7.1 Institutional planning

The institution engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.

Compliance Judgment: In Compliance

Rationale

The University of South Carolina Aiken engages in ongoing, integrated, institution-wide, research-based planning and evaluation processes. The institutional effectiveness process described below, combined with institutional research efforts to provide decision support, results in continuous improvement in institutional quality and serves as a means through which the institution can demonstrate that it is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Comprehensive, Integrated, Research-based Planning. The University of South Carolina Aiken developed two 5-year strategic plans since the last re-accreditation in 2011. The first plan, Forward Together [1] was created in 2012 following a comprehensive visioning process [2] through which the perceived Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) were identified by all constituencies with vested interests in the institution (i.e., students, faculty, staff, alumni, administrators, governing trustees, community members, legislative personnel). Seven taskforces were created in the Spring of 2013 to examine specific aspects resulting from the visioning process that would inform and expand strategies within the strategic plan. Each task force collected relevant data and researched best practices to create actionable recommendations that were then broadly shared across the campus. The taskforces and their final reports included:

- **_Academic Innovations Task Force._** This task force explored issues related to improving the learning experience of students. Examples of areas explored included, but were not limited to: use of technology in the learning process, course delivery methods, flexible and responsive scheduling methods, revamping summer school calendar, utilizing and expanding library and other resources related to teaching and learning, and promoting engaged pedagogies (see the Academic Innovations Report [3]).

- **_International Student Recruitment and Study Abroad._** This task force made recommendations to the Chancellor concerning goals for international enrollment, identification of countries of focus, international marketing, and identified issues/opportunities to support international students who come to our campus. Additionally, the task force made recommendations concerning inviting Fulbright scholars, building interest in class to class collaborations, and faculty research collaboration. Finally, the task force recommended ways to enhance and expand the internationalization of the USC Aiken curriculum (see the International Student Recruitment and Study Abroad Report [4]).

- **_Marketing and Recruitment Task Force._** This task force explored issues related to expanding USC Aiken's marketing and recruitment efforts to attract new students and tell the University's story. Examples of areas explored included, but were not limited to: developing key messages regarding areas of excellence for each academic and non-academic department, opportunities for academic and non-academic departments to more fully participate in marketing and recruitment, and opportunities for growth and recruitment with new populations such as veteran/military students, adult students, international students, honor students, Hispanic students, and Asian students (see the Marketing and Recruitment Report [5]).

- **_Process and Innovation Task Force._** This task force explored issues related to improving our processes and developing innovative ways to advance the mission of the University. Examples of areas explored included, but were not limited to: strategic partnerships to advance efficiencies, governance issues,

policies and procedures, and workflow analysis (see the Process and Innovation Report [6]).

- ***Programs of Distinction Task Force.*** This task force explored issues related to defining areas of excellence and niche opportunities for USC Aiken. The task force explored characteristics of signature programs/programs of distinction in both academic and non-academic areas. The task force recommended a process for USC Aiken to use in defining programs of distinction (see the Programs of Distinction Report [7]).

- ***Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) Task Force.*** The RPG Task Force explored issues related to improving USC Aiken's retention, progression and graduation rates. Examples of areas explored included 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. 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 subcommittees, one to examine progression and graduation, and a second to examine retention (see the Progression and Graduation Report [8] and the Retention Report [9]).

- ***Staff Development, Advancement and Recognition Task Force.*** This task force explored issues related to providing opportunities for professional growth and advancement of University staff. Examples of areas explored included, but were not limited to: exploring the addition of levels of advancement for staff, leadership and professional development opportunities, and rewards and recognitions (see the Staff Development, Advancement and Recognition Report [10]).

The second strategic plan, Leading Forward [11], was initiated in the 2017-18 academic year following a comprehensive review of the institution's mission statement (see the notification letter sent to SACSCOC [12] in 2017 of the new statement). The

development of the Leading Forward strategic plan (see timeline [13]) was overseen by a Steering Committee [14] was similar to that of the Forward Together strategic plan. It too started with a SWOT analysis [15] and incorporated the work of eight task forces that studied specific issues and issued recommended actions. The task forces and their reports are as follows:

- Advancing Inclusion and Belonging; [16]
- Expanding the Student Experience through Internationalizing the Campus; [17]
- Campus Communication; [18]
- Enhancing our Liberal Arts Curriculum and Advancing Engaged Teaching & Learning; [19]
- Campus Sustainability and Green Initiatives; [20]
- Faculty and Staff Development; [21]
- Integrated 360 Student Support; [22] and
- QEP Strategic Planning Task Force. [23]

