

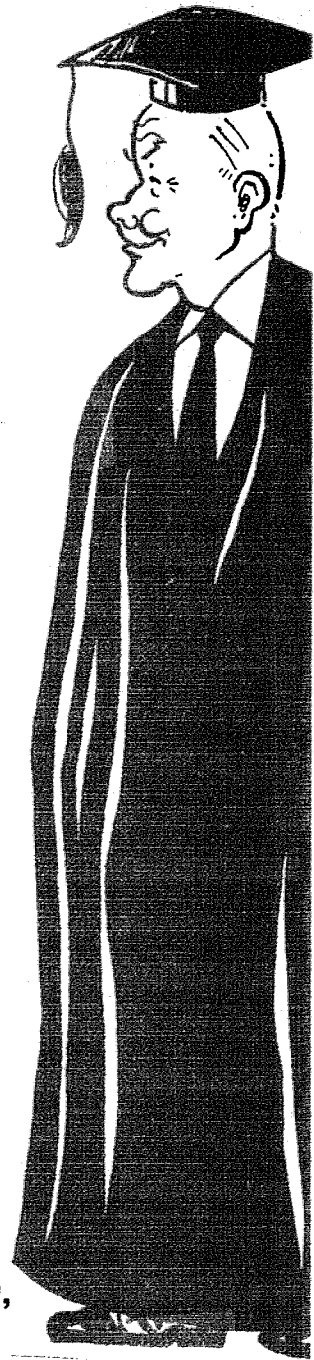


## THE NORMAN H. TOPPING PRESIDENCY

Contributed by—

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Norman Hawkins Topping was born in 1908 and lived to the age of 89, dying in 1997. He was President of the University of Southern California during part or all of the college careers of the Half Century Trojan Board members, having served from 1958 to 1970.

This mini-biography of his life and its challenges and successes is organized into three major phases of Topping's life:

- The first highlights his early academic and professional life, including his remarkable accomplishments and early formative administrative experience.
- The second concentrates on his "Presidential Years", 1958-1970, during which he earned the title "father of the modern USC".
- The third phase focuses on his contributions to the USC and Los Angeles communities as Chancellor (1971-1980) and Chancellor Emeritus (1980-1997).



## I. Early and Formative Years: the First Fifty Years (1908-1958)

President Topping was born in Flat River, Missouri in 1908, but the family soon moved to Los Angeles where he grew up, graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1926 and married Helen Rummens in 1930, who passed away in 1989. He attended USC where he earned both his bachelor (1933) and medical (1936) degrees. [In fact, to this day only one other USC alumnus, George Finley Bovard--the younger brother of USC's first President, Marion McKinley Bovard—received his education at USC. He received his bachelor degree in 1884 (in a class of 3 students) and a Master's degree in 1887. Following in his older brother's footsteps, he served as USC's President (1903-1921).]

Relatively little else is known about Topping's early years in Los Angeles, except that he graduated from LA High and obtained his undergraduate and medical education at USC. Graduating from Med-School in 1936, he took a position as a researcher of viral diseases at the U.S. Public Health Service in Bethesda, Maryland in 1937. There in 1939 he developed a serum for Rocky Mountain spotted fever that was considered the "first effective treatment" for that disease. In 1942, he developed the typhus vaccine that was administered to fifteen million soldiers (American, Canadian and British) during World War Two and is still used today. He served a brief stint in the U.S. Coast Guard, but was ordered to return to his public health position around the end of the War.

His administrative career started towards the end of the War; once commenced he did not return to research. He served in very impressive public health positions, and later as a medical school administrator, before being summoned by the USC Board of Trustees to undertake the Presidency of the University. Dr. Topping was Associate Director of the National Institute of Health in the mid-1940s and in 1948 was named Assistant U.S. Surgeon General. He then went from public health positions in which he was employed since Med School, to administration in the private, Ivy League institutional environment of the University of Pennsylvania, an urban university not physically unlike USC at the time. From 1952 to 1958, he was Vice President for Medical Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

**II. "The Father of the Modern USC": Making USC a World-class  
Educational and Research Institution (1958-1970)**

When Dr. Topping returned to SC in 1958 to take the Presidency of the University after the ten-year incumbency of Fred D. Fagg, Jr. (1947-1958), he commented to the LA Times that the SC Campus "hadn't changed a great deal" since he studied medicine there twenty years

**INTERCHANGE**

**The Black Community**

**and the**

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before in the mid-1930s. In short order, however, he dramatically changed the physical plant, university endowment and financing, and [commitments] the goals of the University. And in twelve years, via Master Plans, university and community redevelopment leadership, President Topping made remarkable accomplishments, leaving a legacy that many HCTs experienced first-hand.

