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LETTERS

Shoot Your Own Horse, and Other Presidential Wisdom

TO THE EDITOR:

I was pleased to read the front-page story about the University of Southern California's extraordinary president, Steven Sample ("As Its Popular Chief Retires, U. of Southern California Eyes an Encore," *The Chronicle*, March 7). There are just a couple points I would like to add.

First is his sage book *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* (2001), which has become a must-read for any aspirant inside or outside the academy. Among Mr. Sample's memorable, counterintuitive precepts are: Think gray; don't decide today what you can put off until tomorrow (it will be a better decision); listen first, talk later; shoot your own horse (when it comes to the dirty work); tell the story (the myths) of the institution; read great literature every day and don't waste your time on the news media and leadership texts (after reading his).

Second is Mr. Sample's continuing generosity and mentoring to the large number of USC faculty and staff members who have moved on to college and university presidencies of their own. During my tenure as a professor at USC, I overlapped with Mr.

Sample for only a year, but when I left to assume the presidency of California Lutheran University, he continued to be a down-to-earth and generous supporter.

As C.L. Max Nikias prepares to take over the reins, we can expect that the legacy of strong, long-term presidential leadership at USC—including the outstanding accomplishments of John Hubbard in the 1970s and James Zumberge in the 1980s—will continue. The new president indeed faces significant challenges, but a mark of Steve Sample's greatness has been his care and responsibility in preparing the next generation of leaders.

LUTHER LUEDTKE
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TO THE EDITOR:

Your mildly snarky article on Steven B. Sample's retirement tells an engaging story of an institution's ascent. The article rightly focuses on Mr. Sample, but leaves out an important chapter in the USC story, one written by Joseph Allen.

Mr. Allen was hired by USC in 1993 as the director of admissions.

He died of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 4, 2001, and was in every respect Mr. Sample's full partner in improving the quality of USC's undergraduate student body. Mr. Allen and Mr. Sample together were the architects responsible for the USC decision to begin providing small quantities of merit-based aid to middle-class families. It was the mid-1990s, and the conventional wisdom in financial-aid circles was that merit-based aid for undergraduates was a social waste. However, offering responsible, careful, middle-class families with striving children a small amount of merit-based aid that recognized achievement regardless of need resonated like a thunderclap with the values on which these households are centered. These families sent their students to USC in droves. Our institution was never the same again, and we never will be.

In 1988, I left a tenure-track position at Northwestern to come to USC. My colleagues in Evanston thought I was being foolish, but I had extrapolated the trends I saw in play at USC, and could clearly imagine what the institution might be like in 20 years. Thanks to the likes of Steven Sample

and Joseph Allen, USC covered that ground in the first 10.

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Faith in Prior Learning Was Well Placed

TO THE EDITOR:

I was a member of the Middle States Association team that paid the initial visit to Empire State College some decades ago and led to its accreditation. The recognition that a college that offered credit for experiential learning could stand with traditional institutions, while commonplace today, was a leap of faith then. Empire State had to demonstrate its validity through results—educational outcomes—and on that score, it stood tall. In fact, focusing on outcomes, as we did, led many of us to question how well traditional institutions would measure up!

Our confidence in the institution, and that of the founders of the col-

lege and early advocates of "credit for prior learning," was well placed, as "Where Life Earns Credit: 'Prior Learning' Gets a Fresh Assessment" (*The Chronicle*, March 19) confirms.

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ABOUT LETTERS

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