WINTER 2018
Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support

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Last fall, we opened the marvelous new Center for Health and Well-Being, a 68,000-square-foot building that, as you’ll see on page 20, embodies the principles of wellness and encourages students to manage their health holistically. The building’s ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the culmination of 10 years of diligent planning and very hard work. It also marked the beginning of a new phase in the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support as we embrace a change orientation.

Over the next several years, the physical changes to our campus will be significant. Construction soon will begin on Campus Village (page 27), a transformational project that will replace outdated and unsalvageable buildings with residence halls for undergraduate students, as well as green space, shopping and dining spots that the entire community can enjoy.

Many changes will be less visible but equally important. Our enhanced focus on efficiency will help us provide better service to students, especially in areas critical to student enrollment and success. Our financial aid office has already begun this work, making a series of thoughtful changes that are making an enormous difference in students’ ability to pay for college. Learn more in “Financial Aid Upgrade,” page 14.

Other changes will be bittersweet. Two of our long time associate vice presidents — one for student life, the other for housing and student development — are retiring from those roles, and we’ll miss their wealth of experience and expertise. We’re thrilled, though, to have the opportunity over the next six months or so to welcome exceptional leaders to those roles and to a new one: our first dean of students and deputy Title IX coordinator.

My privilege over the next few years will be to guide these new leaders and our division through the transition and to ensure that there’s one thing that doesn’t change: that we continue to deliver on the promise to our students.

I couldn’t be more excited.
A new scholarship program at the University of South Carolina rewards high school students for a wide variety of academic achievements and extracurricular activities.

Students at 56 selected high schools in South Carolina, starting as early as ninth grade, can earn micro-scholarships to Carolina through an online program called RaiseMe (raise.me). Academic successes such as getting an “A” in a core course, earning a high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher, taking an advanced course or participating in clubs and student organizations will be rewarded through this program. Students can earn a maximum of $2,000, to be spread over four years.

In addition to improving clarity and access around financial aid, the new program allows students to track specific goals they want to accomplish throughout high school, helping them become more competitive college applicants and more successful college students. Earning micro-scholarships throughout high school provides encouragement and motivation for students to excel in high school. It also demonstrates Carolina’s interest in attracting students from schools from which relatively few students have attended in the past.

RaiseMe is focused on expanding access to higher education, especially among low-income and first-generation students. RaiseMe was developed in response to the fact that most scholarships and grants today are awarded by colleges at the very end of high school — after a student has already done well or not, applied to a college or not and been accepted or not — which is often too late to impact a student’s college ambitions or choices.

“The University of South Carolina has found an ideal partnership with RaiseMe as it seeks to motivate and encourage low-income and first-generation students to dream big and prepare earnestly for college,” said Scott Verzyl, associate vice president for enrollment management and dean of undergraduate admissions. “We hope micro-scholarships that students earn will motivate them to even greater achievement, help them to immediately see the value of their accomplishments and, of course, to consider attending USC for college.”
A NEW CAMPUS COMMUNITY

The roughly 300 health sciences undergraduates in USC’s newest living and learning community, Galen Health Fellows, benefit from activities that enrich their academic course work, internships with local health care organizations, health-related study abroad opportunities and talks and research opportunities with health sciences faculty members. But for these students interested in helping professions, the greatest benefit may be mentoring.

“I know from my own experience as an undergraduate that having great mentors made my college experience productive and rich beyond measure.”

“Having people around me who were well-informed, passionate and interested in me helped pave the way for much of my own sense of mentoring and the paying-it-forward that I hope to bring to my role as faculty principal,” says David Simmons, an associate professor in anthropology and public health who serves as Carolina’s first faculty principal of the Galen Health Fellows living and learning community.

Gamecocks AT THE GATE

Since 2012, thousands of students have taken a special path to the University of South Carolina. They’ve taken part in the Gamecock Gateway program, a highly collaborative partnership between the University of South Carolina Columbia campus and Midlands Technical College. First-time college students who applied to USC Columbia and were not admitted may be invited to Gateway, giving them an opportunity to transfer to USC in their sophomore year.

In the meantime, students gain an authentic Gamecock experience by living on the USC campus while completing their first-year of course work in a smaller academic setting at Midlands Technical College. Students get personalized attention from dedicated professional staff members at both schools who support them in both academic and co-curricular pursuits.

“Both campuses want to do everything they can to help you succeed,” said Austin Owens, who completed the program and enrolled at USC in 2017. “There is so much support around you that you can accomplish anything.”

