



May 2, 2017

Dear USC Aiken Colleagues,

It has been a remarkable year for USC Aiken, one of accomplishment and achievement. Together, we helped over 500 students reach their dream and complete a college undergraduate or graduate degree. This year we attracted our largest, most diverse class ever. Our faculty and staff worked tirelessly with students across all disciplines, solving problems, lending support, and engaging students in the learning endeavor. We also hosted the largest Scholar Showcase Day in our history. This is an exciting time for our institution. The work we do and the impact we have cannot be achieved without the immense effort and skill put forth every day by our faculty, staff, and administration. Our success is enhanced by our strong partnerships and community support.

The 2016-17 academic year also has been a year of challenge and reflection. One of the great benefits of being a diverse institution is having a wealth of backgrounds and perspectives that push us to think differently about how we advance our mission. In response to the "Tweet" event last September (as it has come to be called), we've launched a series of projects, including a review of our Student Code of Conduct, an appraisal of the way we manage crisis communication and communications in general, our approach to social media, our need to better orient students to the values of the academy, and a more focused approach to diversity...in all its forms....through discussions and development workshops, work with consultants, and a review of the way we do business. We are fortunate to have one of the most diverse student populations in the state, and we are ahead of our institutions on national benchmarks in terms of faculty and staff diversity. But, we can and we will do more.

Once again we received accolades from outside the academy. USC Aiken was singled-out as one of the best institutions in the U.S. in closing the achievement gap. We received notable awards for the work we do with veteran and military students. And once again, we were recognized as the number one public regional university in the south. Most importantly, our students are flourishing. Through the leadership of our Retention, Progression, and Graduation Taskforce, we are achieving more to deserve the moniker, "a student first university." Graduation

rates overall are higher and retention for full-time freshman students is trending in the right direction. Everyone has a stake in the progress of our students, and I applaud you for all you've done to support them in their pursuit of a higher education degree.

Our community is recognizing and supporting our progress. Recently, we were pleased to receive an invitation to use a building in downtown Aiken to provide more visibility and awareness. When the MOU is signed, the new space will give us a much needed presence in the city-square. Meanwhile, the work to look and feel more like a college town continues with transportation for students to the city square, co-branding the university and community, and ramping-up Oktoberfest and partnerships with K-12 schools. Additionally, the university remains guardedly optimistic in respect to the Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative and our STEM initiatives. Finally, with the help of our local delegation, the legislature approved our request to consider a doctoral program in the School of Nursing. If we decide to pursue a DNP, we will be well on our way in the approval process. Partnerships are important to our university and fruitful collaborations will help us to flourish even when state funding is uneven.

Our university-wide commitment to expanding international enrollment continues to enrich our campus community. This year students came to USC Aiken from 35 states and 32 countries. This summer we receive our first guests from one of our partner institutions in India, when a dozen DY Patil students join us for leadership workshops. In the fall of 2018, we'll receive our first cohort of full time students from India. Meanwhile, we are working with Academic Partnerships to expanding international student access to our business and nursing programs, and soon we will be designing a plan to expanding recruitment efforts into Southeast Asia.

The combination of academic excellence through engaged learning, a steadfast commitment to meeting our diverse students "where they are," and a promise to serve our region, combine on this campus to form the profile of a healthy university. Thank you for your part in advancing our mission and the *Forward Together* goals. We look ahead to a successful summer and the upcoming 2017-18 academic year...but, first things first...I hope after commencement that you will take time for some well-deserved rest and renewal.

With sincere gratitude,

**Sandra J. Jordan**  
Chancellor

P.S. I'm sorry I will not be able to join you this year at the Staff and Faculty Luncheon. This year Michael and I will be attending our son's commencement and celebrating his accomplishments on May 5th. Have a wonderful Cinco de Mayo!