.

For Newsome, cuts to programs like the diversity supplement he was funded by are fueled by misconceptions about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion-focused research. In February, a press release from the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation called projects that were related to social justice, environmental justice, status, race, or gender “neo-Marxist class warfare propaganda.”

“There’s also a lot of work that is just people who are underrepresented doing what they would call regular science. And because of the face [on] the paper, it got cut,” Newsome said.



Lauren Kim / Daily Trojan

Even among researchers whose funding has remained largely consistent, concerns were being raised about the greater world of science and this country’s shifting importance in it.

For Travis Willaims, a professor of chemistry, this is a process that’s all too familiar. Williams was one of the researchers targeted by a list of “Woke DEI” NSF-funded research.

“The process [of writing grants] hasn’t changed a lot. It has always been: You talk to the program officer, you read the solicitation, you figure out what they’re looking for and if you can, respond to it,” Williams

said. “What they’re looking for has changed, but what the government is looking to fund changes every year.”

Moving forward, Williams was unsure what the landscape of student research could look like.

“How many students can we train? How are we going to compensate them?” Williams said. “How do we balance the needs of education with the needs of available funding, tuition and the growth of institutions?”

Meanwhile, student researchers are relying on themselves to advocate for their work.

“Part of being a scientist is to be an activist for your own field,”

Reyes said. “It would solve a lot of issues if the public just had a better understanding of why it takes so much money to do what we do, and why it’s also beneficial to everybody.”

Despite federal changes, Petryshyn is hopeful that the country will remember the value of science.

“My ideal scenario is we realize that funding science is an investment in America. It’s an investment in the world. It’s an investment in our future,” Petryshyn said. “When the electron was discovered, it was useless, but now it runs our society. You never know which discovery is going to be the one that changes everything.”

‘Animal Farm’ blends absurdity, laughter, truth

Behind the red barn doors, an apt cast of nine redefines George Orwell’s allegory.

By **KODY CHRISTIANSEN**
Staff Writer

A rooster’s call. The soft shuffle of hooves. The distant creak of a gate. The sound of farm life filled the Sanctuary Theatre long before the lights came up. When the barn doors finally opened on the School of Dramatic Arts BFA acting for stage and screen junior class cohort’s “Animal Farm,” the audience was already inside the world.

The actors emerged, their hands shaped into hooves and wings, each movement deliberate. There were no oversized masks or heavy costumes: What emerged was a world built from instinct and imagination, a farm both hilarious and heartbreakingly human.

First published in 1945, George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” remains one of literature’s most enduring political allegories — a story of revolution and control that never loses its bite. SDA brought it to life through laughter and sincerity, transforming Orwell’s fable into something modern and moving.

Director Zachary Steel, associate professor of theatre practice and director of comedy, infused the production with physicality and play.

“I’m always interested in something physical,” Steel said. “It was kind of open-ended in our interpretation of it, which is also fun with students because they can bring a lot of them to it. They can invent. They can be creative. They can choreograph. We can create.”

His approach turned a blank canvas into a world of equal parts chaos and choreography based on a judgment-free environment.

“They can take big risks and be weird and fail and trust that they’re not going to be shamed,” Steel said. “In fact, they’re going to be supported at every step.”

That trust became the foundation for a cast that felt like family. For Aaron Eichenlaub, who played Boxer the horse, the rehearsal process felt like training both body and spirit.

“Zach told us from the first day of rehearsal to pick two or three physical traits to embody as the animal,” Eichenlaub said. “I didn’t know how much horse to bring and how much Aaron to bring. It feels like a gym for actors ... discovering how the physicality informed those choices was wonderful.”

Nash Rahman, who played Clover, said she played “a female horse, who depicts the feminist working class at the time.” Her academic and creative work shaped her approach to the role.

“My feminist theory class has been helping me a lot with how I want to build my character structure and give it the lifelike qualities that I want it to have,” Rahman said. “Something that has been helping me is vocalization and becoming comfortable with it, learning how to neigh, learning how to whinny ... and working with two legs instead of four.”

That blend of physicality and meaning shaped through collaboration and years of shared experience within a familiar cohort of actors truly defined the entire production.

“We add so much off of each other, each show, each rehearsal, each run,” Rahman said. “It’s feeding on each other’s energy.”