Comprehensive, Integrated, Research-based Evaluation. Each strategic objective of the strategic plan were aligned to key performance indicators and budgetary areas. Metrics were tracked annually relative to established targets to assess how effective actions were in improving institutional outcomes. Progress reports were created annually and reported to the Governor's Office as State Accountability Reports. Example of such reports are provided for each of the following years:

- 2012-13 State Accountability Report [24]
- 2013-14 State Accountability Report [25]
- 2014-15 State Accountability Report [26]
- 2015-16 State Accountability Report [27]
- 2016-17 State Accountability Report [28]
- 2017-18 State Accountability Report [29]
- 2018-19 State Accountability Report [30]

Alignment of Performance Improvement Systems and the Institutional Effectiveness Process: Assessment, Planning, and Budgetary Allocations. USC Aiken's planning and assessment process is broad-based and systematic. The performance of all organizational units, academic programs, and personnel is reviewed annually to determine effectiveness and to identify how to continue the University's mission in new and innovative ways. Evaluation of activities and programs is multi-layered. At the institutional level, key performance indicators are tracked as part of strategic planning efforts. At the department and programmatic levels, all units articulate goals and objectives, measure outcomes on a regular basis in multiple ways, analyze the findings, and describe how findings are used for improvements in annual program review reports submitted to the senior administrator responsible for each division. At the individual employee level, activities are planned, evaluated, and reported through reviews that occur at annual and longer term intervals as described in the narrative response to Standard 5.5 - Personnel appointment and evaluation.[31]

Directors were also encouraged to identify any links between their unit level goals and objectives and the institution's strategic goals and objectives. Annually, administrative units complete a report on outcomes of key measures relative to target performance levels. Action plans and funding needs to improve work processes are delineated based upon assessment data.

Academic departments also submit data for a battery of common indicators such as faculty loads, credit and contact hours by discipline, enrollment counts, average class sizes, and number of graduates as describe in the narrative response to Standard 8.2.a - Student outcomes: Educational programs.[32] Student evaluations of teaching are monitored, as are data from senior exit surveys and results of campus-wide surveys broken out by discipline. Each program provides discipline-specific outcomes for student learning, evidence of the extent to which students have mastered these outcomes, and information on how the assessment results have been used to make program-level changes. These reports are reviewed annually by Academic Council, the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Compliance. On a tri-annual rotational basis, academic

unit program reviews are presented to the Academic Assessment Committee. The Committee examines the extent to which the department's assessment program meets institutional guidelines and makes specific recommendations to the department to improve the unit's assessment process. Similar reviews are conducted by the Academic Services Committee for administrative units that provide academic support such as the Bookstore and the Academic Success Center as described in the narrative response to narrative response to Standard 8.2.c - Student outcomes: Academic and student services.[33]

Any requests for additional allocation of resources are carefully examined. Administrators and appropriate committees examine reports on categories of requests (e.g., facilities requests, personnel requests, or technology requests). Senior administrators then prioritize budgetary requests and assign funding based upon the availability of financial resources and alignment with strategic priorities.

Supporting Documentation

1.   Forward Together Strategic Plan
2.   Forward Together Visioning Process
3.   Academic Innovations Task Force Report
4.   International Student Recruitment and Study Abroad Task Force Report
5.   Marketing and Recruitment Task Force Report
6.   Process and Innovation Task Force Report
7.   Programs of Distinction Task Force Report
8.   Progression and Graduation Task Force Report
9.   Retention Task Force Report
10.   Staff Development, Advancement and Recognition Task Force Report
11.   Leading Forward Strategic Plan
12.   Notification Letter of Mission Revision sent to SACSCOC
13.   Leading Forward Strategic Plan Development Timeline
14.   Leading Forward Strategic Planning Steering Committee
15.   Leading Forward SWOT Analysis

16. Advancing Inclusion and Belonging Task Force Report

17. Expanding the Student Experience through Internationalizing the Campus Task Force Report

18. Campus Communication Task Force Report

19. Enhancing our Liberal Arts Curriculum and Advancing Engaged Teaching & Learning Task Force Report

20. Campus Sustainability and Green Initiatives Task Force Report

21. Faculty and Staff Development Task Force Report

22. Integrated 360 Student Support Task Force Report

23. QEP Strategic Planning Task Force Report

24. 2012-13 State Accountability Report

25. 2013-14 State Accountability Report

26. 2014-15 State Accountability Report

27. 2015-16 State Accountability Report

28. 2016-17 State Accountability Report

29. 2017-18 State Accountability Report

30. 2018-19 State Accountability Report

31. Narrative response to Standard 5.5 - Personnel appointment and evaluation

32. Narrative response to Standard 8.2.a - Student outcomes: Educational programs

33. Narrative response to Standard 8.2.c - Student outcomes: Academic and student services