

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION	BTRU Board of Trustees
POLICY NUMBER	BTRU 2.00
POLICY TITLE	Commencement Exercises
SCOPE OF POLICY	USC System
DATE OF REVISION	December 13, 2022
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Secretary of the Board of Trustees
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE	Board of Trustees

PURPOSE

This policy establishes standards to maintain the dignity and tradition of academic commencement exercises to honor the achievements, learning, and rigorous work of undergraduate, graduate and professional students across the University of South Carolina System.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Commencement Exercise: An official ceremony in which degrees or diplomas are conferred on graduating students.

Comprehensive Universities: University of South Carolina Aiken (USC Aiken), University of South Carolina Beaufort (USC Beaufort), and University of South Carolina Upstate (USC Upstate).

Other academic ceremonies: Ceremonies and events sponsored by a college or other academic unit at a USC System institution to recognize graduating students by bestowing of honor cords, academic hoods or other symbol of achievements. These are not official university Commencement Exercises.

Regional Palmetto Colleges: University of South Carolina Lancaster (USC Lancaster), University of South Carolina Salkehatchie (USC Salkehatchie), University of South Carolina Sumter (USC Sumter), and University of South Carolina Union (USC Union) (collectively, “USC Palmetto College”).

System Leadership Council: The systemwide advisory body composed of the President, the President’s designee representing USC Columbia, and the Chancellors of USC Aiken, USC Beaufort, USC Upstate and USC Palmetto College.

University of South Carolina: University of South Carolina Columbia, or USC Columbia.

University of South Carolina System (USC System): USC Columbia, the Comprehensive Universities, and Regional Palmetto Colleges (collectively sometimes referred to herein as “university”).

POLICY STATEMENT

- A. 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). Acting through its Board of

Trustees, the University of South Carolina System confers degrees at Commencement Exercises at each USC System institution to those degree candidates who have completed the requirements for their respective degrees. 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 while maintaining a ceremony of comfortable length.

- B. The ceremonies will begin with a series of academic processions, which may include members of the Board of Trustees, the President, the Chancellor and/or Dean of the host USC System institution, representatives of the host institution's administration and faculty, other university officials and distinguished guests.
- C. A ceremonial mace is carried in procession at all Commencement Exercises. The placement of the mace, which represents the authority of the Board of Trustees, on its stand signals that the proceedings are about to come to order; its retirement indicates the conclusion of the exercises.
- D. The Board of Trustees' authority is further reflected in the medallions the University of South Carolina System President and Chancellors wear during Commencement Exercises.
- E. Colleges and other academic units may not schedule other academic ceremonies such as graduation cordings, hoodings, or other honorary events on the day of any official Commencement Exercise on their respective campus unless the Board of Trustees has identified available times. 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. See policy [ACAF 3.70 Commencement Exercises and Other Academic Ceremonies](#) for additional guidelines for non-commencement ceremonies at USC Columbia.

PROCEDURES

A. Committees on Commencement

1. The Columbia Commencement Committee

The Columbia Commencement Committee manages Commencement Exercises held at USC Columbia. The President shall appoint a chair or co-chairs of the Columbia Commencement Committee. The chair or co-chairs shall constitute the committee with such personnel as may be necessary or advisable to accomplish the committee's objectives.

2. System Commencement Committee

All other system institutions shall plan and execute Commencement Exercises on their respective campuses. Each such institution shall designate a representative to serve on the System Commencement Committee, which shall meet from time-to-time as needed to coordinate the scheduling, planning and execution of Commencement Exercises at the Comprehensive Universities and Regional Palmetto Colleges. The Vice President for System Affairs shall serve as the Chair of the System Commencement Committee, and in such capacity serve as a liaison between system institutions outside of USC Columbia and all applicable system and board administrators regarding commencement planning and execution

of commencements.

B. Commencement Calendar

The University of South Carolina System holds formal Commencement Exercises in accordance with a rolling two-year calendar developed by the System Leadership Council, approved by the President, and submitted annually to the Board of Trustees through the University System Committee. The calendar will indicate the expected presiding officer for each Commencement Exercise scheduled.

C. USC System Standards for Commencement Exercises

1. Degree candidates/graduates march with their college/school in alphabetical order within their degree.
2. The ceremonial mace of the host institution shall be carried in processional at Commencement Exercises by the student government president of the institution or a substitute approved by the President or Chancellor.
3. The order of exercises, format and content of the commencement program, and processional for each USC System institution shall be substantially similar to one another and shall be submitted to the applicable Commencement Committee Chair in Section A. These items shall be presented to the System Leadership Council for any desired additional consideration, and the President shall approve them prior to their publication or use in a Commencement Exercise.
4. The language conferring degrees shall be substantially similar across USC System institutions and shall include an acknowledgment of the statutory authority of the Board of Trustees to confer degrees.
5. The person invited to deliver the invocation and benediction is expected to follow the guidelines in Appendix 1.

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 3.70 Commencement Exercises and Other Academic Ceremonies](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
October 11, 2019	New policy approval
December 13, 2022	Changes to Commencement Practices and Planning Bodies

APPENDIX 1: GUIDELINES FOR INVOCATION

The University of South Carolina System is comprised of multiple institutions of learning with more than 50,000 students. Members of approximately 45 religious denominations are represented in the University of South Carolina System. 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.