

8.1 Student achievement

The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution's mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success.

Compliance Judgment: In Compliance

Rationale

The University of South Carolina Aiken (USC Aiken) identifies and evaluates success with respect to student achievement consistent with its [mission](#) ^[1] as a comprehensive institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional disciplines. USC Aiken is a diverse community of individuals engaged in educational experiences and service necessary for the pursuit of meaningful work in an enlightened, inclusive, and economically vibrant society. Evaluation of student success is based on multiple measures including student enrollment, course and program completion rates, persistence data, degrees awarded by major, and results of licensing exams. These measures are calculated at an overall institutional level and at disaggregated levels for the programs and types of students. The measures serve as key performance indicators in support of the institution's strategic plan. Pursuant to [South Carolina Code of Laws, Sections 1-1-810 and 1-1-820](#) ^[2], USC Aiken submits these data in the form of an agency accountability report to the Governor and the General Assembly by September 15 of each year for the previous state fiscal year. The annual accountability reports are published and made available to the public on both the [USC Aiken website](#) ^[3] and the [South Carolina State Legislature website](#).^[4]

Program Enrollment Outcome Measure. As a comprehensive public institution, it is important to offer degree programs for which there is interest and a need for the enhancement of society. Tax-payers expect universities to be good stewards of

resources and they both demand and deserve a return on appropriated dollars. Resources associated with programs in which there is little interest or need can be reallocated to programs that are more likely to meet the needs of constituents.

- **Target and Target Justification.** The [South Carolina Commission on Higher Education \(SCCHE\) Program Productivity Standards](#) ^[5] required baccalaureate degree programs to have an average of 12.5 students enrolled over a five-year period. The same productivity standards required an average of 6 students enrolled over a five-year period for master's degrees. The university has little say in establishing the goal which is set by the SCCHE. Program enrollments are monitored continuously but are reviewed on a biennial basis by SCCHE.
- **Data and their Use.** Program enrollment is monitored through major tally reports to ensure a sufficient number of students to justify each program's existence. In concert with other indicators, program enrollment also serves as a key performance indicator for personnel requests by departments and schools. For example, new recent faculty positions in Exercise and Sports Science and in Industrial Process Engineering were due in part to the relatively high enrollments in those degree programs. Major Tally reports for [Summer 2018](#) ^[6], [Fall 2018](#) ^[7], [Spring 2019](#) ^[8], [Summer 2019](#) ^[9], [Fall 2019](#) ^[10], and [Spring 2020](#) ^[11] are provided along with a [5-year trend report](#) ^[12] as examples of the data collected and evaluated. Other Major Tally reports are available on the [USC Aiken Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Compliance analytic reports website](#).^[13] To improve program enrollment, several departments have created faculty committees to improve recruitment and retention of students within their major (e.g., see the [Department of Biology and Geology End-of-Year Report](#) ^[14]; a complete set of End-of-Year Reports is provided in the [narrative response to 8.2.a - Student outcomes: Educational programs](#) ^[15]).

Course Completion Rates Outcome Measure. Successful completion of courses contributes to student achievement and progression toward degree completion. Course completion is also linked to retention and graduation rates. Successful

completion of a course ensures students have attained the knowledge and skills associated with their chosen fields of study, in keeping with the institution's mission as a comprehensive institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional disciplines. Successful completion is monitored by examining DFW rates (i.e., grades of D, D-, F, and withdrawals as a percent of all grades assigned) in all USC Aiken classes, regardless of location or delivery mode.

- **Target and Target Justification.** The target for DFW rates was to be below 17% for the Fall semester and below 16% for the Spring (see [2019-20 targets for measure 2.2.11](#) ^[16]). Targets are set based upon empirical data from the same semester in the previous year. The effort is to continuously improve by decreasing grades of DFW, while maintaining standards and developing strategies to address those classes with the highest DFW rates.
- **Data and their Use.** Course completion rates are monitored through grade distributions which are produced in an electronic format at the end of every semester. Each teaching faculty member reviews student success for individual classes while the department chairs and deans monitor grade distributions within their departments and schools or colleges, respectively. The and proportion and count of D's, F's, and W's within and across courses is carefully monitored by the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs through DFW reports (e.g., [Fall 2019 DFW Count Report](#) ^[17], [Fall 2019 DFW Percent Report](#) ^[18], [Spring 2020 DFW Count Report](#) ^[19], and [Spring 2020 DFW Percent Report](#) ^[20]). The overall institutional DFW rate serves as a key performance indicator for the Strategic Plan and is reported each year as part of the Institution's Accountability Report (see [measure 2.2.11](#) ^[21]). Academic units must report on efforts to address classes that have relatively high DFW rates in their annual reviews. Overall rates of Ds and Fs have been below 20% and have shown a general decline while other grades have shown an increase in response to several initiatives implemented to improve course completion such as changing the course withdrawal date to be later in the semester, having faculty submit mid-term

grades, and following-up with students who are noted by faculty as being absent from classes early in the semester. Academic support services in the form of tutors and supplemental instruction are also provided for courses that have high DFW rates.