SC's contributions in the early twentieth century involved training professionals to support the development of Southern California, but by mid-century that role was being replaced by the public Universities of California, California State Universities and Community College systems. To better meet the needs and growth of SoCal society, USC needed to transform itself into an institution that could deliver--through graduate studies and research—programs of study demanded by the nature of the times. Topping got the alumni, faculty, and donors to commit to making SC a first-rate national university and respond to and serve the SoCal community as well as be a model for “urban universities”. A major tool to accomplish that was his twenty-year “Master Plan for Enterprise and Excellence in Education” launched in 1961. *Time Magazine* at the time referred to it as “the most overdue master plan fund drive in the nation”. Despite the pricetag over \$100 million, and the long-term (20 years) prospect of success, the Plan achieved its goals in just five years, and dramatically changed USC. By 1969, recognizing USC's achievement of academic excellence and its elite status among research universities, USC was elected into the prestigious Association of American Universities, which membership consists of only 63 universities in the U.S. and Canada.

The USC Faculty and peers at other universities marveled at Topping's many successes. As one commentator remarked, “Topping just decided that this was going to be a first-rate university.”

During Topping's twelve year tenure, many other “firsts” were achieved. A listing hardly does the accomplishments of his Presidency justice, but reflects the tremendous growth—reputational,

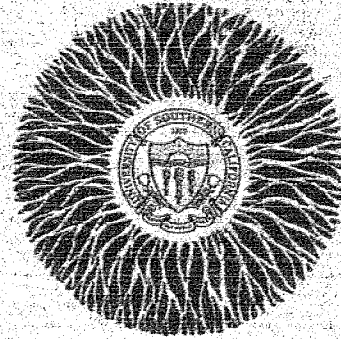
**physical and activity-wise-- that took place at SC during this turbulent and dramatically changing period.**

**Some firsts:**

- **1958: hypersonic wind tunnel, the only one of its kind, is put into operation on campus (capable of simulating missile flying 20 Xs the speed of sound and 60 miles above earth)**
- **1960: both candidates for US President (Kennedy and Nixon) speak on campus at First-time Voters Convocation**
- **1960: John McKay is USC's head football coach leading to legendary successes as national football power**
- **1961: Announcement of Master Plan for Enterprise and Excellence in Education (to add 30 new buildings to campus and double endowment)**
- **1961: Traveler makes first appearance at a Trojan football game**
- **1965: Mike Garrett, USC tailback, becomes first USC football player to win the Heisman Trophy; he is quickly followed by O.J. Simpson, Charles White and Marcus Allen**
- **1965: Watts Riots-first large city riot, leading to death and destruction; awakening urban institutions (especially universities) about their social and community responsibilities**
- **1966: Scott Bice is first USC law student to clerk for US Supreme Court (CJ Earl Warren), after serving as student Editor-in-Chief of *Southern California Law Review***
- **1967: Students form Committee to publish *USC Student Guide: The Guide to Courses and Professors at USC*, one of the first responsibly evaluating faculty and serves as model nationally for others; second evaluation published in 1968**
- **1968: student-organized, 3-day urban university conference, "INTERCHANGE: The Black Community and the University of Southern California"**
- **1969: Dorothy Wright Nelson is first woman dean of a major U.S. law school**
- **1969: Neil Armstrong (M.S.'70) is first person to step onto the surface of the Moon.**

# USC STUDENT GUIDE

1968



*The Guide to Courses  
and Professors at USC*

The University grew physically during this period. The active city traffic routes that traversed through the campus were closed and contributed to encasing the campus for student life. With the help of a redevelopment plan, the campus expanded providing commercial support for on-campus activities. Buildings were built, increasing the “brick and mortar” campus facilities to include a student center, eating facilities, and new buildings for international relations and other social sciences. In fact, thirty new buildings (or \$60 million worth) were added to the Health Sciences and University Park campuses, the student body of 20,000 became 55% graduate students, federal support for research went from \$2 million to \$28 million, endowment was quadrupled, large foundation grants grew, and Topping kept finances in the black while improving faculty salaries, upgrading the quality of faculty and students, and increasing the operating budget from \$18.5 million to \$80 million.