“Our students are looking for ways to contribute during their time at Carolina — to leave their mark and soak in every ounce of what we have to offer ... and they have to gain. They challenge us to stay on our toes — adapt to the changing needs of students, the community and our environment — and to deliver on the promise that we have made to students and their families.”

Anna Edwards is the new associate vice president for student life, a position she previously held in an interim capacity.

Edwards has served in roles of increasing responsibility since joining USC in 2005. She now leads the Department of Student Life, which includes athletics tickets for students, campus recreation, fraternity and sorority life, multicultural student affairs, off-campus living and neighborhood relations, parent and family programs, student media, and the Russell House University Union and its associated programs, including leadership and community service.
Finding your space on a college campus can be intimidating, no matter your background. With temptation and peer pressure around every corner, college life can be especially threatening to some. To combat this issue, the Gamecock Recovery program is providing a haven for a special group of students: those in recovery from various addictions. The program supports students who have changed their lives for the better. It’s been around for several years, but found new momentum since moving under the umbrella of Substance Abuse Prevention and Education.

“Gamecock Recovery provides a safe space for students in recovery so that they can have an authentic college experience and still enjoy life,” says Aimee Hourigan, director of SAPE. “We do this by focusing on three main goals: providing support and opportunities for students in recovery, reducing the stigma and educating the campus about recovery and addiction, and building a sustainable recovery program with an array of resources.”

Collegiate recovery programs have been around for decades, but the movement to provide a safe space for students in recovery advanced about five years ago when Texas Tech University created a how-to guide for others to follow. Another push in the movement came after Stacie Mathewson founded the Transforming Youth Recovery Foundation in remembrance of her son, Josh, who died of an overdose. The foundation awarded $10,000 to 100 campuses to kick-start their CRP efforts. Carolina received one of the awards.

“When you look at schools of our caliber and schools that have the number of students that we do, we all have some sort of recovery program for students,” says Hourigan.

Along with an open study space in the Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center where students can hang out away from the hustle and bustle of campus life, Gamecock Recovery offers many other resources and programs. A few of these, like recovery meditation sessions in the Center for Health and Well-Being, are led by peer leaders.

Senior Chris Benitez guides the weekly meditation sessions for students and says he enjoys seeing students drop all of their worries in those few moments of mindfulness.

“Each week, students are introduced to a practice that enables them to free themselves from the suffering that is caused by addiction, and each week they leave with real-life examples of how they can use mindfulness as a healthy way to meet the conditions that arise in their daily lives, instead of engaging in addictive behaviors,” says Benitez. “Students often report feeling a sense of relief in that affirmation, that it’s okay to stop worrying about school and work for a moment and just lean into their own experience.”

About a dozen students are actively connected to Gamecock Recovery, and hundreds more stay informed through a mailing list. Any student interested in learning more about Gamecock Recovery can connect with the program via social media, the university website or the alcohol.edu modules administered during their first semester at USC. Hourigan encourages students in recovery to take advantage of these resources to improve their Carolina experience.

“A lot of students in recovery will say that they come to campus with their blinders on. They go to class and try not to listen to other people talking about negative things, and they can’t study in the library because people are talking about negative things there, and so they run off campus as fast as they can,” says Hourigan. “They spend their whole college experience not getting to do any of the things that make a Gamecock experience matter. Collegiate recovery provides an opportunity so that they don’t have to choose.”
During her summer internship, junior social work major Erin Woods helped raise money for the Children’s Hospital of Greenville Health System through the Children’s Miracle Network. She helped manage corporate partnerships, including Costco and Publix, and planned fundraising events, including Children’s Hospital Radiothon, which raised nearly $300,000 in just 48 hours. “I learned a lot about nonprofit fundraising and how it directly benefits children and families, but also, in terms of macro-level social work, how raising money benefits a community in a broad sense,” Woods says.
USC’s Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support staff members are among the most knowledgeable, talented and dedicated in the field. We’re proud of the recognition they earn and the distinction they bring to the university.

**JOEY DERRICK**  
**DIRECTOR OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS**  
Appointed to the College Board’s National Forum Planning Committee

**STACEY BRADLEY**  
**SENIOR ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT**  
Received EAB’s Visionary Leadership Award

**JERRY BREWER**  
**FORMER ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT**  
Received the NASPA Region III and national AVP/Senior-Level Student Affairs Awards

**SCOTT MCDONALD**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF PEER LEARNING, STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER**  
Selected treasurer of the Southeastern College Learning Center Association
CINDY PEACHEY
SENIOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Awarded the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Achiever Award

JOAHNN SPERRY
LEAD ADVOCATE, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND VIOLENCE INTERVENTION & PREVENTION
Received the 2017 Honored Victim Advocate Award from the National Organization for Victim Assistance