Graduation Rates and Persistence Outcome Measures. Retention of students is necessary if they are to successfully complete their chosen fields of study in a timely manner and enter the work force in careers to which they aspire. Further, in an environment where less than 15% of revenue comes from state appropriation, persistence of students becomes essential if the institution is to achieve its mission. Graduation in six years or less and retention rates of [first-time full-time freshmen](#) ^[22] are reported annually to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Compliance also tracks persistence and graduation of [part-time freshmen](#) ^[23], [full-time transfer](#) ^[24], and [part-time transfer students](#) ^[25] and disaggregates the metric for each group by ethnicity and race. In keeping with federal requirements, persistence and graduation rates are also disaggregated by recipients of a Federal Pell grant, recipients of a subsidized Direct Loan who did not receive a Pell grant, and students who neither received a Pell grant nor a subsidized direct loan (see the [Pell Grant and Direct Subsidized Stafford Loan Graduation Rate Report](#) ^[26]). Because there are a substantial number of veterans, military, and military affiliates at USC Aiken and a sizeable proportion of the student body are first generation students, persistence and graduation rates are also disaggregated for these groups (see for example, the [Military Affiliate and Non-affiliate Retention and Graduation Report](#) ^[27], and the [First-generation and Non-first Generation Retention and Graduation Report](#) ^[28]). The University of South Carolina Aiken is a participating member of the Center for Institutional Data Exchange and Analysis (CSRDE) through the University of Oklahoma Outreach Division. The University of South Carolina Aiken is also a participant in the [Student Achievement Measure \(SAM\) Initiative](#) ^[29] through which it publishes persistence and graduation rates as students move from one institution to another. All of

these sources provide the means to benchmark against comparable and aspirational peers from across the nation.

- **Target and Target Justification.** The target six-year graduation rate for academic year 2019-20 was to be greater than 44% (see [2019-20 target for measure 2.2.28](#) ^[30]). The first-to-second year retention target was to be greater than 69% (see [2019-20 target for measure 2.2.29](#) ^[31]). The targets for both the six-year graduation and the first-to-second year retention rates are based on the means of each measure from a national group of 84 comparable and aspirational peers. The use of aspirational and comparable peers, similar in size and mission, allows the institution to note areas of relative strength and areas that are in need of attention. The national peer group serves as the basis for establishing targets across a wide range of metrics.
- **Data and their Use.** Persistence and graduation rates are compiled by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Compliance and published on its Retention and Progression website. Graduation and retention rates serve as a key performance indicator for the Strategic Plan and are reported each year to the Executive Budget Office as part of the Institution's Accountability Report (see [measure 2.2.28](#) ^[32] and [measure 2.2.29](#) ^[33]). The University has established a Retention, Progression, and Graduation Implementation Committee that is tasked at examining best practices and institutional data in an effort to make specific recommendations of actions that can be undertaken to improve persistence and graduation. Among the recommendations made by the committee are initiatives related to placement testing, course sequencing, tutoring, and academic advisement. Increased flexibility in course delivery such as online offerings has been identified as a means to support working students as they try to complete their degrees.

Degrees Awarded by Major Outcome Measure. The completion of program requirements and awarding of a degree is the principal outcome measure of success. Like program enrollments, it is important to offer programs for which there is interest and a need. Tax-payers expect universities to be good stewards and they both demand

and deserve a return on appropriated dollars in the form of credentialed graduates prepared to contribute to society.

- **Target and Target Justification.** USC Aiken had an overall target of awarding 562 bachelor's degrees and 114 master's degrees in 2019-20 (see 2019-20 targets for [measure 1.1.9](#) ^[34] and [measure 1.1.10](#) ^[35]). Each program of study must also meet or exceed a minimum number of degrees awarded. [SCCHE Program Productivity Standards](#) ^[5] require baccalaureate degree programs to have a minimum of 8 degrees awarded annually averaged over a five-year period. The same productivity standards required a minimum of 3 degrees awarded averaged over a five-year period for master's degrees. The minimum number of degrees to be awarded to establish a program as a viable offering at a comprehensive public institution is set by the SCCHE; the university has little say in establishing the target. Targets for overall degrees awarded are based on the median number of degrees awarded from a national group of 84 comparable and aspirational peers – institutions of similar size and mission. The use of a national peer group allows the institution to note its relative standing.
- **Data and their Use.** The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Compliance tracks degrees awarded by major and makes this information available in Degree Awarded Reports (e.g., [2019-20](#) ^[36] and [2018-19](#) ^[37]). Each academic unit reports the degrees awarded by major in its annual end-of-year report (links to which are provided in the [narrative response to 8.2.a - Student outcomes: Educational programs](#) ^[15]). In addition to other indicators, degrees awarded by major serve as a key performance indicator for personnel requests by departments and schools. The overall number of degrees awarded by the institution also serves as a key strategic indicator and is reported each year to the Executive Budget Office as part of the Institution's Accountability Report (see [measure 1.1.9](#) ^[38] and [measure 1.1.10](#) ^[39]). In 2019-20, 641 degrees were awarded with the largest number in Business Administration (137 graduates), Nursing (89 graduates), and Exercise and Sports Science (61 graduates). The increased offering of degree completion programs at remote campuses with the

USC System and using online delivery is a strategy adopted to improve degree completions.

