

### 14.3 Comprehensive institutional reviews

The institution applies all appropriate standards and policies to its distance learning programs, branch campuses, and off-campus instructional sites.

**Compliance Judgment:** In Compliance

#### Rationale

The University of South Carolina Aiken (USC Aiken) conducted a comprehensive institutional review and applied all relevant standards and policies to its distance learning programs and off-campus instructional sites. Summarized details pertaining to distance learning specific to each relevant standard include:

- **Standard 2.1 Institutional mission.** USC Aiken’s mission specifically mentions “continuing and distance education.” In the [narrative to Standard 2.1 – Institutional mission](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, distance education is mentioned under the area of the mission being comprehensive.
- **Standard 3.1.a Degree-granting authority.** USC Aiken’s authorization to offer degree programs via distance education is discussed in the [narrative to Standard 3.1.a – Degree-grant authority](#).<sup>[2]</sup> USC Aiken is part of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (NC-SARA).
- **Standard 4.3 Multi-level governance.** The authority of the USC System Board of Trustees to approve programs and policies at remote locations or online is presented in the [narrative to Standard 4.3 - Multi-level governance](#) <sup>[3]</sup> under the section discussing the role of boards with respect to institutional policy. The authority of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education to set state-wide policies with respect to distance education is also discussed in this area.
- **Standard 6.2.a Faculty qualifications.** As mentioned in the [narrative of Standard 6.2.a – Faculty qualification](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, the faculty teaching rosters are comprehensive and include “faculty teaching programs offered at remote sites,

faculty teaching dual credit courses at local schools, and faculty teaching distance education classes.”

- **Standard 6.2.c Program coordination.** A table of program coordinators is presented in the [narrative to Standard 6.2.c – Program coordination](#) <sup>[5]</sup> that includes all degree programs. Coordinators are named for online degree completion programs and for programs at remote sites.
- **Standard 6.3 Faculty appointment and evaluation.** The application of appointment, employment, and evaluation policies and procedures to all faculty, regardless of the mode of instructional delivery or the principal location of the faculty member is mentioned in the [narrative response to Standard 6.3 – Faculty appointment and evaluation](#).<sup>[6]</sup>
- **Standard 6.5 Faculty development.** As mentioned in the [narrative to Standard 6.5 – Faculty development](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, all USC Aiken faculty are provided support to promote and enhance their growth as teachers, scholars, practitioners, and professionals. All faculty members within the USC System are provided opportunities to take additional graduate classes, attend professional meetings and in-service training, and write and present scholarly works in their fields. Sabbatical leave and services provided by the Office of Sponsored Research, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the Office of Distance Learning are available to all faculty. As mentioned in the narrative, faculty who teach online classes are provided assistance in course design and effective remote learning pedagogies.
- **Standard 7.1 Institutional planning.** As mentioned in the [narrative of Standard 7.1 – Institutional planning](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, the use of remote instruction and distance learning has been integrated in the institution’s strategic plans and in taskforces.
- **Standard 8.1 Student achievement.** The impact of distance learning offerings on several measures of student achievement is mentioned in the [narrative of Standard 8.1 – Student achievement](#).<sup>[9]</sup> Among other things, the offering of degree completion programs at remote sites and online are expected

to positively impact persistence to graduation and the number of degrees awarded.

- **Standard 8.2.a Student outcomes: educational programs.** Distance learning programs and off-campus instructional sites are included in the programmatic assessment activities of academic units. As mentioned in the [narrative to Standard 8.2a – Student outcomes: Educational programs](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, data are reported and examine in both aggregated and disaggregated forms to ensure comparable outcomes.
- **Standard 8.2.c Student outcomes: academic and student services.** Academic and student services are provided both virtually and in person. For example, Disability Services, the Library, the Help Desk, and the Counseling Center, to name a few, provide services in both formats. All data are included in the assessment activities of the unit. The [narrative to Standard 8.2.c – Student outcomes: Academic and student service](#) <sup>[11]</sup> states that support services have as their primary purpose support for student learning and student welfare, regardless of instructional delivery mode or the location of the student.
- **Standard 10.1 Academic policies.** The [narrative to Standard 10.1 – Academic policies](#) <sup>[12]</sup> indicates that academic policies are uniformly enforced regardless of the location of a USC Aiken student or the instructional delivery practices employed by the institution’s faculty. All policies are made available to student, faculty and other interested parties online.
- **Standard 10.2 Public information.** As specified in the [narrative to Standard 10.2 – Public information](#) <sup>[13]</sup>, students enrolled in distance education courses can access the academic calendars, grading policies, cost of attendance, and refund policies online or request hard copies of these publications. All students in USC Aiken programs offered at remote USC campuses have onsite program coordinators and advisors who can provide guidance on policy matters. Also, syllabi for online courses include details regarding where students can receive assistance or find policy information.

