Commencements are a time-honored tradition in academia and honor the achievements, learning, and rigorous work of undergraduate and graduate students.

**Definitions and Acronyms**

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

*University of South Carolina Mace* includes the seals of the university and the state of South Carolina and the Great Seal of the United States, along with a stylistic representation of a palmetto tree with 13 stars as the tree fronds. The mace is carried in procession on occasions of outstanding importance, such as commencements, convocations and formal dedications.

*Other academic ceremonies* are 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**

A. The University of South Carolina President 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.

B. The ceremonies will begin with a series of academic processions including representatives of the university faculties, university officials and deans, members of the Board of Trustees and distinguished guests.

C. The university mace is carried in procession at all commencements. The placement of the mace on its stand signals that the proceedings are about to come to order; its retirement indicates the conclusion of the exercises.
D. The significance of the mace is mirrored in the President's Medallion and Chain of Office which designate the wearer as the temporary embodiment of the institution's power and authority.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. 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. Committees on Commencement

1. The Columbia Commencement Committee

   The Columbia Commencement Committee manages commencement exercises held on the Columbia Campus of the University of South Carolina. The secretary of the Board of Trustees serves as chair of the Commencement Committee.

2. The Systemwide Commencement Committee

   The Systemwide Commencement Committee oversees, coordinates, and establishes standards for all commencement exercises of the University of South Carolina on all campuses. The secretary of the Board of Trustees serves as chair of the Commencement Committee.

B. Commencement Calendar

1. The University of South Carolina holds formal commencement exercises in May and December of each year on the Columbia campus and in May of each year on the Comprehensive and Palmetto College campuses. The systemwide Commencement Committee Chair informs the campus community of the official commencement dates for all campuses at least two years in advance.

C. Scheduling other Academic Celebrations

1. College graduation receptions, hoodings, honorary or other events at the Columbia campus 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 6 months prior to the event (November for May events, June for December events).

D. Commencement Ceremonies

1. Columbia Campus

a. In May of each year the university will administer separate ceremonies for the School of Law, Schools of Medicine, Doctoral Hooding, and three Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercises.

b. In December of each year, the university will administer a Doctoral Hooding, and one Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercises. Candidates from the School of Law, the Schools of Medicine, the Comprehensive and Palmetto College campuses are invited to march with the Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercises.

c. Degree candidates/graduates march with their college/school in alphabetical order within their degree.

2. Comprehensive and Palmetto College Campuses

a. In May of each year, the comprehensive and Palmetto College campuses hold commencement exercises on their campuses for their degree candidates. In December of each year, degree candidates from these campuses may participate in the USC Columbia Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercises.

E. Standards for Commencement Exercises

The order of exercises, format and content of the commencement program, and processional for each USC campus are submitted to the chair of the Systemwide Commencement Committee for approval.

F. Standards for College Graduation Receptions, Hoodings, Honorary or other Events

Colleges are asked to following 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**
As applicable

**HISTORY OF REVISIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF REVISION</th>
<th>REASON FOR REVISION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 5, 2010</td>
<td>New policy approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 8, 2010</td>
<td>Non-substantive change to move administrative divisions from Board of Trustees (BTRU) to Academic Affairs (ACAF).</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 31, 2014</td>
<td>Policy revisions reflect campus name changes and provide guidelines for college graduation receptions, hoodings, honorary or other events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10, 2017</td>
<td>Policy revisions remove August commencement and updates regulations on non-university sanctioned commencement events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7, 2018</td>
<td>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.</td>
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**APPENDIX**
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.