

**PROGRESSION AND GRADUATION TASK FORCE  
FINAL REPORT  
APRIL 15, 2013**

In January 2013, the Retention, Progression and Graduation (RPG) Task Force was formed to address issues associated with improving student persistence at USCA. In the first meeting of the task force, the group decided that the comprehensive and significant charge would be better addressed by breaking into two independent task forces. Accordingly, the Retention Task Force was formed and Mr. Ahmed Samaha, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Life, agreed to serve as chair. Dr. Charmaine Wilson, Professor of Communications, agreed to chair the Progression and Graduation (P and G) Task Force. This report summarizes the efforts of the second group.

**Task Force Charge**

After splitting into two groups, the charge for the P and G Task Force was to explore issues related to improving USCA's progression and graduation rates. Examples of areas to explore could include--but were not limited to—academic success and advisement efforts, methods for all academic and non-academic departments across campus to contribute to RPG, policies and procedures impacting RPG, issues of customer service, student involvement, ceremonies and traditions, and academic engagement.

**Membership of the Progression and Graduation Task Force**

**Dr. Charmaine E. Wilson**, Professor of Communications, Task Force Chair

**Dr. Allen J. Dennis**, Professor of Geology

**Ms. Heidi DiFranco**, Director of Bookstore Services

**Professor Karl Fornes**, Senior Instructor of English

**Professor Patrick Gelinis**, Instructor of Exercise & Sport Science

**Mr. Tim Hall**, Associate Athletic Director, NCAA Compliance Coordinator

**Dr. Clifton Jones**, Dean, School of Business Administration

**Dr. Deb Kladviko**, Vice Chancellor for Student Life and Services

**Dr. Lynne Rhodes**, Professor of English

**Dr. Michael Ritchie**, Professor of Business Administration

**Dr. Gerard Rowe**, Assistant Professor of Chemistry

**Dr. Windy Schweder**, Associate Professor, Interim Dean, School of Education

**Professor Lisa Simmons**, Instructor of Nursing

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**Dr. Stacie Williams**, Director, Academic Success Center

**Meeting Schedule/Timeline and Brief Overview of Issues Covered**

The first meeting of the RPG Task Force was January 23, 2013. As noted, in the first meeting the decision was made to separate into two groups. Subsequently, the P and G Task Force met most weeks from January 29 to April 9. Early discussion focused on a variety of issues, including

scheduling, academic support, student life/experience, advising, general education, academic offerings and university structures. Because of the scope of issues, the Task Force broke into three Action Squads in early February. After meeting with other task force chairs and identifying potential redundancies, the P and G Task Force is making recommendations in four areas: university structures, core curriculum, academic advising, and learning support/academic success.

## **Resources and Data Examined**

An extensive list of resources in the areas of retention, progression and graduation was compiled by committee member Kari D. Weaver and shared with both the Retention Task Force and the Progression and Graduation Task Force via publicly available Google Doc. The list of these materials is found in Appendix A of this document.

The committee also consulted articles and books covering best practices in progression, graduation, student services and learning assistance. Information was gathered from web sites of appropriate associations and advocacy groups. Practices at aspirational peer institutions were examined after the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Office provided a current list of peer and aspirational institutions. IE provided a wealth of USCA data related to benchmarks, including graduation rates, retention from year to year, WDF rates, numbers of majors by discipline, etc.

## **Findings Related to Best Practices**

In general, while USCA has many of the programs and services in place that represent best practices in concept, the task force members agreed that the execution of some of the programs and services needs to be comprehensively reexamined. We must ensure that what is sound conceptually is executed efficiently and effectively.

We turn now to each of the four areas examined, and offer recommendations for moving forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Area I: University Processes and Programs**

The University Processes and Programs Action Squad examined processes, procedures, approaches and offerings in terms of their relationships to progression and graduation, and occasionally, retention. Clearly, the group could not look at everything done at USCA, but a few issues emerged as especially important in terms of progression and graduation.

**Recommendation:** Refine current practices to retain current students and attract more students (listed chronologically, related to growing the university, responding to range of students, increasing offerings, enhancing efficiency, etc.)

1. Refine the application process for USCA (all on-line, create an app). Significantly speed up the process of evaluating applications. Encourage early commitments from students to whom scholarships are awarded.