That same energy carried into Yara Raymond’s performance, who played several roles, including Moses the crow, bringing both humor and realism to her



Vic Grzesiuk / USC School of Dramatic Arts

Director of Comedy at the School of Dramatic Arts Zach Steel directed the stage adaptation of George Orwell’s classic allegorical novel, “Animal Farm,” as a comedic interpretation on an otherwise dramatic narrative.

characters. For Raymond, comedy became its own form of truth.

“[It is] freeing,” Raymond said. “We don’t really need to display the symbolism; it’s right there for us ... It’s incredibly timely. Leaning into the bizarre ... and understanding that absurdity and seriousness can exist at the same time, and two things are true at once. We don’t live in a world that’s so black and white.”

Lauren Collins, the show’s stage manager and a sophomore majoring in dramatic arts with an emphasis in stage management, watched it all unfold from the wings.

“They’ve all been working together for years, and throughout the rehearsal, it was their relationship that made them such a joy to work with,” Collins said. “I couldn’t imagine what it was going to look like, and I’m incredibly happy with how it turned out.”

Collins described rehearsals as joyful and unpredictable. One pivotal scene stuck with her. When it came time to decide how the show would

shift from humor to heartbreak during a scene where characters are executed, she said it was the cast who came up with the impactful transition.

“The actors had this idea of using a table set piece and dropping it down on the ground and making this huge bang,” Collins said. “The first time that we were blocking this, I had such a pit of dread in my stomach, and I remember watching it and the tone shift between what we had been doing so far.”

By the final act, the laughter turned to silence. Eichenlaub’s cries as Boxer were raw, Rahman’s mournful neighs were soul-piercing and the eerie calm around them was unnerving. The audience sat in stillness, suspended between absurdity and truth. When the final lights dimmed, the audience stayed still for a moment before erupting into cheers.

“It’s thrilling and terrifying at the same time,” Eichenlaub said. “You want audiences to walk away

feeling the impact and the weight of what we’ve just done.”

Steel echoed the sentiment, noting that what mattered most wasn’t the politics of the piece, but the sense of connection it created between everyone in the theater.

“More than a call to action, this play is an opportunity to feel a sense of togetherness,” Steel said. “For the time that we’re in the theater together, we can actually feel things ... sadness, grief, anger, but also joy and laughter.”

USC’s “Animal Farm” reminded audiences that revolution isn’t only political, it’s personal. Beneath the barn lights and the echo of hoofbeats, nine actors found something deeply human. What remained post-show wasn’t rebellion or ruin, but a reminder that humanity, at its core, is still learning how to stand upright.

“Animal Farm” was performed at Dick Wolf Drama Center’s Sanctuary Theatre Nov. 6-9.

‘Guys and Dolls’ risks it all — wins big

PLAY REVIEW

GUYS AND DOLLS

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

4/5

TYPE: Musical comedy

OPENING DATE: Nov. 6, 2025

WHERE: Bing Theatre

FOR FANS OF The King and I, West Side Story

By **FABIÁN GUTIÉRREZ**
Associate Managing Editor

Depression-era suits and hats, high-flying dancers and a whole lot of dice: Midcentury cats and theater fans alike were in for an impressive show this weekend. The School of Dramatic Arts put on a brightly-colored, high-octane musical masterclass, with its fourth-year BFA musical theatre students right at the heart.

“Guys and Dolls” tells two stories of romance and gambling in a fantastical Manhattan based on Damon Runyon’s stories of post-prohibition New York City. Sky Masterson (Gabriel Navarro) and Nathan Detroit (Bruno Koskoff) run a wager that puts the former in love while the latter is up against the wall — winning a “doll” over was the bet, but missionary Sarah Brown (Madigan Rear) proves to be no pushover.

In a story that inherits antiquated, of-its-time misogynistic undertones — and direction that unfortunately does little to avoid — it feels like cosmic justice that the two women leads are the lifeblood of the show. Rear’s Sarah Brown feels plucked out of the 1950s, with a warm and curious character arc perfectly complemented by her pitch-perfect old-soul timbre.

