



Spotlight on: USC Marshall School of Business

Description

Choose the programme that you are passionate about, because if you have passion, you are going to perform better and excel. The advice of Dr Geoff Garrett, Dean of University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business (USC Marshall), to prospective students who are researching business and management programmes.

Having joined USC Marshall in 2020, Dr Garrett has worked in senior positions at some of the world's most prestigious business schools. He is a former Dean of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and of business schools at both the University of Sydney and University of New South Wales.

This week, QS CEO and founder Nunzio Quacquarelli spoke to Dr Garrett about his achievements in his time at Marshall and his priorities for the future.

Here are highlights from their conversation:

You were very successful in your role as Dean at the Wharton School, which was reflected in stellar outcomes in the QS and other full-time MBA rankings. USC Marshall also places extremely well in several QS rankings: QS Online MBA (5th) and Specialised Masters Rankings like Business Analytics (8th) and Supply Chain Management (5th). What are some of the similarities and differences between these two schools?

The key similarity is that both Wharton and USC Marshall are very large schools. We are two of the only top-tier institutions to also have undergraduate students. USC Marshall's total student population is over 7,000, of which over 4,000 are undergraduates. This gives us the scale to attract excellent faculty in lots of specialist areas. Marshall has over 230 full-time faculty staff. Specialist postgraduate business schools just can't match that. This helps us achieve outstanding research outcomes and great teaching, both of which are reflected in our rankings.

The big difference is in the power of our brands, especially as they relate to executive education. Wharton, like Harvard and Stanford, has huge brand recognition, which brings multiple benefits. We are also close to Silicon Valley, and right next to Silicon Beach in LA, and I like to think we are ahead of the game in meeting the needs of the tech industry. USC Marshall has also committed to online degree learning delivery with, as QS says, a top-ranked [online MBA programme](#). Whereas Wharton invested in Coursera and offers certificate programmes both directly and through Coursera – it is not offering degree programmes online.

The other big difference is the breadth of degree programmes offered by USC Marshall, with one of the biggest portfolios in the industry. Wharton is not offering a wide range of specialist master's programmes so USC Marshall can meet the needs of students who have specialist career intentions and match them effectively to employers. Hence our strong performance in Master's in Business Analytics and in Master's in Supply Chain Management.

What changes have you introduced at USC to enhance the performance of the Marshall School?

Since I have come to USC Marshall, I have really tried to emphasise how –comprehensive– our school is as well as focusing on enhancing our research performance in new areas like supply chain and digital assets and really driving our diversity and environmental, social governance (ESG) initiatives.

USC Marshall is located in downtown Los Angeles. We are in the heart of the entertainment industry, so we have a great opportunity to lead the way in the business of entertainment, which is a huge growth area given the disruptive impact of technology on the industry.

QS is looking at incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and sustainability initiatives into our ranking methodologies. What initiatives are you undertaking at USC Marshall, with regard to these areas?

A key change we are driving forward at USC Marshall is embracing the multi-stakeholder business model required by the modern world, which places huge emphasis on diversity and inclusion, as well as change in ESG.

USC Marshall was the first top school whose MBA achieved gender parity, which our undergraduate programme has just also achieved. We are pushing hard to bring in members of under-represented groups as well and making progress. Our next challenge will be to diversify the faculty and we have a specific plan with KPIs to expand our faculty with a focus on gender parity and under-represented groups to achieve our goals. International students are also an important part of our drive for diversification as they create a much richer classroom experience.

ESG is central to business leader priorities and USC Marshall is undertaking a great deal of research and teaching in this field. We have accounting professors who are examining how we measure ESG impact effectively. If we can't measure ESG, businesses are not going to make a meaningful difference. This is a key part of our strategy and I completely support ESG being built into rankings.

Can you tell us about any innovations at USC which deliver real benefits in terms of learner outcomes or nurturing employability?

USC Marshall was an early mover in the online MBA space, and I am convinced we have many leading-edge features to our online MBA. For example, we offer a one-week residential on campus, before the online programme kicks off, to allow socialisation of all the students and faculty. This really helps engagement during the programme. We also have a digital infrastructure which allows us to deliver leading-edge learning tools and to encourage action learning and group working. I believe Marshall excels in delivering learning in small groups, both online and in hybrid format. Many business schools claim this, but USC Marshall really is ahead of the game, and we will look to applying to the QS Reimagine Education Awards in the hope of getting recognition for this.

What do you think would constitute a good business school ranking to meet the needs of future students? What innovations would you like to see from QS and why?

As we have discussed, I think it is essential to include DEI metrics within a modern ranking. This objective is a pre-requisite for all business schools today. In addition, I agree that ESG impact needs to be measured and that this should be captured in rankings. I do like objective metrics in rankings, perhaps more than reputational metrics, but I recognise the importance of employability and look forward to seeing how QS continues to lead the way in measuring and reporting employability outcomes at business schools. I also like your wide range of specialist masters' rankings, which are much needed and world-leading in terms of providing comparative information in these fast-growing programmes. I would perhaps encourage an undergraduate business school ranking as well, as this is a growth area in management education, which I believe is set to boom in the coming years. I believe everyone needs a business education in our complex modern world.

What other advice would you offer international and domestic students when choosing programmes?

There is so much choice today. It is not just degree programmes, like the MBA or specialist master's, but also the wide range of certificate programmes available. I always advise students to be true to themselves. Don't study what your parents want you to study. Choose the programme that you are passionate about, because if you have passion, you are going to perform better and excel. You also need to keep your options open, and I would argue that a degree programme provides more long-term options than a specialist certificate, which may be helpful in the short-term but will quickly diminish in utility.