2. Simplify, centralize and speed up the process for evaluating transfer credits. General education courses should transfer automatically.
3. Ensure that current practices for placing students into classes are consistent with best practices and are working effectively, especially for math and foreign language.
  - a. Examine the rules around placement exams (e.g., students cannot take the math placement test after taking any math course, students are told to submit the Writing Proficiency Portfolio after 60 hours).
  - b. Ensure that the institution is making good use of the placement information (directing students to supplemental instruction and tutors, for example).
  - c. Explore the feasibility of allowing students who show certain levels of proficiency to bypass lower level courses, as we do now with foreign language (English and math, for example).
4. Ensure that students who are not accepted into a professional program receive appropriate referrals and guidance regarding other options for continuing their studies at USCA, and that they receive this guidance sooner rather than later. Many of these students are good students we want to retain.
5. Develop BIS pathways targeted specifically to students who are not admitted into professional schools, especially nursing (i.e., health administration, health communication, public health, informatics, community development, health education, guidance counseling, leadership, etc.). This could be accomplished quickly and inexpensively.
6. Simplify BIS entrance requirements and re-evaluate deadlines for entrance into the BIS program. Make sure deadlines are compatible with selection processes in academic units.
7. Review the withdrawal/failing (WF) date.
8. Consider implementation of administrative withdrawals for students who never attend classes or have too many absences to pass the class.
9. Make better use of the extensive storehouse of data available from our IE office to ensure continuous improvement at every level (e.g., WDF data, graduation rates by discipline).

## **Area II: Core Curriculum**

USCA's General Education requirements have remained mostly unchanged since 1991. Students are required to take English 101/102, an applied speech course, two semesters foreign language (except some professional programs), two sciences, two math/statistics/logics, two social sciences, three humanities, a history of civilization, one US government/history class, and one nonwestern studies class. In the late 1990s, the Writing Proficiency Portfolio requirement was added. More recently, Writing Intensive, Critical Inquiry, and the Inter-Curricular Enrichment requirements were adopted, and the requirements were regrouped and renamed. Overall, the GE approach is oriented toward earning credit hours rather than achieving competence or meeting learning goals.

In 2011, Faculty Assembly established a standing GE committee charged with overseeing GE goals, outcomes, and assessments. Responsibility for assessment of GE currently rests with departments that offer GE classes, although the USCA IE office assists with data gathering.

**Recommendation:** Reconsider the overall approach to General Education, along with the specific requirements and numbers of hours required in both GE and the major. (Relates to themes of being responsive to broader range of students, expanding reputation, addressing budget/workload concerns as well as maintaining our focus as a liberal arts institution.)

1. Replace the current “menu” model for GE with a learning outcomes model consistent with best practices. A more flexible model will appeal to a broader student base. Common intellectual experiences, learning communities, undergraduate research, service learning, internships, and capstones will attract and engage students. The AACU/LEAP outcomes provide one model for “high impact educational practices” that can increase student engagement and retention. (See Appendix B.)
2. Eliminate or significantly restructure the Inter-Curricular Enrichment Program (ICE). At this time, ICE events are not consistently connected to learning outcomes. Students are completing large numbers of ICE events in the final semester and we have not gathered data to demonstrate that the requirement has learning value. Promoting the ICE program places an additional burden on academic advisors. In tight financial times, the workload/cost of administering the program seems to outweigh the benefits.
3. Add a Writing Program administrator who reports to the EVCAA if writing competence is to be a major focus of the GE requirements. A Writing Program Administrator would be expected to ensure compliance with best practices for WI classes, proficiency evaluations, and writing assessment; clarify and coordinate WI and WPP; provide professional development for WI instructors; approve WI courses, and interface with the General Education Committee. The estimated cost for a WI administrator is \$50K, plus benefits, putting the total amount around \$65K. If adding the position is not feasible:
  - a. Clarify the relationship between the WPP and WI to eliminate duplication
  - b. Examine the timing of the WPP and WI requirements
  - c. Assess WI to ensure the requirement is meeting learning objectives.
  - d. Re-evaluate the need for the WPP and the costs. Students are assessed a fee for the folder and if they don’t pass the WPP, must take English 201, which could be viewed as a hidden requirement because there are no credit hours associated with the WPP in the Academic Bulletin.
  - e. Consider revising the process to ensure that the WPP is not a barrier to graduation.
4. Require some kind of course or experience that requires students to integrate learning or eliminate the statement in the GE requirements about an integrative experience.
5. Review some specific issues regarding critical thinking initiatives, the Critical Inquiry (CI) requirement and the QEP.
  - a. Provide incentives and rewards for faculty to be more involved in CI.
  - b. Schedule CI classes and first-year seminars (AFYS 101) strategically so that students can take the two classes sequentially.
  - c. Consider integrating the First-Year reading selection in other courses to provide a more generalized common experience.
  - d. Identify specific areas where critical thinking is incorporated into the curriculum (separate from the CI course).
  - e. Identify and implement methods for assessing critical thinking skills as students develop, perhaps in the junior or senior year.

