



Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Compliance

University of South Carolina Aiken

October 3, 2022

Southern Association of College & Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033

Dr. Kevin Sightler:

The University of South Carolina Aiken is applying to the US Department of Education to begin a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) Program for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This program, Pacer LIFE, will begin in fall 2023. One of the requirements for the CTP program is that we notify our accrediting body of the program. We believe that the addition of the program does not constitute a substantive change as defined in SACSCOC policy.

As outlined in our mission statement, USC Aiken is committed to providing students with the needed experiences to pursue “meaningful work in an enlightened, inclusive, and economically vibrant society.” Additionally, we are committed to “enriching the region’s quality of life” through activities such as educational outreach.

The goals of Pacer LIFE are aligned with this mission and the core values of the University. Pacer LIFE provides adults with intellectual disabilities (IDs) the opportunity to attend a two-year residential program on our college campus to gain the knowledge and skills related to academics, employment, and independent living. These skills will provide opportunities for meaningful work, which benefits students and the community.

This two-year program will focus on *Promoting Academic, Community, and Employment Readiness* (PACER). Students will complete a variety of academic courses, participate on and around the campus and community, live independently on campus (with the support of a LIFE Resident Assistant), engage socially with peers, and maintain employment throughout the program. Specific goals for each Pacer LIFE student will differ and be based on person-centered planning.

Pacer LIFE students will complete the program on the USC Aiken campus in Aiken, SC. They will have access to all general student services (e.g., clubs, organizations, Wellness and Counseling Centers, sporting events). Faculty and staff who work with Pacer LIFE students will be provided support by the program’s staff. This will include training and resources related to working with students with ID. Students can complete USC Aiken coursework as credit-bearing or for audit. Modified syllabi and/or personal learning contracts will be offered to Pacer LIFE students who are auditing coursework.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) will be determined using person-centered planning. For students who are enrolled in credit-bearing courses, SAP will be evaluated using the following: (1) earn a minimum institutional cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0; and (2) satisfactory progress in internship experiences, academic support, independent living, and social engagement (described below). Students enrolled in credit-bearing courses will be required to complete all course requirements as outlined in the syllabus, which are the same standards and expectations for degree-seeking students. Students will be graded using the same grading scale as degree-seeking peers, as well. If accommodations are needed, the student will collaborate with Pacer LIFE staff, the course instructor, and Disability Services.

For students who enroll in courses on an audit-basis, SAP will be measured based on individualized goals developed in collaboration with the student, course instructor(s), and Pacer LIFE staff. A rubric will be utilized to measure progress towards each goal. The following criteria will be used to measure progress: much less than expected, less than expected, as expected, greater than expected, and much greater than expected. The rubric will be developed with the student, Pacer LIFE staff, and course instructors and will be both observable and measurable. To meet SAP, students will need to meet, at minimum, “as expected” on each learning goal.

Students will also (1) complete internship experiences/employment, (2) work with degree-seeking peers for academic support, (3) live independently with the support of a LIFE Resident Assistant (LRA) in our campus dorms, and (4) be engaged socially. The SAP in these four areas will also be monitored using four individualized rubrics developed in collaboration with the student, Pacer LIFE staff, and others (e.g., employers, LIFE Resident Assistants) as appropriate. To meet SAP, students will need to meet, at minimum, “as expected” on each learning goal.

Sample Curriculum:

	Fall 1	Spring 1	Fall 2	Spring 2
Pacer LIFE Coursework	Personal Responsibility I (3)	Personal Responsibility II (3)	College to Career I (3)	College to Career II (3)
	Group Dynamics I (3)	Group Dynamics II (3)		
USC Aiken Coursework	UNIV 101 (1)	USCA Course	USCA Course (1-3)	USCA Course (1-3)
Academic Support	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week
Employment	Supportive Internship I (3)	Supportive Internship II (3)	Internship I (6)	Internship II (6)
Independent Living Support	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week
Student Engagement	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week	Minimum of 2 hours per week
	16 credit hours	16-18 credit hours	16-18 credit hours	16-18 credit hours

Minimum requirements for the successful completion of the PACER (*Promoting Academics, Community, & Employment Readiness*) program include:

1. *Academic* – Students will complete at least one credit hour of credit-bearing or non-credit bearing (e.g., auditing) USC Aiken (inclusive) coursework each semester. Students will plan this coursework with the support of an Academic Advisor. Additionally, students will complete Pacer LIFE courses to prepare them for college, career, and independent living. Academic Support will also be provided for at least two hours weekly. This will include tutors or mentoring from college-aged students and/or faculty or staff on our campus (non-Pacer LIFE).
2. *Community* (Social Engagement)– Pacer LIFE students will be active participants on the USC Aiken campus and in the community. They will have the opportunity to join and to be leaders of student clubs and organizations including Greek Life. Students will be required to join at least one student organization each year. The Pacer LIFE program will also assign each student with a mentor to help in the USC Aiken coursework (e.g., note taker) and to coordinate activities and events (e.g., basketball game attendance). Additionally, our students will reside on our campus in our dorms/apartments and eat at the dining hall on campus.
3. *Employment* - As part of our program, students will become employed. Students will be required to be work 5-20 hours per week. The employment plan for the two-years is outlined below:

First Semester	Second Semester	Third Semester	Fourth Semester
Unpaid or paid internships on campus; Minimum 5 hours per week	Paid internships on campus or in the community; Minimum 10 hours per week	Paid internships on campus or in the community; Minimum 15 hours per week	Paid internships on campus or in the community; Minimum 20 hours per week

Cumulative Portfolio - At the end of the program, students will share a presentation about the knowledge and skills learned throughout the program and why they are ready to move forward and work and live independently. This presentation will include Pacer LIFE staff, roommates, LRAs, families, employers, leaders on campus, and others selected by the student. As part of this presentation, the student will describe growth in the areas of academics, community, and employment, as well as make goals for the future. Students will also develop a printed resume and include a discussion of their experiences during this presentation.

At program completion, the student’s progress in the areas of independent living, employment, and social inclusivity will be evaluated according to our Program Evaluation Plan.

The anticipated outcomes for students are higher rates of meaningful, retained employment; independent living; and social inclusion. We will evaluate the effectiveness of the PACER program at the following time periods: 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years after program completion.

The USC Aiken faculty assembly voted in favor of this program in February. The USC system Board of Trustees also voted in favor of the Pacer LIFE program on our campus.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lloyd A. Dawe

Lloyd A. Dawe, PhD

SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison

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