But in the quest to establish “excellence”, Topping, the University and its students also experienced difficult times. The late-60s was a time of change for educational institutions and many political forces were at-play. A growing student discontent about civil rights and racial injustice in society, the Vietnam War, and the student role in the educational process, among others, manifested themselves in student protests at universities domestically and internationally, some of which were violent. At a number of universities in the U.S. and abroad, student protesters occupied administrative and other buildings and ground the educational process to a temporary halt. While not having to confront extreme expressions of this dissatisfaction, Topping was quick to appreciate and undertake a leadership role at USC in addressing many student concerns. In typical fashion, he met the challenges of these concerns with a calm, candid, and honest manner by assembling and communicating directly with stakeholders. He saw the future in terms of collaboration, not confrontation, and from my perspective worked hard to achieve processes that engaged and motivated stakeholder problem-solving. An example was the support for the “Days of Concern” on May 7-11, 1970 that protested the escalating war in Cambodia and featured students and faculty participating in rallies, marches, teach-ins and political canvassing. The creation of the Topping Student Aid Fund also demonstrated a collaborative effort. Thus, the support for student government and its initiatives such as the evaluation of courses and professors (emphasizing student role in the learning process), the university outreach to the community surrounding it via programs and projects often led and designed by students, and willingness to open the campus to new ideas and philosophies, combined to reveal Topping’s and the University’s commitment to excellence.





**During my four years at USC (1964-68), especially the last two, I had the pleasure of working closely with Dr. Topping on a number of projects and grew to know and highly respect him. With his support and that of the ASSC President then, Taylor Hackford, I organized a group of students to develop methodology and conduct a student evaluation of USC courses and professors. Although faculty were skeptical and some were resistant, Topping's unwavering support (and policy of non-interference) for the project made it successful. The first Guide was published in 1967 and a second (3 times larger) was published in 1968. As Student Body Vice President of University Affairs (Academic Year 1967-68), his support for my efforts continued as I and other students addressed academic and political objectives resulting in a variety of programmatic initiatives. These included: a three-day conference, "INTERCHANGE: The Black Community and USC"; another outreach to the community, "Festival of the Arts"; the Experimental College; a student-written and produced magazine; and invitations to leading thinkers of the arts and politics ("Great Issues Forum") to speak at the campus.**

**Dr. Topping enjoyed his relationships with students and our friendship continued well after my graduation from SC. When attending law school at UC Berkeley, I would return periodically to SC and visit with him. During my joint professorships (of Law and Public Policy, and as a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Program at USC, 1974-76) and my early years as a Professor of Law at Southwestern Law School, we would meet for lunch from time-to-time to share ideas and impressions.**



**III. Los Angeles, the Urban University**  
**and Life as Chancellor (1970-1980) and Chancellor Emeritus (1980-1990)**

Dr. Topping's commitment to growing USC's reputation and guiding it as it reached for academic excellence continued during his Chancellorship and Chancellor-Emeritus periods. He did not relax when taking on the wrappings of "Chancellor," a role he played from 1970 to 1980 during which his successor, Dr. John Hubbard, a historian, was at the presidential helm, and then from 1980-1990 as Chancellor-Emeritus. Topping focused his efforts on raising money for the medical school physical plant and research development. In 1976, Topping campaigned for a LA County ballot measure for bonds to fund construction of the Los Angeles County-USC Cancer Hospital and Research Institute. The measure lost, but Kenneth Norris, Jr., a major USC benefactor and member of the USC Board of Trustees, thereafter worked with Topping to create the USC-Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, which opened in 1983. Additional funding was sought to finance an annex that received the name, "the Dr. Norman Topping Tower."

