

Heavy is the Head Wearing the Big Hat  
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Dean's Remarks at TFT Staff Welcome. July 1, 2025

Today is my first day as Dean of TFT. We're facing budget deficits across universities. African American Studies, Gender Studies, and Art History face the chopping block in other institutions. When things shake up, do certain changes make us unrecognizable to ourselves? When commitments to diversity are questioned, how does access remain important?

I stand before you wearing a big hat because...heavy is the head that wears a big hat! As a woman of color in the academy, I have lived in the crosshairs of abusive power and as Dean, I aim instead to empower and uplift across times of turbulence and times of calm.

Why? Higher education creates analytic and powerful artists and scholars. Even as film and theater hurt people historically through dehumanization, their technologies can undo that harm. We must thus defend, protect, and restore this place so we can fulfill the promise of the media we love so much!

Right now, I'm making a film about me and my sisters—the Piranha Sisters, those man-eating fish found in the Philippines. We are field-definers with Ph.D.'s. My sister Rhacel is the most important scholar of labor and migration today, a Princeton endowed chair in Women's Studies and Sociology whose analysis fights established thought to illuminate the exploited and expose those who traffic them. My other sister Juno studies human-animal relationships at Cornell where she is professor of Science and Technology and Anthropology. Her thinking is novel, expansive and

unexpected about the bonds of care that sustain us. My sisters and I have the privilege to actualize our ideas. Sadly, it is rare to find WOC in the academy at our levels and it is harder for more like us to get through.

Shot last month in the Philippines, my film is about the curse of my father's patriarchy that we bore. His death liberated us to speak the truth—he never wanted us educated because we'd become powerful feminists. My sisters and I worked three jobs, 40 hours during school, 80 hours in the summers, to pay for our education. Heavy is the head that wears the hat—means finding my own power to help others deploy theirs.

Packing my UC Santa Cruz office yesterday after four years as Arts Dean, a colleague brought potions and creams she made. As a woman of color leader, she says she wanted to protect me because I'll be attacked relentlessly even when doing the right thing—in the Spike Lee sense—so she tells me I must breathe, use the creams, and listen to birdsong for peace. I recognize her need to care for me. Someone once complained formally that I dress "too fabulously." Heavy is the head wearing the big hat.

I don't let petty things derail my even bigger vision: where our students gain authority and confidence to think, speak, create, analyze—not just to improve our lives, but to make room for others who speak but cannot be understood. Recognition and legibility are hard to come by which is why I make and study movies and plays. I want people to feel for others beyond themselves. Movies and plays change behavior towards empathy. I share these 2 stories with you today to show what we do in higher ed and to show you how I will lead TFT.

So, This is How We'll Work Together

*Rules of engagement that follow UC principles.* No abusive conduct anywhere. You can expect respect. You can expect transparency. I will tell you our problems after working with the center in order to seek your help.

I will consult, I will collaborate with you and bear the burden of decision making and decisive action from listening and learning.

*Policies and processes are our expert friends.* If something happens, we investigate. Report, and we act. We put systems in place so we know where to go. In any institution, there's a game we can play and change if needed.

*Communication is key.* Orientation equals empowerment. Known dates, clear and confirmed expectations, no surprises. There will be celebrations of our achievements, there will be retreats so we can grow together.

Timely responses so you're heard and seen. I expect this from you too.

*I am your advocate.* As part of the leadership of UCLA. I walk into decision-making rooms prepared with data, evidence, and the concerns facing TFT.

We will lean into our methods: we will read together, we will share vocabulary so we can best express TFT and its exquisite distinction.

Most importantly, what I would like you to absorb from me is that staff are experts who build this institution at the frontlines and in the back. So thank you for your collaboration and contributions that I wish to make known.

I need you, I appreciate you! I know you are curious, so I now share my Plan for the First 90 Days of my deanship.

Month 1: Listen and learn. What are your concerns about the challenges and opportunities facing us? What resources can we leverage? What should I know about and prioritize as your Dean?

Month 2: An action plan will be formulated based on our conversations and my study of the strategic plans, job descriptions, and other docs. Organizational restructuring will happen—with your help. What needs changing and why will be explained so you feel good about our direction.

Month 3: Collective learning toward shared vision. We must unify so as to do great things together in the form of a summit on the LA Rebellion—we will read this new book together too while making a splash that will be heard: UCLA TFT already has the roadmap we are looking for! A movement based on everybody working together to achieve the highest aesthetic and socially significant contributions!

We're writing a TFT story together. Independent, innovative, impactful. This is why I wear my big hat—to symbolize personal transformation through higher education and my commitment to using my authority as dean in making that transformation available to all.

What are your comments, questions, thoughts from what I just said?

Then let's go around the room. Your name, where you come from, and what communities you bring to and wish to serve via your work in TFT.