MARY WAGNER
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS
Elected as a representative to the College Board’s Guidance and Admissions Assembly

KIMBERLY DRESSLER
COORDINATOR OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT, STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER
Elected to the board of the National Student Exchange Consortium

ASHLEY BAILEY-TAYLOR
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, GAMECOCK GUARANTEE PROGRAM, OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Selected to serve on the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Assisting Displaced Students Working Group

KIRSTEN KENNEDY
INTERIM ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR HOUSING AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT
Elected to the executive the board of Association of College and University Housing Officers — International
STUDENT AFFAIRS AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES ARE CONSISTENTLY RECOGNIZED AS STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MODELS OF EXCELLENCE. THESE ARE OUR MOST RECENT AWARDS.

INSIGHT Into Diversity named the University of South Carolina a recipient of their diversity and inclusion award for the fifth straight year. The Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award honors institutions for making diversity and inclusion a high priority.
The University of South Carolina was selected a top school in the 2017 Military Advanced Education & Transition Guide to Colleges & Universities. The top school designation recognizes USC for its services for students in the military, including availability of financial aid, flexibility and in-person and online general support services.

**off-campus excellence**

Off-Campus Student Services won the 2017 Award for Programming at a Public Institution of 7,500 or More Students for their “Off-Campus Living 101” program. This award, given by the South Carolina College Personnel Association, recognizes a program’s outstanding contribution to its campus and the field of student affairs.

**looking good**

U.S. News & World Report’s undergraduate rankings publication highlighted University 101 and USC’s living and learning communities in the 2017 “Programs to Look For” section, which recognizes programs that lead to student success. It’s the 15th consecutive year University 101 has earned the distinction.

**leading the way**

The University of South Carolina was chosen as a Lead Initiative Institution for the 2017-18 academic year. This is the second time the university has been recognized by NASPA for its commitment to making civic learning and democratic engagement a part of every student’s college education. Institutions selected to participate in this initiative work collaboratively in cohorts to share resources and promising practices and to participate in professional networking opportunities. Lead institutions receive support and continuing professional development from NASPA.

**military friendly**

The University of South Carolina was selected a top school in the 2017 Military Advanced Education & Transition Guide to Colleges & Universities. The top school designation recognizes USC for its services for students in the military, including availability of financial aid, flexibility and in-person and online general support services.
STUDENT PROFILES

By Abby Webb, ’18

OMAR BARAKET
Omar is a junior marketing and GSCOM major and a member of a business fraternity. He’s also a group fitness instructor, and before he arrived at USC, he served as Zumba Fitness coordinator for Tunisia, his home country. There and here, Omar has used the workout to help communities unite for a good cause.

“I was on the fundraising committee for Delta Sigma Pi. I wanted to think outside the box, so we did a Zumba master class for more than 60 people, and in one hour we raised over $300. That’s exactly what I used to do in my country — these big exhibitions, and all the money would go to a specific cause. I thought to myself, ‘If I did this in North Africa, why not try it here?’”

LAURA KOCK
After she graduated high school in her home country of Aruba, Laura waited two years for a program that would allow her to pursue her degree in the U.S. Now that she’s at USC, the junior Spanish and psychology major shares her love of Aruba through the Thinking Globally program.

“I bring chocolates to the presentation, and if the kids answer my questions, they get a chocolate. We spoke to a class that was all the ages combined, and they were so excited to learn. When I got to the questions, all their hands went up, and they were yelling, ‘Pick me, pick me!’ and ‘I had my hand up first!’ Everyone got chocolate that day; I had to make up new questions!”
JANELYS VILLALTA
As a first-generation college student from Beaufort, S.C., Janelys came to Carolina to study journalism and sociology. Now a senior, she’s president of the Latin American Student Organization and an activist for what she believes in most deeply: immigration rights for people who entered the U.S. as minors.

“She got so happy when we came to help her on Saturdays, and it makes you feel good knowing that. She goes above and beyond for the kids, which makes it one of my favorite sites. She does so much stuff outside of school to help her kids. She’s a science teacher, so if they’re doing a lesson on plants, she’s going to make sure she has the biggest, best garden for them to play in.”

EMERY SMITH
In high school, Emery loved helping out in her great aunt’s Spartanburg, S.C., soup kitchen. At USC, Emery started out as a volunteer for Gamecock Pantry, the campus food pantry, and worked her way up to director. The senior advertising major says she’s connecting to her fellow students in a way she couldn’t before.

“I feel like we think we’re so different, but then you start talking to someone and they let you in their world for a little bit. That’s when you realize how similar you are and how you’re able to connect. I feel like that’s our purpose — to connect to people and to help each other.”

