Good Afternoon.

I want to thank all of you for being here today, and especially those that helped make the day possible.

To the distinguished panelists who led the discussion that preceded this event... Mary Helen, Bob, Amy, Lucien and Ted. Who they are, and what they are doing, is exactly why I wanted to spotlight them. They are setting a clear path for what the status quo and the future must embrace.

A special shout out to Kenae, the event coordinator, Rochelle, Barbara, and to Lisa... To the search committee, to Bill and Melora, along with Michael, Blair, Doug and USC faculty and administrators inside and outside of Rossier... I hope to validate the confidence and support that you have given me.

To Ira and John Kobara, who provided me invaluable counsel, along with my many life mentors who are either here today or with me in spirit.

To my sister, brother-in-law and nephew, to my mother-in-law and my niece. To my mother, Salome, and father, Jim, 91 and 94 years young, respectively... they have been my primary teachers and life compass.

To my wife and sons, who challenge me in every way possible... questioning my priorities, intelligence, scruples and sadly, my diminishing athletic abilities. Mary, Jacob and Michael... thank you for proving me with the pride, love and joy—the najis—that sustains me as a husband, as a father and as a human being.

Thank you Provost Quick, for your ongoing leadership, whether it be
your scholarly work in neuroscience, pushing crucial innovations to the undergraduate curriculum or creative ways for the university to do cross-cutting work.

Under Secretary Mitchell, from the time that Chancellor Young asked you to make sure that I didn’t screw up the UC’s first real attempt at online education oh so many years ago... you’ve been there for me.

At a time when so many of the best and brightest are no longer willing to make the hard sacrifices necessary for public service, your extraordinary leadership is steering the future of education... at the most tumultuous and important inflection point in higher education’s history. Whether it’s teacher training, competency-based education or making sure that access, affordability and accountability are more than buzz-words, but things that actually radically transform higher education for the better... I’m proud to call you Mr. Secretary, and even prouder to call you my friend.

To Dean Gallagher and her trailblazing leadership at Rossier: Whether by bringing Math for America to LA, launching Hybrid High, helping create Deans for Impact or being responsible for the finest online education degree program in the world... the Gallagher imprint has put Rossier front and center, and where it matters most.

The two things I like most about the dean is that she’s never forgotten where she came from, as the first in her family to go to college... and that she knows exactly what she wants to do—having a dramatic and lasting impact on the quality of urban education, in a way that touches as many teachers and students as possible. While that's easy enough said, change is hard, especially in education. But Karen knows that you either lead, or follow behind. Thank you, Dean Gallagher.

John and Alicia, thank you for being, well... Katzman and Ernst. Education has always been a part of Alicia’s DNA... her father was a superintendent, her mother was a teacher and she helped lead a series of innovations at the Princeton Review while directing its research.

As for John, he’s currently trying to pull off an unprecedented hat trick... creating three (very) different education companies that fundamentally
change education. With the Princeton Review, John had the audacity to challenge the College Board and the college admissions system, and force everyone to rethink fundamental beliefs and realities regarding who should go to college, where they should go and what they were capable of.

With 2U, John had the vision and nerve to seek out ways to alter the higher ed playing field by actually improving the quality and reach of the best postsecondary institutions.

I'm honored to have played a meaningful role in helping to kick-start 2U. The complexities and the struggles sometimes seemed insurmountable. And I'm proud of how the company has been able to evolve and grow, becoming the pre-eminent online higher ed company in the world.

With Noodle, John has had the temerity to aim for the holy grail of education—individualized learning—by leveraging the power of the Internet to fundamentally democratize and improve educational choice, and by effectively matching students with the right resources, irrespective of demographics or subject matter.

The university has strict guidelines on separating donors from the chair selection process, and for that, I'm very grateful... because, quite frankly, John not only didn't think I would be selected, he told me—in explicit detail—why I'd fail. That was all I ever needed to decide to throw my hat in the ring (think Marty McFly, and the word “Chicken”).

John and I have a rather odd relationship... he challenges me, I challenge him... he insults me, I insult him. We constantly have verbal lighting rounds to see who can come up with a better solution to a vexing problem... whether it be traffic, half-time NFL shows, government, foreign policy or religion.

But as we constantly push each other, invariably, we always come back to one, essential constant... how to tangibly and quantifiably improve education.

So, that being said, what am I going to do with this great opportunity?
Across town, high above the stage at Royce Hall, are etched the words that I used to stare at before falling asleep at concerts: “Education is learning to use the tools that the race has found indispensable.”

For me, these tools need to include not just entrepreneurship, technology and innovation... but equal parts common sense and chutzpah.

Here’s what I know in terms of my toolbox. I’m one person, I’ve been here for just a few months and I won’t be able to accomplish anything important by myself... plans don’t implement themselves, people do. Sooner rather than later, we’ll need to create and fund a center that can quickly and effectively use events, programs and products to transform education... and it will need to collaborate far beyond the walls of Rossier.