### Area III: Academic Advisement

The Academic Success Center oversees academic advising. A single professional staff member coordinates faculty and staff who provide advisement across academic units. Faculty members provide most of the academic advising for students in their disciplines. The loads of those faculty members vary significantly from no advisees to as many as 50. In addition, about 20 staff advisors work with first year students, usually about 10 advisees. The School of Business Administration and the School of Nursing have administrative personnel who provide academic advisement for many of their students. Finally, the First Pace Coordinator provides advisement to provisionally admitted students. Training for advisors focuses on learning computer support systems and advising sessions focus heavily on course selection. Quality of advisement reportedly varies.

**Recommendation:** Promote a relational advising culture across campus that is characterized by accuracy, support and the development of effective decision-making skills. Move away from the cultural belief that advisement is primarily a matter of course selection. (Relates to growing the university, addressing workload issues and being responsive to students.)

1. Combine academic advisement and career services into one office focused on academic and career advising.
2. Provide comprehensive advisor training geared toward establishing a supportive relationship and offering accurate guidance, with less emphasis on teaching the technology associated with advising.
3. Employ faculty advisors whenever feasible, keeping in mind the students' need for support and guidance. The connection between a student and a faculty member in the discipline is important to retention.
4. Develop a comprehensive advising syllabus to be used by all advisees and advisors.
5. Examine institutional rewards for and valuing of quality advising. This might include re-examining promotion and tenure policies with regard to advising.
6. Measure the effectiveness of advisement efforts. The current evaluation of advising is not adequate.
7. Reconsider the First Pace program. IE examined comprehensive data on the program in 2011 and found that students who go through the program do no better than those who don't.
8. Examine strategies for linking CI, FYS and first year advising, paying particular attention to developing a strong connection between CI instructors and new students.
9. Add an additional full-time professional advisor to the newly created office to support advisement of students who have not yet declared a major and provide relief for overloaded faculty advisors. Estimated expense: \$43,000. Grant funding (TRIO grants for student support services and other opportunities) can supplement the hire. See Appendix C for information on TRIO.
10. Monitor the need for additional professional advisors and/or professional program advisors.

#### **Area IV: Support for Learning and Academic Achievement**

Over the years, USCA has engaged in a variety of efforts to enhance and ensure the academic success of students, from monitoring the accuracy of the admissions formula to creating programs and classes to support students to creating a Center for Teaching Excellence. Perhaps the most noteworthy effort came in AY 2004-2005, when the Academic Success Center was created to collaborate with academic units to support student success. The ASC is to facilitate the transition from high school to college for first year students and to identify, coordinate and support academic success initiatives. The ASC oversees tutoring, supplemental instruction, the Writing Room, the Math Lab, the Early Warning System, and more. USCA has a number of structures and processes in place to support academic success, but in some cases, the execution falls short of best practices.

**Recommendation:** Communicate academic expectations clearly, teach well, provide learning assistance that reflects best practice, and assess meaningfully the extent to which programs are effective. In short, do what we do well. (Relates to growing the university through retention, being responsive to students, enhancing organizational efficiency.)

1. Revise the current probation policy to clearly communicate the minimum academic expectation of a 2.0. Probation should go into effect when a student's GPA falls below a 2.0. Once on probation, students should have restrictions (hours, student activities) and be required to create and follow a "recovery" plan. Review suspension policies also.
2. Replace the current "early warning" system. The current approach indicates to students that a problem exists without requiring any response or action on the part of the student. A rapid and effective intervention process is needed, and faculty needs to be involved in the intervention. Any process that is implemented must be assessed.
3. Put faculty with disciplinary expertise back in charge of academic support areas (e.g., the Writing Room and Math Lab). One option would be to reassign ½ teaching loads to allow for administrative oversight. Estimated expense for reassigned time: \$24,000.
4. Evaluate the purpose and effectiveness of the Language Lab; for example, should a tutor be available in the lab, is lab time associated with learning success, could space be combined?
5. Use available data from IE, especially DFW rates, to guide more efforts related to learning assistance; for example, recruit tutors and SI instructors in the spring for training and employment in the next year, visit high DFW classes early in the semester to increase awareness of support services, incorporate supplemental instruction into the syllabus, introduce and support high impact teaching practices, etc.
6. Ensure that students who provide learning assistance receive adequate and ongoing training to do their jobs well; for example, some schools require tutors to participate in a multi-day or week long boot camp in preparation for the role. Cost would depend on a number of factors, including the duration of the "camp," the number of tutors being trained, availability of housing, cost for instructors, etc.
7. Create a comprehensive communications center to provide students with collaborative assistance on such tasks as PowerPoint presentations, public speaking, preparation of charts and graphs, etc. (See proposal from the Academic Innovations Task Force.)