SAM LUPTON
Sam, a 2017 mechanical engineering graduate from Wake Forest, N.C., was a site leader for Service Saturday, USC’s monthly volunteer projects. Forest Heights Elementary, where he helped the school’s science teacher, Ms. Dire, was one of his favorite spots.

“Being president has really allowed me to gear the organization toward what I want to focus on. Obviously we want to promote social events, but I also thought it was important to focus on the social issues. When it was time for me to become president, I knew exactly what I needed to do: prioritize activism and advocacy.”

JANELYS VILLALTA
Financial Aid Upgrade

Financing college isn’t always a simple process for students and their families. The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships at the University of South Carolina, led by director Joey Derrick, has set out to improve it. They’ve made system enhancements and provided strategic communications designed to reduce the headache (and the heartache) of figuring out financial aid. BY GRACE DAY

SERVING LOWER-MIDDLE-INCOME STUDENTS

Over the past few years, financial aid staff members noticed a rise in requests from students and families who were not eligible to receive federal Pell Grants. Their expected family contribution as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid was too high to qualify, but they were still in need of significant additional assistance.

In response, USC developed and launched the Access Grant. This award, specifically designed to aid lower-middle-income in-state students, is now given to 100-150 students each semester. The amount, while varying from student to student, is always slightly less than the smallest Pell Grant, but will help a growing population that truly needs some assistance. As funding allows, Derrick would love to see the initiative grow, allowing more students who fall into this category to be able to receive this supplemental funding.
“We think that makes a difference, and we’ve received a lot of positive feedback from families and students, particularly those in their first year, because they would not have received anything like this at any other school similar to USC,” Derrick says.

ENHANCING ONLINE ACCESS
Another area Derrick and his team saw as an opportunity for improvement was the way students access their financial aid award information on the university’s online system Self Service Carolina.

They moved more information to the platform and implemented new features. Students now can view and take actions on the status of their loans, including accepting or declining loan offers, on the Self Service Carolina website. They can see any reason their financial aid may have not been applied to their account yet, as well as any additional steps they need to take related to their aid. And, importantly, they can view their total amount borrowed and access a repayment calendar.

“We want students to actively know how much they are borrowing, so that they can make informed borrowing decisions,” Derrick says. “This way, when they go to accept their awards, they can also see what they already have. A lot of times, it is easier to focus on ‘How much do I need right now to cover the bill?’ and not necessarily realize how much it’s growing over time.”

Derrick believes that this added feature also will remove the element of surprise when the time comes for students to start paying back their loans.

SPEEDING UP
Sometimes, the most frustrating part of the process for students is simply the wait between submitting requests and receiving results. In response to this, the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships has taken steps to increase the speed of communication. The office now communicates with the Department of Education multiple times per day, decreasing the turnaround time between a student completing requirements like entrance counseling or submitting signed master promissory notes and the awarding of their financial aid.

The office submits FAFSA corrections daily to the Department of Education, essentially matching their efficiency. Thanks to University Technology Services, all of these file transfers run in the background, allowing the office to complete concurrent tasks and maintain optimal productivity.

Speeding up these transactions has helped the office to cut down on the number of calls they get from people who merely want a status update on their aid. Answering fewer calls frees the staff up to work with people who need more intensive help.
COMMUNICATING STRATEGICALLY

Rather than sending emails scattershot, the office determined that they needed to be more strategic with their outreach to students and families. Based on the time of year, staff members send targeted emails to remind them about things they may need to do to maintain their financial aid award.

For example, every semester, students receive a notification from the financial aid office encouraging them to log on to Self Service Carolina and view their total borrowing history, as well as the repayment calendar. This helps students understand how much they have borrowed and how it grows over time, and it helps get them to start thinking about how much they want to borrow for the next term.

The timing of communications is most important, Derrick emphasizes, and his office wanted to make sure that these messages were intentional.

"We wanted it to all have a purpose," he says.

Additionally, they launched a series of print pieces for students and parents. Originally, all of the information was electronic, and staff members expected that putting everything on the website would provide easy and accessible references. However, what they found was that at resource fairs, orientations and other in-person meetings, parents and students needed something to carry with them and hold on to. These physical communication pieces provided an intuitive space for students and families to take notes, which also created a simple paper trail to record what they had talked about with financial aid counselors.

"Self Service Carolina, Parent Plus loans — they’re a lot to think about, and it can be confusing, but this way if they called us, which more often than not they did, they at least had something physical that they could refer to," Derrick says.
REAPING THE BENEFITS

The changes seem to have paid off.