We’ll need to be visible and vocal about two, inter-connected needs: to create higher standards for teachers, starting with schools of education... and making sure that teachers are better treated, and better paid.

We’ll need to help lead the conversation about making sure that the fundamentals of a school day are not based on the incredibly outdated concepts of an agrarian society from more than 150 years ago. A cornerstone of our efforts will be the ability to decisively communicate. Remember the line in “Cool Hand Luke”: “What we have here, is a failure to communicate.” Sadly, that is the story for education today. How is it possible, when we know—we know—that there are specific ways to improve learning outcomes, and so few folks actually know about them. That’s a communications problem.

If there are things that work in education, and the proper efficacy and research validates it, than we have to communicate it, and communicate it right. And as much as some academics won’t like it, a key to effecting real outcomes for education will only come via our ability to change the narrative via public policy, politics, the courts and creating a conversation with as many people as humanly possible. It requires events that are newsworthy and sustainable.
Here’s a little known secret. Without any entity mandating or blessing it, education has quietly moved from a supply-side economy to a demand-side economy. Think about it... until recently, you drew a 30-mile radius around where you lived or worked, and that’s where more than 95 percent of students got their higher education. On the K–12 side, that number was closer to 99 percent.

The message was clear: this is your school, this is your teacher this is your textbook. Not happy with any of the above... too bad. Fast forward: Now what happens when that college student who had few choices based on location, price and quality is engaged by a great professor or university 3,000 miles away, offering the finest courses or programs online with hands-on fieldwork programs wherever they live... and can quantify that its learning and career outcomes are superior? While location is still a huge driver, it will only be a driver if the local programs are as good as the best programs offered elsewhere.

And guess what’s going to happen when all of the parents, teachers and students who have already downloaded hundreds of millions of lessons by the Khan Academy... find that they are better able to learn, while enjoying it at the same time... for free? And by the way, there are thousands of Sal Khans and software programs out there, brilliant in their respective areas of knowledge, that have yet to be discovered.

Much of the bureaucracies of higher ed and K–12 don’t know what to do with the shifting playing field. They are the dinosaurs, the remnants of generations of an arrogant, command and control education systems. The quiet revolution is happening... and students, parents and teachers will not tolerate bad schools, bad teachers and bad content.

So what are some of the things I’m looking at and working on with my colleagues?

A Global Education Innovation Tournament that can harness and bring to reality the extraordinary free market of ideas for education; an Education Hall of Fame, housed at Rossier and online, that would spotlight the best people and practices from around the world. While I know that ideas are the easy part, and it’s all about execution... we’ve
got to be able to tap into the reservoir of opportunities and plant as many education smart seeds as possible.

On the technology front: It is estimated that this year, society will be connected by 25 billion computerized devices. Nothing will be more important than making sure that the current generation of students is able to effective harness and use technology. How does this chair and Rossier do that? In this era of Big Data, I fear that we’re focused too much on data, and not enough on learning. Ed tech often forgets about the human factor... and by creating a local and national partnership with EdSurge, a vital organization that uniquely knows how to amplify the voice of teachers, we’ll be able to leverage the tools and best practices that great teachers must have to support their students.

On the entrepreneurship front: Some of the most important opportunities in education aren’t about creating new things, but making sure that things simply work better: And one need not look further than USC’s backyard to know where it can make a profound difference... the 700,000 students at the nation’s second largest school district, LAUSD.

I look out at all of the outstanding former LAUSD school presidents here today... Roberta Weintraub, Mark Slavkin and Marlene Canter... and I’m reminded that LAUSD is too big, the governance structure is fatally flawed, and it’s bigger than what any one individual can fix. But I also know there are still some basic, connect-the-dot things that we can do to help... in a few months, you’ll hopefully hear more about a strategic mapping initiative that Rossier has initiated, which will take the priorities of LAUSD, and produce an overlay that allows entities like USC to take its best assets, whether it be social services, researchers, professional development or star faculty, and deploy them in a way that benefits everyone.

There’s nothing magical about what I’m suggesting... it’s not like we’re unlocking the secrets of dark matter. But this is stuff that can have real impact, right now.

I believe it’s time for a Manhattan Project for education in the United States, and USC can be part of its epicenter. Ten years ago, Annenberg and Lynn Miller led a Dream Team of over 65 USC professors
collaborating across all specialties at the university, as part of a massive NSF Science of Learning proposal that focused on the integration of virtual environments, games, neuroscience and much more to totally rethink what learning is, and how to properly evaluate it. The process included reimagining the interplay between research and teaching at all levels, and how to move from science to rapid cycle research, development and mass dissemination. President Nikias, the Engineering Dean at the time, was one of its greatest champions. It’s only major flaw was that the reviewers found it too edgy. I think it’s time to update that vision, and produce a bold plan that government, philanthropists and corporations can get behind... that not only changes the face of education as we know it, but neuro, behavioral sciences and much much more.

