



The Office of the Chancellor

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA AIKEN

July 7, 2017

Dear Faculty and Staff,

Hello! I hope you are having a productive summer that includes time for some much deserved R&R.

This summer, the Cabinet and I have been productive laying the foundation for the upcoming semester. We are taking a critical look at our priorities and processes, particularly in light of a very difficult budget cycle. I look forward to sharing with you the details of some of our initiatives in August. Until then, I wanted to provide a brief update on the fiscal situation we're now facing as a result of legislative budget and efforts and share a few announcements.

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET:

On June 6, the General Assembly returned to take up and adopt the final budget. While we are grateful to our local delegation for engineering a modest increase to our Education and General (E&G) funds (\$133,830.00), we are, like our sister public institutions, feeling the pinch of an overall decrease in state appropriations.

The reduction in appropriations came in part from a 13.8% decrease in technology funding. As we look to the future, there are concerns that the entire technology fund will be eliminated, and institutions will need to find ways to increase revenue to cover those lost dollars. Eventually, we expect that for USC Aiken that will translate to a loss in technology funding of \$270,000.

As you have probably read, there is a significant shortfall in South Carolina's pension plan (an estimated \$24 billion dollar shortfall), so during the past several years, the state has passed more of the cost of state retirement and healthcare to the institutions. For USC Aiken, this represents an estimated increase cost of \$147,000 in the upcoming budget.

We had high hopes that the state would float a bond and that a bond bill would help address deferred maintenance. However, the early enthusiasm over a bond bill evaporated when the Governor promised to veto a bond if one was sent forward. There was no state funding for capital projects at universities, so our HVAC system request for Penland was not funded.

Focus this year seems to have been on state infrastructure, roads, and recovery on the coast from the hurricane last fall.

Due to the outcome of state appropriations, USC Aiken will increase tuition for 2018. The increase will be modest and the percentage of increase aligns with our sister comprehensive institutions in the state. As always, our intention is to seek efficiencies and to maintain a net cost that is among the lowest in the state.

All in all, it was a disappointing legislative session in relation to support for higher education.

ENROLLMENT:

As you've heard me say on numerous occasions, with only 13% of our budget coming from state appropriations, we are highly dependent on tuition and auxiliaries. Luckily, the initiatives put in place across campus that focus on retention are beginning to have a positive impact on our retention and progression rates, and the university's enrollment has slowly, but steadily, increased over the past several years. These two positive trends have made it possible to make headway on our agreed-upon priorities, including the fair wage adjustment plan, the addition of select new positions, and physical plant updates and improvements, such as the changes made to the Gregg-Graniteville Library. Thanks to our retention efforts -- coupled with attracting more students through new majors; an international and out-of-state enrollment campaign; and the Pacer Pathway bridge program -- USC Aiken reported our highest enrollment in the institution's history in 2016-17.

This time of year, we are watching the enrollment numbers for summer and fall 2017 very closely. With a loss in overall funding for 2017-18, even a modest reduction in enrollment will have an impact on the budget. While we can absorb the budget implications of a slight dip in enrollment, I think the time has come to renew our thinking about how we recruit students. We've seen how successful the Retention/Progression/Graduation Committee has been in helping us rethink retention. A similar committee focused on recruitment will bring some fresh thinking to how the entire campus can assist the recruiting efforts of our Office of Admissions.

FACULTY MANUAL:

I'm pleased to report that by action taken during the June 23 meeting of the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees (BOT), the update to the USC Aiken Faculty Manual was approved. A special thanks to Dr. Bridget Coleman who was on hand to respond to possible questions at the June 9 BOT Academic Affairs Committee meeting.

MBA MODIFICATIONS APPROVED:

At the most recent BOT meeting, modifications to the MBA proposed by the School of Business Administration were approved. The changes broaden the appeal of the MBA by now allowing business majors to enroll in the MBA and providing concentration areas in the masters. The Board also approved the SOBA expanding its reach by offering the MBA online and marketing it internationally. A special thanks to Dean Fekula who was on hand to respond to possible questions at the June 9 BOT Academic Affairs Committee meeting.

DIVERSITY AND BELONGING:

The university will ramp up a focus on enhancing diversity, understanding, inclusion and belonging through a series of initiatives in the fall. The first important step is the return of Juan Johnson to USC Aiken. Mr. Johnson will follow up on his popular discussions last spring with two days of discussions with faculty and administrators in August. Seating is limited to 40 individuals per day, and you are encouraged to sign up early for your session of choice. Please contact Sherri Jenik at sherrij@usca.edu or ext. 3403 to reserve a spot on either August 17th or 18th. These discussions will help provide the launching point for the Chancellor's Task Force on Diversity and Belonging that will be charged with further enriching diversity and inclusion efforts at USC Aiken.

COPLAC'S Strategic Plan:

The Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, (COPLAC) has unveiled a new strategic plan which will enhance the current benefits our faculty and students receive. USC Aiken has been a member of COPLAC for several years and has participated in the COPLAC Undergraduate Research Symposium. The new plan places emphasis on how "opening one door, opens many" by expanding the possibility of student and faculty exchanges between COPLAC campuses; making available hybrid and online courses in unique programs of study to students at COPLAC institutions; creating data-informed research on the impact of the liberal arts and sciences on student learning and achievement; and providing multi-campus, team-taught, distance seminars in digital scholarship. The time is right for USC Aiken to consider how to engage our students in COPLAC opportunities. Currently, the COPLAC website includes an article about USC Aiken's achievement of being recognized by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as a Great College to Work For. See that article at: <https://coplac.org/category/current-events/>. Special thanks to Dr. Judy Beck who attended the recent COPLAC meeting.

I look forward to seeing you all back on campus soon for what promises to be another productive semester. Until then, I hope you continue to have a good summer!

Sincerely,

Sandra J. Jordan
Chancellor