Opposite Koskoff’s Detroit, Neema Muteti as Miss Adelaide and her powerhouse voice are as sweet as a spoonful of sugar each time she takes the stage. Whether it be in one of two numbers alongside her Hot Box Girls or hearing Nathan’s pleas in “Sue Me,” Muteti heals theatregoers like chicken noodle soup does a cold, with magnetic physicality and pure joy in her performance.

This is not to say the titular guys have little to give: Navarro oozes wicked charisma as Sky, doing good justice to the iconic “Luck Be a Lady” shoulder-to-shoulder with a full-tank ensemble of gamblers who filled Bing Theatre with life — and testosterone — throughout. Meanwhile, the Nathan Detroit that Koskoff brings forth is perfect. Seldom does

one get to say they see a performance so precise — hilarious timing and choreography delivered to boot.

As if out of a tasting menu, hot plates of big-band suspender-clad no-good gamblers kept coming out of the oven. Chief among them were Anton Peter as Benny Southstreet and Eugene Boyd as Nicely-Nicely Johnson, adding quips and laughs to standout pieces such as the titular “Guys and Dolls” and “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat.”

This all takes place in a Bing set that feels like a lived-in world from the hectic “Runyonland” until the curtain comes down. In what has become a staple in USC’s biggest proscenium stage, rotating set pieces and projections came together to make agile and hilarious transitions from scene to scene in a Big Apple rotten right to the core, courtesy of seniors Lukas Garberg, Alex Muir and Jackson Doran.

Props also need to be handed to the lighting team led by Billie Oleyar, authors of the uniting sinews of each transition from one space to another, and better mood setters than bath bombs and scented candles.

Expert conducting courtesy of Billy Thompson and intricate yet spontaneous choreography from S. Anindo Marshall and Marin Helpie are exemplary and add to the absolute spectacle in front of the audience’s eyes, though numbers like “Havana” take marks off for other reasons. In a performance that, at the very least,

acknowledges outdated visions of gender in its program content warning, little is said about a caricature they make no apologies for.

The brief detour some of its characters make to Cuba is mostly wonderful — thanks to gorgeous set pieces, projections and music. However, the sequence that follows reveals a disappointing directing choice to lean into tired stereotypes about oversexualized Latin music and Caribbean culture. In putting on a show like “Guys and Dolls” in 2025, there is an opportunity to subvert long-time prejudices; the opportunity was not just ignored, but damn-near spat on.

Being on-the-nose and aware of misogyny in the show — to the point of including it in the program and having femme-presenting actors playing male roles satirically — and then playing to Latine stereotypes like it’s nothing at all is a total slap in the face.

Still, for what its outstanding student artists and performers can be responsible for, they come together to breathe life into Bing Theatre during a packed Trojan Family Weekend crowd that rightfully roared into a standing ovation Saturday night. All of the moving parts in “Guys and Dolls” roll into one hell of a payout in the end for a one-of-a-kind group that seemingly had Lady Luck by their side on this one — whether they needed her or not.

“Guys and Dolls” ran at Bing Theatre Nov. 6-9.



Craig Schwartz / USC School of Dramatic Arts

The School of Dramatic Arts chose the classic historical comedy “Guys and Dolls” for its Fall 2025 musical, a choice that led the students involved to a successful production and performance from the acting to the costumes.

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- ACROSS**

1 Wished, as a goodbye

5 English Lit or Intermediate French

10 Reckless

14 One perched on a lily pad

15 Yankees slugger Judge

16 Sound heard in a cave

17 Fancy one-handed basketball shot

19 Enter

20 H.S. senior's exam

21 Serious theatrical work

22 Concur

23 ___ splicing

25 Good-looking companion on the red carpet, say

27 Language spoken in Kathmandu

29 Destiny

30 Org. looking for alien life

31 Whoopi's role in 1985's "The Color Purple"

33 Bowler or sombrero

36 Punch in the mouth, slangily

40 "Sure is"

41 Ralph who ran for president four times

42 Falco of "The Sopranos"

43 Popular brand of hiking sandals

44 Raked in

47 Cat's little pink paws, cutesily

51 Feel sorry for

52 Multinational currency since 2002

53 Blokes

55 Aier of "Euphoria" and "The Last of Us"

58 Loads
- DOWN**

1 Closest pals always

2 Song for a diva

3 "Stay seated"