Engagement and the use of entertainment literacies will be key to such an initiative, and that’s why nothing gets me more excited than the opportunity for Rossier and USC to forever change education locally and globally via the ability to engage students through vehicles that are entertaining. This is where entrepreneurship meets innovation and technology, this is where the rubber meets the road and this is the future.

Hence, the reason for today’s panel discussion on the brain and entertainment literacies. We are at a unique inflection point in human history. Today’s students are more technologically literate than the majority of their teachers, and at the same time, they are more entertainment literate than they are reading literate. It’s no longer open for debate, it’s what it is.

Intentionally and unintentionally, we have created an education caste-system... based on socio-economic gating factors that have nothing to do with a student’s innate ability to succeed.

Pick up any urban newspaper, and you’ll likely see a story about school reform wars, Common Core wars, standardized test wars, and teacher wars. Entire generations of students and their families are the casualties, and yet no one seems to be able to get past these two-sided battles. The time is ripe for a third way... an environment and ecosystem where entertainment literacies can truly drive educational engagement
and learning outcomes.

How is it possible, that in the entertainment capitol of the world, that the entertainment industry has been MIA in terms of having real impact on education? Isn’t it ironic that two of America’s greatest exports to the world are (higher) education and entertainment? We know that Hollywood does two fundamental things better than anyone else in the world: they know how to tell stories... storytelling has been a crucial building block to learning since the beginning of man; and they know how to communicate and market those stories.

The arts, games and sports provide us with extraordinary physiological, socio-emotional and mental engagement opportunities. When an important film like “Selma” comes out and there’s a large and serious dialogue about race and making sure that history is accurately characterized, that’s a (very) teachable moment. When a movie like “The Interview” comes out, irrespectively of what you think about the comedy, it’s a very significant and teachable moment... especially for students who don’t even realize that there was a Korean War, that there are two Koreas on the map or why the international stakes are so high.

There need not be any required mandates in terms of what the entertainment titans should do to improve education, but there should be some realistic goals. If cities can set aside 1 percent of a new building’s overall cost for artwork, we should be able to set aside 1 percent for educational engagement tied to the overall budgets for films, games, music and sports. ESA, MPAA, The Grammys, the NCAA and other industry umbrella groups all have the capacity to effect deep change... and it’s in their best interest to do it.

Whether it’s the work of the Annenberg School and the Lear Center, the Thornton School or the School of Cinematic Arts and the Game Innovation Lab, the sum of USC’s parts regarding engagement is extraordinary, and unmatched by any other university in the world. This is a university that has spawned immersive 3D technologies from ICT like Oculus Rift, and trailblazing engagement from entities as diverse as the Brain and Creativity Institute, the Shoah Foundation, and the Unruh and Schwarzenegger Institutes.
And here’s the pièce de résistance... as the research by Carol Dweck and others has made clear, we know—we know—that intelligence itself can be altered by having a different mindset. The very act of creating a different playing field... where students are engaged and equal, and not held back by the psychology of inferiority—based on what they know, who they are or where they come from—allows them to dramatically improve their ability to learn and achieve. Imagine the implications of what will happen when we can effectively communicate that to the masses!

In closing, I want to thank everyone again for this tremendous opportunity. I’m going to a lot of help... whether it’s collaborating with the right people, or raising the necessary dollars. Although I certainly cannot promise that I’ll succeed in everything that I set out to accomplish, I can promise you that if I do fail, it will be glorious! And I can tell you that I’m going to give this effort a mighty whack, and that together, we will have impact.

It’s easy to be cynical about all of this stuff. But as I increasingly find myself in those random, scary moments—you know—the ones where you have a blur of emotions and questions as you think about who you are, what is life and what is your place in the cosmic scheme of things. I take great comfort in being surrounded by family and friends, and knowing that in my work with colleagues, I’m helping education evolve and having impact on as many people as possible... in tangible, meaningful ways. This is core to who I am.

We can innovate and improve education via traditional and non-traditional pathways, and we can do it with passion and purpose.

I hope that it will be said, long after the celebration and spoken words of this day have faded away, that this school and this university did not lose sight of its fundamental mission, and its rightful place in history—to transform and improve how we think, learn and teach. This is the rightful place for a great school of education, and a great research university... especially when it is housed in the entertainment capital of the world.

The great French writer Anatole France once said, "The whole art of
teaching is only the art of wakening the natural curiosity of young minds." And while it has been said that genes shape our paths, it is experiences and those that guide us that will determine who we are.

The time is right, and the time is now. Be prepared... to engage, or to be in engaged, for the Age of Engagement is here.

Thank you.