



REPORT OF THE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE

Statement Regarding the Report

The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is responsible for making the final determination on reaffirmation of accreditation based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

Name of the Institution: University of South Carolina - Columbia

Date of the Review: March 22 – 25, 2021

SACSCOC Staff Member: Dr. Linda Thomas-Glover

Chair of the Committee: Dr. Laurie Casteen
Associate Dean of Students
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA

Committee conducted interviews with the Institutional Effectiveness Manager- SAAS Planning and Assessment; Associate Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Innovation; Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support and the Dean of Students and Deputy Title IX Coordinator in support of the institution's case for compliance.

- 12.4 The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written student complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be accessed upon request by SACSCOC.

(Student complaints) [Off-Site/On-Site Review]

The institution provided substantial documentation of its promulgated student policies, describing student options for compliant resolution on a variety of areas of student concerns related to (a) equal opportunity and affirmative action, (b) equal opportunity complaint processing procedures, (c) sexual harassment, (d) discriminatory harassment, (e) non-discrimination, (f) sexual assault, (g) relationship violence and stalking, (h) hazing, (i) student non-discrimination and non-harassment, (j) the student code of conduct, and (k) academic grievances. The institution provided multiple redacted example responses to demonstrate resolution of written student complaints from its main campus in Columbia and its Palmetto College branch campuses in Lancaster, Salkehatchie, Sumter, and Union. Records policies outline responsible departments for complaint processes, along with department and institutional standards for records retention and access. The responsible department maintains the complaint records. Along with standard departmental and academic unit procedures, an institution-level undergraduate and graduate ombudsperson is available to help students resolve complaints. Additionally, the ombudsperson reviews policies, makes revisions when necessary, and oversees overall policy compliance.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the procedures to receive and resolve student complaints as well as the record of student complaints. The institution provided documentation demonstrating broad dissemination of procedures and student's options for complaint resolution. The procedures are available to students on all campuses and address a broad range of student concerns. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee conducted interviews with the Undergraduate Student Ombudsman; Graduate School Ombudsman; Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, USC Lancaster; Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, USC Salkehatchie; Executive Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, USC Sumter; Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, USC Union; University Registrar; Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer; Associate Vice President for Information Technology Transformation; Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions and the Chief Health Officer & Associate Vice President Health and Well-Being in support of the institution's case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 12.5 The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records and maintains security measures to protect and back up data.

(Student records)

The institution protects student records guided by State of South Carolina Policy, best practices from the US Department of Education, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the institution's definitions, policies, manuals, and system-wide data information governance used to protect student records. The institution's Chief Data Officer oversees information security inclusive of institutional data sharing agreements. The institution utilizes multiple student records systems to process and protect the confidentiality of student data. The student records systems they utilize are respected systems in higher education and are sufficient to maintain confidentiality of student records.

In compliance with data integrity expectations, the institution has established a Responsible Use of Data, Technology and User Credentials policy. This policy outlines employee data integrity and confidentiality expectations, along with measures to educate and enforce these institutional standards. Appropriate security measures are in place and were identified for both physical records and electronic records. The institution acknowledged "there is not a current disaster recovery plan that includes off-site resources." The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee was unable to verify the security of student records; the institution needs to provide information about its disaster plan for records retrieval.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the disaster recovery plan that was developed in 2016 when the institution moved from a physical off-site data backup center to a cloud-based data backup process. This plan is current as of April 2020 and under the direction of the Division of Information Technology. The plan details the institution's process to retrieve records in the case of emergency. The disaster recovery plan documents resources and procedures to be used if a disaster occurs at the institution's data center. The plan delineates recovery procedures and responsible personnel for requisite recovery tasks. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee conducted interviews with the Undergraduate Student Ombudsman; Graduate School Ombudsman; Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, USC Lancaster; Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, USC Salkehatchie; Executive Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, USC Sumter; Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, USC Union; University Registrar; Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer; Associate Vice President for Information Technology Transformation; Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions and the Chief Health Officer & Associate Vice President Health and Well-Being in support of the institution's case for compliance.

- 12.6 The institution provides information and guidance to help student borrowers understand how to manage their debt and repay their loans.
(Student debt)

The institution provides information and resources on the Financial Aid and Scholarships website to help students understand how to manage their debt. The services are provided on the main campus and regional campuses. Resources include support for financial planning, exit counseling, along with resources to understand loan options. Overall, the institution has a default rate well below the national average for four-year public institutions. Each semester students receive an email directing them to review consumer information in compliance with the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act. The institution requires financial counseling for any student who wants to borrow federal