The USC FIM Program Class of 2018

Now in its 60th year, the Food Industry Management (FIM) Program at the USC Marshall School of Business, in association with the Western Association of Food Chains Inc. (WAFC), is designed for the food industry’s high-potential executives. There is a rigorous process just to be admitted to the program—then the hard work begins, in the form of five classes: Accounting, Communications, Strategy, Marketing and Leadership. Taught by world-class faculty from the USC Marshall School of Business, along with well-known executives from the food industry, the students are exposed to texts, lectures and other teaching methods including team projects, role-plays, group presentations and materials developed specifically for the food industry. The curriculum integrates the functional areas of business with cutting-edge theory and practical application to help students understand how all pieces of an organization fit together. Participants leave with strong leadership and management skills, enhanced business acumen and a solid understanding of communication, marketing, finance, strategy and more.

Cynthia McCloud, director of USC Marshall Food Industry Programs, bestows a special designation on each class. The 2015 class was the “All In” class, and she urged them to be brave, bold and brilliant. The 2016 class was the “Dare to Be Different” class, with McCloud reminding them that education opens doors one never would have known existed or would have dreamed that he or she would have the right to enter. The 2017 class was the “Lion Chasers” class; McCloud told them that lions don’t run from anything or anyone, but when they do run toward something, they do it at great speed and with keen vision. For the 2018 class, she is using the metaphor of the marathon.

“As I considered a new theme for this luncheon, I thought about why a marathon is metaphor for this program,” McCloud says. “It is so very hard to make the decision to come join us for four months and then actually ‘stay the course’ and prepare for the race.”

McCloud applied marathon runner Dr. Pamela Peeke’s method of getting ready for a marathon to getting ready to go through the FIM Program:

1. Start by setting and achieving goals...push through the tough runs to finish.
2. Practice mindfulness...be present at every step along the journey.
3. Learn to adapt and adjust...be ready for anything that comes your way.
4. Expand your tribe...find people who will support you and cheer you on when you are hitting your wall.
5. Share the journey...find a battle-buddy who will work and train with you.
6. Have no regrets...take risks, experiment, be courageous and stop deferring the hard decisions to run!

“Our jobs here at USC are to teach these students to prepare for the race and then run the race,” she said. “Our jobs are to ensure these future leaders become ambassadors for the power of education and show others in their companies there is always a choice.”

This year’s 16-week program will officially conclude April 25 at the graduation banquet at USC.

Who is a good FIM Program candidate?

The participants in the FIM Program are hand-picked by their employers. The ideal candidates are senior-level managers from food retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers or companies that support the food industry.

Tuition is funded by the WAFC, a nonprofit organization composed of the senior executives from food retail and wholesale companies that account for sales exceeding $140 billion annually in 14 western states.

2018 USC FIM Class Profile:

- Class size: 32
- Average age: 36
- Age range: 24-54
- 21 men and 11 women from 11 states
- 22 retailers and 10 suppliers
- 21 Millennials
- 10 Gen Xers
- One Baby Boomer