8. Create an active and vibrant Center for Teaching and Learning (in lieu of the current CTE) that includes a full-time or near full-time director. Effective implementation of high impact educational practices requires professional development and support for faculty. Further, the Center should advance the scholarship of teaching and learning at USCA. Salary and benefits package for a director of such a center is estimated at about \$80K, assuming the director comes in at the associate professor level.

## Appendix A

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### **Retention Reading List from Strategic Planning Committee**

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*Enrollment Management Review* (Spring, 2009)  
<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/higher-ed/recruitment/enrollment>

*What Works in Student Retention? All Colleges and Universities* (2010)  
<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/AllInstitutions.pdf>

*What Works in Student Retention? Private Four-Year Colleges and Universities* (2010)

<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/PrivateFour-YrColleges.pdf>

*What Works in Student Retention? Four-Year Private Colleges* (2004?)

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*The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention* (2004)

[http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college\\_retention.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college_retention.pdf)

*Retention: Diverse Institutions = Diverse Retention Practices?* (2010 AIR Forum)

[http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/AIR\\_ForumPaper.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/AIR_ForumPaper.pdf)

Duranczyk, Irene M., et al. *Best Practices for Access and Retention in Higher Education* – On reserve at the Library under call number LC 148.2 .B47 2004

ACT Website

<http://www.act.org>

## Appendix B

### The LEAP Learning Outcomes

**Note:** This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007). For further information, see [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).

## The Essential Learning Outcomes

**Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:**

### **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

*Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring*

### **Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

*Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance*

### **Personal and Social Responsibility, including**

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

*Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges*

### **Integrative and Applied Learning, including**

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

*Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems*

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Note: Chart copied from [http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/EssentialOutcomes\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/EssentialOutcomes_Chart.pdf)

More information is available from <http://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm>

## Appendix C

### The TRIO Grant Program

The TRIO Grant program for Student Support Services provides funding for higher education institutions to support students with academic development, basic college requirements, etc. More information is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp/index.html>.

Funding from TRIO is based on how many qualifying students attend each institution. If we show that we could get around 150 students to participate, we could qualify for \$240-\$280K of support. In addition, by looking at the list, there are already 6 schools in the USC system that have this kind of TRIO program (in addition to several other SC public universities).

#### FY 2012 Grantees Student Support Services Program

PR Award Number	Student Support Services (SSS) Grantees	State	Number of Participants	FY 2012 Funding (2012-13 Proj Yr)	Project Type	
P042A100297	Central Carolina Technical College	SC	160	\$ 231,103	Regular	
P042A100946	Claflin University	SC	160	\$ 281,510	Regular	
P042A100345	Clinton Junior College	SC	90	\$ 129,969	Regular	
P042A100123	College of Charleston	SC	140	\$ 213,180	Regular	
P042A100269	Florence/ Darlington Technical College	SC	160	\$ 231,103	Regular	
P042A101394	Greenville Technical College	SC	350	\$ 391,157	Regular	
P042A100243	Lander University	SC	160	\$ 224,372	Regular	
P042A100500	Midlands Technical College/ Airport and Beltline Campuses	SC	175	\$ 281,511	Regular	
P042A100445	Morris College	SC	200	\$ 282,124	Regular	
P042A100354	Northeastern Technical College	SC	160	\$ 253,676	Regular	
P042A101100	Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	SC	200	\$ 292,336	Regular	
P042A111018	Piedmont Technical College	SC	160	\$ 264,258	Regular	
P042A100984	South Carolina State University	SC	160	\$ 247,582	Regular	
P042A100967	Spartanburg Community College	SC	185	\$ 276,570	Regular	
P042A100408	Spartanburg Methodist College	SC	160	\$ 248,926	Regular	
P042A100411	Technical College of the Low country	SC	160	\$ 281,511	Regular	
P042A100195	Trident Technical College	SC	200	\$ 330,133	Regular	
P042A101438	University of South Carolina	SC	150	\$ 281,511	Regular	
P042A100032	University of South Carolina/ Columbia Campus	SC	350	\$ 334,448	Regular	
P042A101162	University of South Carolina/ Lancaster	SC	160	\$ 256,809	Regular	
P042A101465	University of South Carolina/ Salkehatchie	SC	160	\$ 240,064	Regular	
P042A100121	University of South Carolina/ Spartanburg-Upstate Campus	SC	160	\$ 281,510	Regular	
P042A100582	University of South Carolina/ Union	SC	160	\$ 246,050	Regular	
P042A101379	Voorhees College	SC	170	\$ 246,050	Regular	
P042A100308	Winthrop University	SC	160	\$ 231,103	Regular	
P042A100494	York Technical College/ Rock Hill	SC	200	\$ 284,743	Regular	