4 Sunny-side-up item

5 Place for privacy in a library

6 ___ Croft, "Tomb Raider" character

7 Welcoming feature of a bakery

8 Sun phenomenon that can cause radio blackouts

9 TV show with the most Emmy nominations of all time, familiarly (350+)

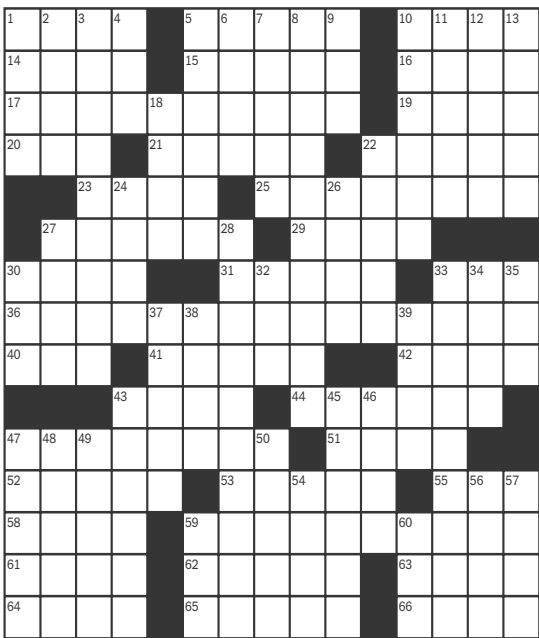
10 Music genre for Bob Marley

11 Nut for a squirrel

12 Backed (away from)

13 Beehive production

18 Fashion designer Mode in "The Incredibles"



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- 22 Performed on the stage

24 "Beowulf" or the "Iliad"

26 Street name in the center of town

27 Hawaiian goose

28 Skaters who do lifts and twizzles

30 ___ blue

32 Language suffix

33 Secret compartment, informally

34 The "A" in DNA

35 Most common English word

37 Where pants may need patching

38 Source of much igneous rock

39 Left the area

43 Steakhouse options named for a letter

45 Fruit left on teachers' desks, perhaps

46 Stand up

47 Rips

48 Protruding bellybutton type

49 Gradually wear away, as soil

50 Sandbar

54 Church area next to the chancel

56 Big name in noise-canceling headphones

57 Stench

59 Architect I.M. ___

60 Just lovely, informally

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SPORTS

PAGE 11 | MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2025 | WWW.DAILYTROJAN.COM/SPORTS

Wild plays, well-rounded attack lift football over Wildcats

The USC offense outscored Northwestern 24-3 after being tied at 14 early on.

By **BENNETT CHRISTOFFERSON**
Sports Editor

When Northwestern graduate defensive lineman Najee Story picked off a pass at USC's 25-yard line and began bolting it to the end zone with a chance to give the Wildcats their first lead of the game in the second quarter, redshirt junior quarterback Jayden Maiava had one goal in mind: Stop him from scoring, no matter what.

As the last Trojan standing between Story and the end zone, Maiava slammed into him at the 1-yard line, knocking the ball out of his hands and through the back of the end zone for a touchback.

"I thought I'd just go out there and sacrifice my body for my brothers," Maiava said of the play in a postgame news conference.

83 seconds later, redshirt freshman running back King Miller took a 12-yard run into the end zone — after rushing for 55 yards just two plays prior — to put No. 17 USC (7-2, 5-1 Big Ten) up 21-14, a score that had seemed certain to go in favor of Northwestern (5-4, 3-3) just moments before. The Trojans wouldn't relinquish that lead for the rest of the night, cruising through the second half to a 38-17 victory Friday night at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

"Honestly, I didn't know what was going on," Miller said of the sequence in a postgame news conference. "[Maiava] does everything. Superman, you know? Casual Jayden things."



Matthew Diederich / Daily Trojan

Junior wide receiver Makai Lemon rushed for a career-high 161 yards on 11 catches, while scoring two touchdowns for the Trojans early in the first as well as in the late fourth quarter.

Usual suspects carry Trojan offense

Maiava came out with a much cleaner stat line than his season-worst performance against Nebraska (7-3, 4-3) last week, completing 24 of his 33 passes for a total of 299 yards and two touchdowns while adding a rushing touchdown on a scramble in the second quarter. As has often been the case this season, most of Maiava's production came in tandem with his two favorite targets: junior wide receivers Makai Lemon and Ja'Kobi Lane.

