

Cynthia Villis, PhD

Director, Institute of College Initiatives University of San Diego

Dr Villis has served in the administration of the University of San Diego for over 25 years as a dean, an associate provost, and an institute director. She connects USD to the greater San Diego community, making the university environment especially inviting to students and families.

In 1998 Dr Villis founded the USD Institute of College Initiatives. The Institute supports eight programs which prepare students for success in college, and welcome them into higher education: TRiO Upward Bound, TRiO Student Support Services, TRiO McNair Scholars, TRiO Alumni Association, Expanding Your Horizons, Global Leadership Connection, Afghan and American PreCollege Institute, and a liaison with Rotary District 5340 that includes the USD Rotaract Club. While an active administrator at heart, Dr Villis has served as an adjunct faculty member at six universities, including USD, the California School of Professional Psychology, the University of New Mexico, and Texas Tech University.

Dr Villis develops -- and assists in the development of -- strong programs which have been funded by the US Department of Education, the US Department of Agriculture, the US Department of State, The Rotary Foundation, Rotary District 5340, the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, the Donner Foundation, the Irvine Foundation, Sister Cities International, the Hewlett-Packard Foundation, IME-Becas, the San Diego Foundation, the California Math and Science Partnership, the University of San Diego, and Texas Tech University.

Cynthia is an advocate in education for students from first generation, low-income, under-represented and/or disability backgrounds. She is a founding member of the TRiO Alliance of San Diego-Imperial County, and serves on the oversight committee of the TRiO Alliance Research Program.

She has worked with Steve Brown on projects in Afghanistan since 2003. It has been a privilege, a pleasure and a challenge to develop, facilitate, evaluate, and offer improvements to strong and innovative programs with students in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

Dr Villis' career honors include

- Community Leader of the Year, Dollars for Scholars, Linda Vista Chapter
- Peacemaker of the Year, La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club
- Citizen Diplomat, San Diego International Sister Cities Association
- Nominee, Athena Pinnacle Award, UCSD and San Diego Daily Transcript
- Administrator of the Year, San Diego Science Alliance
- Awardee, Women Who Mean Business, San Diego Business Journal
- Awardee, Governor's Award for Outstanding Leadership, Rotary District 5340
- Rotarian of the Year, La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club
- Awardee, Woman of Distinction, University of San Diego

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