

University of South Carolina Aiken
Programs of Distinction Task Force Final Report

Strategy/Recommendation

The Task Force recommends that a campus committee be given the charge to call for applications from units on campus for the purpose of choosing “USCA Programs of Distinction.” The committee may be a current committee structure that already exists or a new ad hoc committee formed for the purpose of choosing Programs of Distinction for USCA. One point for consideration is that the committee may include community constituents, thus building a partnership in identification of Programs of Distinction.

The Task Force presents the following outline for USCA Programs of Distinction. It is the committee’s recommendation that the appointed committee create the actual specific application, based on the criteria provided below.

Programs of Distinction Description

USC Aiken is proud of its reputation and ranking among its peer institutions within the southeastern region. In an effort to improve the quality and advance the recognition of our curriculum, USC Aiken seeks to identify our “Programs of Distinction” that contribute to our achievements. Members of the USCA campus are invited to submit an application for those programs that you believe truly distinguish USC Aiken, our campus community, our academic vision, or our goals for the future. Although such programs may be housed in a single unit, they are also likely to represent the collaborative efforts of several units or the entire university. Programs of Distinction should be established programs with a proven track record of achievement and, in terms of the future, should also represent a capacity for growth as USC Aiken moves “Forward Together.”

The following criteria represent the areas that the Task Force outlined as critical to applications for USCA Programs of Distinction. It is our belief that applications need to address one or more of the criteria. Examples are provided under each criterion, but the examples are not all inclusive.

- **Outstanding and Innovative Student Engagement**
 - Undergraduate Research
 - Internships
 - Experiential Learning
 - Field Research
 - Creative arts and performances
 - Study Abroad
 - Other _____
- **External Recognition and Validation**

- National Accreditation
- Research Productivity
- Faculty Awards
- Student Awards
- Funding
- Professional success rates (license, certification)
- Graduate Placement Rates (job, graduate program acceptance rates)
- Professional Impact (regional, state, national, international)
- Other _____
- **Vibrant Community Impact (USCA community and the Aiken community)**
 - Community Interest and Affairs
 - Programming to Improve Vulnerable Populations/Economic & Social Conditions
 - Cultural Enrichment
 - Seminars, Workshops, Events for Enhanced Community Engagement
 - Provides Opportunity for Community to Come Together
 - Unique Partnerships
 - Other _____

In addition to identifying the criteria noted, it is recommended that applications demonstrate the following;

- Intentionality
- Aligns with USCA and Unit Mission and Goals
- Addresses USCA Core Values (Collegiality, Citizenship, High Quality Learning, Character)
- Reflects a Larger Plan
- Addresses a Priority/Need
- Demonstrates Successful, Measurable Outcomes
- High Impact
- Plans for Future

Introduction-Overview

Taskforce Charge: 1) To explore issues related to defining areas of excellence and niche opportunities for USCA, 2) To explore characteristics of signature programs/programs of distinction in both academic and non-academic areas, 3) To recommend a process for USCA to use in defining programs of distinction

Membership of the Taskforce: Sara Campbell (Chair), Cheryl Fogle, Paul Newsom, Joel Scrapper, Laura Quaynor, Crystal Edwards, Michael Carlisle, Aja Vaughn, DJ King, Timothy Ashton, DeAnna Gore, Angie Osbon, Andy Dyer, Jill Hampton, Ed Callen, Mila Padgett, Jeff Priest, Adam Port, Anne Fulcher

Meeting Schedule/timeline and brief overview of issues covered:

Meetings held Jan. 28-March 29. Issues covered included discussions related to committee charge, defining excellence and niche opportunities, stating characteristics of signature programs and exploration of a process for defining programs of distinction and understanding scope of committee work.

Relevant Factors

Relevant data and information examined along with conclusions drawn/overview of Best Practices and/or benchmarking data examined:

USCA has distinct programs; discussion occurred related to possible, current programs/areas of excellence. The committee also discussed areas that could be a “niche” given opportunities and resources.

The committee reviewed examples of comparative and aspirant universities and their Programs of Distinction. Defining characteristics were noted.

The committee determined that due to time constraints the larger purpose of the Task Force was to outline a process for defining USCA Programs of Distinction. There was much discussion about relevant criteria for USCA and these were outlined.

Recommendations for each Proposed Strategy/Recommendation

Specify how the strategy/recommendation will address one or more of the Forward Together Themes (Grow the University, Improve the Current Budget/Funding Situation, Increase Program/Degree Offerings, Address Faculty/Staff Salaries, Be More Responsive to a Broader Range of Students, Expand Reputation and Awareness of USCA, Expand and Enhance Community Relationships/Partnerships, Enhance organizational Efficiency and Innovation).

- **Be More Responsive to a Broader Range of Students;** USCA Programs of Distinction will assist students in identifying with different aspects of the campus community. The chosen Programs will be varied in nature and appeal to a range of students and their interests.
- **Expand Reputation and Awareness of USCA;** Units that are hidden gems will become “known” through selection as a Program of Distinction. These Programs will provide greater opportunities for marketing.
- **Enhance Community Relationships/Partnerships;** USCA Programs of Distinction will provide opportunities for stronger relationships/partnerships with the community. Including constituents from the community in the committee structure for choosing Programs will draw them into the process, resulting in stronger ties and recognition with distinctive programs. As a result, the community will be able to more clearly see areas that could benefit from additional funding.
- **Grow the University;** USCA Programs of Distinction will indirectly grow the University by placing unique and innovative programs at the center of attention, drawing students, alumni, community folks, and funding to the table.