Lemon kicked off the night's scoring with a 7-yard reception in the first quarter to conclude a seven-minute opening drive, in which Maiava

completed as many passes as he did in the entire game against Nebraska. Lemon ended up with a career-high 161 yards on 11 catches — bolstered by his third play of more than 50 yards this season — and added a rushing touchdown in the fourth quarter to put the Trojans up 35-17.

"He understands defenses, he understands our entire offense, not just running routes," Head Coach Lincoln Riley said of Lemon in a postgame news conference. "He understands what we're trying to accomplish, and I think that shows up."

After making headlines with a show-stopping one-handed touchdown catch in USC's dominant

win over Georgia Southern (4-5, 2-3 Sun Belt) in September, Lane gave Trojan fans another clip for the highlight reels in the third quarter.

Despite being completely engulfed by Wildcat graduate defensive back Fred Davis II, Lane managed to haul in a 10-yard pass from Maiava with one hand, bobbling the ball slightly before securing it as he and Davis fell to the ground. Lane ended his night with 74 yards on a season-high seven catches.

"I've been seeing it in practice for the last two years," redshirt junior safety Kamari Ramsey said of Lane's catch in a postgame news conference. "It's expected at this point. It's gonna continue."

Miller continued to be USC's primary option on the ground in the absence of its two top running backs, running for 127 yards on 15 carries to go along with the touchdown after Maiava's forced fumble. The former walk-on has recorded triple-digit yards and a score in three of the Trojans' last four games, and his 7.9-yard average on 80 carries this season is the highest of any Big Ten running back with as many attempts.

Defense suffocates Wildcats in second half

After Northwestern's first two drives of the game both ended in touchdowns, it looked like the USC defense was in for a long night. In particular, the Trojans had no answer for redshirt sophomore running back Caleb Komolafe, who totalled 97 yards on eight rushes and two receptions in those two drives alone — scarily reminiscent of Notre Dame (7-2) junior running back Jeremiah Love's dominant performance in USC's earlier loss to the No. 9 Fighting Irish.

While Komolafe remained Northwestern's go-to guy, leading the team in both rushing and receiving yards, the Trojans limited him to just one double-digit gain after the second drive and silenced the rest of the Wildcats' offense, holding them to just one field goal in the final 37 minutes of the game.

"Three points the rest of the way out was huge," Riley said. "We did a better job in the run game, but the third-down defense is what I really point towards. We settled in there a little bit."

After converting all three of its third-down attempts in the first drive, Northwestern went just 1-for-9 the rest of the way, forcing the Wildcats to punt four times to USC's two. The Trojans consistently put pressure on graduate

quarterback Preston Stone, breaking up a season-high five passes and recording two sacks — including the first of freshman defensive tackle Jahkeem Stewart's career.

The other sack came courtesy of sophomore defensive tackle Jide Abasiri, who stifled Northwestern's only significant drive of the second half at USC's 10-yard line and forced the Wildcats to settle for a field goal. Abasiri broke out for a career-high five solo tackles — more than he had all season entering Friday night — and forced his first career fumble to end the first half.

Sneaky number swap leads to unbelievable trick play

Maiava's interception-turned-fumble set the momentum for the rest of the game, but the wildest play of the night came earlier in the second quarter.

Facing fourth-and-6 on its own 46-yard line, USC went into punt formation for its second play of the quarter, led by a player wearing redshirt senior punter Sam Johnson's No. 80. That player was not Johnson, however — it was redshirt senior quarterback Sam Huard.

Huard proceeded to throw a 10-yard pass to a wide-open freshman wide receiver Tanook Hines, giving the Trojans a first down and setting up an eventual touchdown to take a 14-7 lead.

"That's been on [the roster] for three weeks," Riley said of the number swap. "It was just a well-thought-out thing ... We've got some creative guys on staff."

When asked about the trick play, Lane had one word to say about Huard's throw: "Dime."

In a statement to the *Los Angeles Times*, the Big Ten wrote that it would "continue to review the situation with both institutions," citing a rule that prevents two players with the same position from wearing the same number.