State Licensing Exams Outcome Measure. Licensure exams serve as an indicator of the quality of instruction and student achievement in professional disciplines such as nursing and education. The use of licensure pass rates as a measure of student achievement is consistent with USC Aiken's [mission](#) ^[1] as a comprehensive institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in professional disciplines.

- **Target and Target Justification.** The 2019-20 target for licensure exams in nursing was a pass rate above 91.7% (see [2019-20 target for measure 2.2.1](#) ^[40]). The 2019-20 target pass rates for licensure among Education students was to be above 97%, 94% and 98% for Praxis professional knowledge, Praxis academic content areas, and Praxis teaching of special populations, respectively (see 2019-20 targets for measures [2.2.34](#) ^[41], [2.2.35](#) ^[42], and [2.2.36](#) ^[43]). USC Aiken sets licensure targets based on the statewide pass rates. Exceeding the target of a statewide pass rate serves as a testament of the quality of professional instruction at USC Aiken.

- **Data and their Use.** Every year, USC Aiken submits an Institutional Effectiveness Report to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (SCCHE). Included in the report are the Professional Examinations Tables in which Praxis Series II scores are reported (see the [2018 IE Report](#) ^[44] and the [2019 IE Report](#) ^[45]). Passing the Praxis II specialty area test is required of all education candidates before they can complete their teaching internship. The School of Education monitors course progression and test scores. In 2015, USC Aiken had an average pass rate of 78% on the Praxis. In response, students who did not pass the Praxis II on the first attempt were offered assistance or encouraged to audit courses in areas of weakness. The pass rate in 2019 had reached 100%. Similarly, student performance on the National Council Licensure Exam for Registered Nurses (NCLEX) is monitored by the School of Nursing and reported annually to SCCHE. In the 2015 Institutional Effectiveness Report to SCCHE, USC Aiken had a 79% pass rate on the NCLEX, which dropped to a

70% first-time pass rate in 2016. The School of Nursing developed effective strategies to address the drop in performance resulting in a steady increase to a 96.5% pass rate in 2019. Performance on licensure exams serve as key performance indicators that are reported each year to the Executive Budget Office as part of the Institution's Accountability Report (see [measure 2.2.1](#) ^[46], [measure 2.2.34](#) ^[47], [measure 2.2.35](#) ^[48], and [measure 2.2.36](#) ^[49]).

Supporting Documentation

1. [USC Aiken Mission Statement](#)
 2. [South Carolina Code of Laws, Sections 1-1-810 and 1-1-820](#)
 3. [USC Aiken Website: Link to Compliance Reports](#)
 4. [South Carolina State Legislature website](#)
 5. [South Carolina Commission on Higher Education \(SCCHE\) Program Productivity Standards](#)
 6. [Major Tallies: Summer 2018](#)
 7. [Major Tallies: Fall 2018](#)
 8. [Major Tallies: Spring 2019](#)
 9. [Major Tallies: Summer 2019](#)
 10. [Major Tallies: Fall 2019](#)
 11. [Major Tallies: Spring 2020](#)
 12. [5-year Trend Major Tallies Report](#)
 13. [USC Aiken Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Compliance Analytic Reports Website](#)
 14. [Department of Biology and Geology End-of-Year Reports](#)
 15. [Narrative response to 8.2.a - Student outcomes: Educational programs](#)
 16. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Targets for Measure 2.2.11](#)
 17. [Fall 2019 DFW Count Report](#)
 18. [Fall 2019 DFW Percent Report](#)
 19. [Spring 2020 DFW Count Report](#)
 20. [Spring 2020 DFW Percent Report](#)
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21. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.11](#)
 22. [Retention and Graduation Report of First-time Full-time Freshmen](#)
 23. [Retention and Graduation Report of Part-time Freshmen](#)
 24. [Retention and Graduation Report of Full-time Transfer Students](#)
 25. [Retention and Graduation Report of Part-time Transfer Students](#)
 26. [Pell Grant and Direct Subsidized Stafford Loan Graduation Rate Report](#)
 27. [Military Affiliate and Non-affiliate Retention and Graduation Report](#)
 28. [First-generation and Non-first Generation Retention and Graduation Report](#)
 29. [Student Achievement Measure \(SAM\) Initiative Website](#)
 30. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.28](#)
 31. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.29](#)
 32. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.28](#)
 33. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.29](#)
 34. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 1.1.9](#)
 35. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 1.1.10](#)
 36. [2019-20 Degrees Awarded Report](#)
 37. [2018-19 Degrees Awarded Report](#)
 38. [State Accountability Report Measure 1.1.9](#)
 39. [State Accountability Report Measure 1.1.10](#)
 40. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.1](#)
 41. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.34](#)
 42. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.35](#)
 43. [State Accountability Report 2019-20 Target for Measure 2.2.36](#)
 44. [2018 IE Report](#)
 45. [2019 IE Report](#)
 46. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.1](#)
 47. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.34](#)
 48. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.35](#)
 49. [State Accountability Report Measure 2.2.36](#)
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