

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION ACAF Academic Affairs		POLICY NUMBER ACAF 3.70
POLICY TITLE Commencement Exercises and Related Academic Ceremonies		
SCOPE OF POLICY USC Columbia	DATE OF REVISION April 14, 2025	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Office of the Provost	

PURPOSE

This policy establishes standards for ceremonies sponsored by academic units outside of commencement exercises to honor the achievements, learning, and rigorous work of undergraduate, graduate and professional students.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Commencement: a ceremony in which degrees or diplomas are conferred on graduating students.

Other academic ceremonies: ceremonies sponsored by a college or other academic unit to recognize graduating students by bestowing of honor cord, academic hood or other symbol of achievement. This is not an official university commencement exercise.

POLICY STATEMENT

The authority to confer academic degrees rests with the Board of Trustees pursuant to state law (Section 59-117-40(10) of the South Carolina Code of Laws), The University of South Carolina confers the degrees to those degree candidates who have completed the requirements for their respective degrees at each of the commencement exercises across the USC System. The commencement exercises will include the university's traditional ceremony, a ceremony whose style stretches back to the earliest origin of the University of South Carolina, honoring each degree candidate individually. Policy [BRTU 2.00 Commencement Exercises](#) provides detailed information about the formal commencement exercises.

Colleges or other academic units may choose to sponsor other academic ceremonies to recognize graduating students by bestowing of honor cord, academic hood or other symbol of achievement.

- A. Colleges may not schedule graduation cordings, hoodings, or other honorary events on the day of any official commencement ceremony unless the Board of Trustees has identified available times. The Office of the Provost will notify academic units if the commencement schedule can accommodate additional events.
- B. College events may not be publicized or communicated in a manner that suggests in any way that the college event is an official university commencement exercise.

C. Colleges may not publish certificates, documents, or other materials that may be misunderstood as official university diplomas, awards, or documents. The university Registrar alone is authorized to use the university name and seal for these purposes.

PROCEDURES

A. Scheduling other Academic Celebrations

College graduation receptions, hoodings, honorary or other events at USC Columbia are scheduled on the Office of the Provost’s master calendar before the event is publicized (by emailing the request to ceremony@mailbox.sc.edu). These requests must be submitted three (3) months prior to the event (February for May events, September for December events).

B. College Graduation Receptions, Hoodings, Honorary or other Events

Colleges must follow these guidelines in planning their events:

1. Notify campus law enforcement and the Office of the Provost of the event.
2. Provide sign language and other accommodation as needed.
3. Direct ministers to university guidelines for invocations (Appendix 1).
4. Select a speaker who is not paid and limit the speech to no more than 10 minutes.
5. Refrain from reading names of the deceased at these celebratory events.
6. Refrain from “flipping tassels” as this is not an official Commencement.
7. Direct speakers not to represent alumni societies.
8. Complete the event within one hour whenever possible, but not more than 90 minutes.

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[BTRU 2.00 University Environmental Policy Statement](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
May 5, 2010	New policy approval
September 8, 2010	Non-substantive change to move administrative divisions from Board of Trustees (BTRU) to Academic Affairs (ACAF).
October 31, 2014	Policy revisions reflect campus name changes and provide guidelines for college graduation receptions, hoodings, honorary or other events.
March 10, 2017	Policy revisions remove August commencement and updates regulations on non-university sanctioned commencement events.
May 7, 2018	Revision removed practice of the president greeting each individual candidate. The

	policy was revised to follow the new template and key terms are defined. Appendix revision updates the number of students at the university.
July 5, 2019	Clarify college requirements and prohibitions and adjust notification time for college events.
October 18,2019	Policy was separated into two policies, BTRU 2.00 for commencement exercises and this policy for guidance about unit-sponsored academic ceremonies.
April 14, 2025	Policy reviewed and revalidated.

ACAF 3.70 APPENDIX 1

Guidelines for Invocation

The university is a 50,000 student, public institution of learning. Members of approximately 45 religious denominations are represented at the University of South Carolina. Our students and faculty come from all over the world. In keeping with the public nature of our institution, in keeping with the spirit of continuing interpretations of the Constitution of the United States, and in keeping with the desire of the administration to continue to be able to invoke the presence of God at ceremonies which hold great importance in the lives of our students and their families, we ask that prayers be non-denominational and non-sectarian. We are striving for inclusion, not exclusion, and appreciate your willingness to be present with us and your understanding of and assistance in fulfilling these aspects of campus life. In addition, please be respectful regarding the length of your prayer.