The Trojans are still very much alive in the College Football Playoff hunt and expect to improve on their initial No. 19 ranking when the second batch of CFP rankings is announced Tuesday. USC will likely need to win its final three games of the season to earn a bid, including a rapidly approaching bout with No. 7 Oregon (8-1, 5-1) in Eugene.

Before then, however, the Trojans will need to get through a dangerous Iowa (6-3, 4-2) team that nearly took down those same Ducks in an 18-16 battle over the weekend. USC will host the Hawkeyes at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Saturday at 12:30 p.m.

No. 1 men's water polo dominates No. 10 Gauchos

The Trojans exploded for 22 goals and extended their win streak to five games.

By **EDEN CONNER**
Men's Water Polo Beat Writer

No. 1 USC men's water polo put its depth on display in a 22-13 win against No. 10 UC Santa Barbara on Saturday at Uytengsu Aquatics Center. The Trojans' dominating control of the ball throughout the game gave them time to create multiple different scoring opportunities, allowing 14 players the chance to find the back of the net.

After beating two top-four teams in the nation last weekend, the Trojans (18-2, 4-1 Mountain Pacific Sports Federation) made playing a top-10 team look easy, holding the lead for the entire duration of the game. USC presented not just an unrelenting offensive front to the Gauchos (16-13, 2-2 Big West), but a unified one.

On the attack, the Trojans' ball movement was tight and controlled, allowing USC to get clear looks at shots with a 65% shooting efficiency and scoring contributions from across the lineup. Alternatively, the Gauchos' struggle against the Trojans' defense forced them to take much more difficult shots, leaving UCSB scoring on only 39% of attempts.

Junior driver Robert López Duart affirmed his position as one of the Trojans' most dangerous offensive weapons with a hat trick, adding to his lead as the highest goal scorer on the team and tallying his 14th multi-goal game this season.

Senior Driver Jack Vort recorded a hat trick as well, netting the first two goals in the third quarter

within 38 seconds of each other. After his first scoreless game of the season last Sunday, senior driver Mihailo Vukazić was back in regular form, contributing two goals to the Trojans' 22.

Aside from the goalies, most Trojans in the pool had a decent look at a goal over the course of the game. Freshmen drivers Gavin Conant and Efe Naipoglu, as well as freshman 2-meter Strahinja Krstić, notched two goals each. Junior Driver Zach Bettino started the fourth quarter with a goal and led the team in assists with three.

Sophomore utility Ben Mirisch, alongside sophomore drivers Chase Landa and Taj Whitehead, continued the fourth quarter scoring with a goal each. Junior and senior utilities Stefan Branković and Andrej Grgurević each found the back of the net, as did senior driver Evan Ausmus and redshirt senior 2-meter Jack Martin.

Though redshirt senior driver Brock Zamanian's six-goal heroics improved the Gauchos' score, they were unable to overtake the Trojan defense and strong goaltending. Redshirt sophomore starting goalkeeper Charles Mills had seven saves on the day, splitting time with redshirt junior goalie Bernardo Herzer and sophomore goalie Nemo Pavoggi, who recorded two saves each.

USCB's defensive struggles were evident in their desperate attempts to stop the Trojan offense, which gave the Trojans multiple opportunities to shoot from 2 and 5 meters, converting on all but one penalty shot. The Trojans picked up most of their exclusions



Jonathan Ho / Daily Trojan

Junior utility Stefan Branković is pictured Nov. 2, playing Stanford.

in the second half of the game, but still managed to score 13 goals, offsetting any potential damage from the Gauchos' offense.

The win improves the Trojans' record against the Gauchos to 50-3. In the Trojans' most recent matchup with UCSB on Aug. 30, the Gauchos were within one point of USC at multiple moments of the game. On Saturday, however, there was not a moment during the matchup where Trojan fans felt any sense of uncertainty in a USC victory.

USC will face No. 2 UCLA (21-1, 4-1) on Nov. 15 at Uytengsu Aquatic Center in their final game of the regular season, with major implications for the MPSF playoff picture. After USC upset the Bruins on Oct. 18, another Trojan victory would seal their number-one ranking heading into the playoffs, but a loss would likely hand the top ranking to their crosstown rival.



Matthew Diederich / Daily Trojan

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