In 1983, Topping's seventy-fifth year, he was honored with an endowed chair, funded by the National Medical Enterprises, Inc., for the study of the relationship between law and medicine. And in 1987, Dr. Topping was conferred USC's highest honor, "the USC Presidential Medallion."

Topping's contributions beyond the campus—to the larger Los Angeles community during his time as Chancellor and Chancellor-Emeritus—are noteworthy as well. Although today controversial among some, the Topping Presidency embraced urban renewal, especially with respect to redevelopment of the run-down neighborhoods surrounding the university. At the time, he was quoted by the LA Times:

**“We are a large university in the heart of a vast urban area.... We are completely aware that urban problems are major problems that must be solved and that a university can't be an ostrich and stick its head in the sand.”**

**He supported student efforts during the 1960s that provided outreach to the nearby communities via programs (e.g., “INTERCHANGE: The Black Community and the University of Southern California” in 1968) and activities emphasizing student-community interactional programs (e.g., development of summer sports and afternoon cinema programs for local children; a neighborhood scholarship program). And in 1974, his “promotion of racial and religious harmony in Southern California” was honored by the Hollzer Award from the Los Angeles Jewish Federation Council.**

**In the mid-seventies, Chancellor Topping turned his attentions to the larger LA community when he was appointed by then-Mayor Tom Bradley to a citizens' community that considered redevelopment of downtown Los Angeles.**

**As Chancellor, Topping also served several terms as President of the Los Angeles Rapid Transit District (“RTD”). In that position, he advocated making Union Station a unified transportation center for rail, bus and other modes of travel, and actively supported a commuter rail system for Los Angeles. He wrote in a 1973 LA Times opinion piece:**

**“It is not a matter of centralization vs. dispersal, as some would argue. Rather, it is that we in this basin deserve to reach a new level in personal mobility that does not include all-out reliance on the car and the facilities required to store and operate it.... It is critical that we get started as soon as possible.”**

**Among the many other accolades conferred on Dr. Topping are:**

- The Bailey K. Ashford Award, sponsored by Eli Lilly & Co. (1943)—to a person under 35 with proven research in tropical medicine**
- U.S. Typhus Commission Medal (1948)—for service on the Typhus Commission**

- **Man of the Year (1971) by Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce**
- **Headliner of the Year (1971) from the Greater Los Angeles Press Club**
- **Distinguished Citizen Award (1972) from the Public Relations Society of America**
- **Distinguished Alumni Award (1976) from the Los Angeles Unified School District**
- **USC Topping Dinner Honoree (1983)**

#### **IV. The Measure of the Man in His and Others' Words**

*“Eventual success is dictated by the application of ability, sincerity of purpose, innersatisfaction for work well done, acceptance of responsibility, and finally, the desire fo excellence in personal endeavors. I sometimes wonder that if we pay sufficient attention to these values and if we have been guilty at times of not demanding enough of ourselves.” Norman Topping.*

*“Without a faculty devoted to excellence, a university’s buildings would echo with questions unanswered and answers never questioned.” Norman Topping.*

*“Together we have great strength—may we achieve the unity of purpose to bring that strength into full force for the cause of higher education and the future glory of our university.” Norman Topping.*

*“I wish to assure you that I shall give of myself unstintingly to help fulfill the desires of the family of the University of Southern California.” Norman Topping Inaugural Address, USC, Oct. 23, 1958*

*“Norman was brave enough and effective enough to make the USC constituency—alumni, faculty, donors—adopt the new mission to become the international university it is today. He start us on this new course, and this has been our course for 40 years.” Steven B. Sample, USC President.*

*“Dr. Topping was the most influential no-elected person in this community during his era. I watched him work the politicians. I*

***never knew a person who said no to him."* Walter Karabian, Former Majority Leader of the California Assembly.**

Emil Seletz, Norman Topping, Norris Medical Library, University of Southern California

## **Norman Topping**

Emil Seletz, Norris Medical Library, University of Southern California.

Text from the plaque: "Norman Topping, M. D., 1908-1997. President, 1958-1970. Chancellor, 1970-1980. Chancellor Emeritus, 1980-1997. Fecit Emil Seletz, M. D. Class of '33"