- **Standard 10.4 Academic governance.** The [narrative to Standard 10.4 – Academic governance](#) <sup>[14]</sup> makes it clear that faculty within an academic unit of the University have responsibility for the development, implementation, evaluation, and modification of curriculum of all academic programs within that unit, regardless of where or how the instruction is delivered.
  - **Standard 10.6 Distance and correspondence education.** The [narrative to Standard 10.6 – Distance and correspondence education](#) <sup>[15]</sup> demonstrates USC Aiken is in compliance with this standard.
  - **Standard 10.7 Policies for awarding credit.** As specified in the [narrative to Standard 10.7 – Policies for awarding credit](#) <sup>[16]</sup>, seminar courses, distance education courses, internet courses, internships, field classes, and other courses which do not share the traditional lecture/laboratory format require the same number of contact or instructional hours required for traditional lecture/laboratory classes. Policies regarding credit hours and course activities are made available online.
  - **Standard 10.9 Cooperative academic arrangements.** The [narrative to Standard 10.9 – Cooperative academic](#) <sup>[17]</sup> arrangements indicates that the sole cooperative arrangement is an online MEd in Educational Technology offered jointly with the University of South Carolina Columbia campus.
  - **Standard 11 Library and learning information.** Library and learning information [resources](#) <sup>[18]</sup>, [staff](#) <sup>[19]</sup>, and [access](#) <sup>[20]</sup> support both in person and remote services.
  - **Standard 12.1 Student support services.** The [narrative to Standard 12.1 – Student support services](#) <sup>[21]</sup> states that students in online programs are provided access to online resources and services in all academic support areas (e.g., Library, Disability Services) and appropriate student support areas (e.g., Bookstore, Career Services, Financial Aid, Registrar, and Counseling Center).
  - **Standard 12.4 Student complaints.** As indicated in the [narrative to Standard 12.4 – Student complaints](#) <sup>[22]</sup>, all students are provided access to an Ombuds. Students on remote campuses are entitled to relief from an academic
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complaint or grievance through the student grievance procedure established in the appropriate USC Regional Campus Student Handbook. After a judgement has been rendered on that campus, an appeal to the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at USC Aiken and a subsequent appeal to the USC Aiken Chancellor may be made. Students who are taking classes online are provided procedures for handling complaints including a student complaint form. The forms is available on the USC Aiken website.

- **Standard 13.7 Physical resources.** The [narrative to Standard 13.7 – Physical resources](#) <sup>[23]</sup> includes an assessment of the adequacy of facilities and resources, both on and off campus
- **Standard 13.8 Institutional environment.** As indicated in the [narrative to Standard 13.8 – Institutional environment](#) <sup>[24]</sup>, USC Aiken employs technological protocols to protect all students, including those using online instruction. In fact, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, on campus students, faculty and staff were directed to continue their studies and work virtually until a safe and effective protocol could be developed.

### Supporting Documentation

1. [Narrative to Standard 2.1 – Institutional mission](#)
2. [Narrative to Standard 3.1.a – Degree-grant authority](#)
3. [Narrative to Standard 4.3 - Multi-level governance](#)
4. [Narrative of Standard 6.2.a – Faculty qualification](#)
5. [Narrative to Standard 6.2.c – Program coordination](#)
6. [Narrative response to Standard 6.3 – Faculty appointment and evaluation](#)
7. [Narrative to Standard 6.5 – Faculty development](#)
8. [Narrative of Standard 7.1 – Institutional planning](#)
9. [Narrative of Standard 8.1 – Student achievement](#)
10. [Narrative to Standard 8.2a – Student outcomes: Educational programs](#)
11. [Narrative to Standard 8.2.c – Student outcomes: Academic and student service](#)
12. [Narrative to Standard 10.1 – Academic policies](#)

13. [Narrative to Standard 10.2 – Public information](#)
14. [Narrative to Standard 10.4 – Academic governance](#)
15. [Narrative to Standard 10.6 – Distance and correspondence education](#)
16. [Narrative to Standard 10.7 – Policies for awarding credit](#)
17. [Narrative to Standard 10.9 – Cooperative academic](#)
18. [Narrative to Standard 11.1 Library and learning information resources](#)
19. [Narrative to Standard 11.2 Library and learning information staff](#)
20. [Narrative to Standard 11.3 Library and learning information access](#)
21. [Narrative to Standard 12.1 – Student support services](#)
22. [Narrative to Standard 12.4 – Student complaints](#)
23. [Narrative to Standard 13.7 – Physical resources](#)
24. [Narrative to Standard 13.8 – Institutional environment](#)