In 2017-18, the office was charged with disbursing $425 million in aid, up by 22 percent from six years ago. In years past, more aid meant more traffic on phones and in the office, but after instituting all of these changes, financial aid actually saw a decrease. Phone calls have dropped 27 percent to 88,000 per year, and office visits have declined 34 percent to 12,000 per year.

By providing information in a more strategic way, offering better online access to complete financial aid tasks and maximizing efficiency in the awarding process, the financial aid office has made it possible—even preferable—for recipients to accomplish what they need to on their own. That allows financial aid staff members to focus more of their time and efforts on assisting people who have more complex questions and needs, and it gives them time to plan for future improvements.

Every year, the team gets together and looks at what needs to be done and what opportunities could be developed to serve even more students even better.

“These are things we should be doing anyway, so that folks can move on and start thinking about other important things,” Derrick says.
Ashley Bunnell has worked long and hard for her country, her family and her education. As an advocate and social worker in the making, she’s working just as hard for her fellow veterans.

As told to Abby Webb, ’18
Most 16-year-olds are concerned with getting their driver’s license, hanging out with their friends on Friday nights, maybe working an after-school job. At 16, my life was far from typical. I was emancipated as a survivor of child abuse and domestic violence, dropping out of high school, getting my GED and enlisting in the military because I was out of options.

While in the military, I could only take one or two classes at a time because I couldn’t afford to do more. I started going full time in 2012, pursuing a degree in nursing. I was working at the VA hospital in Fort Bragg, N.C., as a certified nursing assistant when I discovered my passion. I was concerned with helping the patients feel heard and listened to. It didn’t sit right with me to watch them have hardly any human interaction, get discharged abruptly and have no home to go to. I was calling churches, trying to find help for the discharged veterans; I didn’t realize at the time that that was social work.

I had just received a letter of acceptance into an upper-division nursing school program when we got the orders to move from Fort Bragg. There were three options, one of them being Fort Jackson. I was very upset with the move, but the good thing about it was the opportunity to attend the University of South Carolina.

Fast forward to now. I am a wife, a mother, a full-time student, a veteran, an advocate and a survivor. I work mainly in advocacy for the Student Veteran Association here on campus. SVA builds camaraderie and helps with academic achievement — basically a support group for military-connected students.

In addition, I’m a founding board member of the My Carolina Veterans Alumni Council. In this role, I do more community engagement. I go out to the military affairs committee through the Columbia Chamber of Commerce and act as a bridge between them and the university, communicating how we could get involved in the community, and vice versa. In the future, we’re hoping to start some mentor programs for younger veterans or ROTC members, with more seasoned, accomplished alumni.

After 10 long years of grinding, I’ll graduate in May with a degree in social work. The next step is graduate school to earn a master’s degree in social work. From there, the end game is to work in a VA hospital, advocating for those men and women who have gone so far out of their way to serve their country.

I hope that after I leave USC, the SVA and Veterans Alumni Council continue to grow and spread awareness. I want my legacy to be about not only standing up for myself, but standing up for others and inviting them to sit at the table to talk for themselves. People always say you need to fight for others, but sometimes the right thing to do is empower them to fight for themselves.
wellness revealed

by Chris Horn
With its soothing interior colors, lush plants, comfy seating and walls of windows that afford a panoramic view of the center of campus, the University of South Carolina’s new student health center might become the next cool place for students to hang out.

If that happens, Debbie Beck will be more than a little pleased. As executive director of student health services, Beck wants USC students to embrace the building’s vibe of wellness and health promotion, which she helped orchestrate with the building’s architects.

“We want this new building to be welcoming,” she says. “All of the colors inside have been proven to reduce stress and anxiety. And the live plants and nature graphics give the feel of being outdoors while you’re inside.

“I’d love to see students cut through this building on their way across campus and just absorb the wellness messaging on the walls and wellness activities taking place, like the demonstration kitchen for healthy cooking.”
All of which is to say, the new Center for Health and Well-Being isn’t your grandfather’s college infirmary. The 68,000-square-foot building replaces the adjacent Thomson Student Health Center, which has served the campus for the past 45 years. That building has been renovated and is the new home for student counseling and psychiatry services as well as peer educators and Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention and Prevention.

“Thomson has large offices, which will be perfect for counseling,” Beck says. “Mental health is one of our primary concerns. Lots of studies have shown that stress and anxiety affect student success and retention.”

Color schemes and furnishings from the new building have been matched in the old one, and a covered corridor connecting the two facilities provides convenience for students.

As part of a holistic approach to health care that is part of the center’s patient-centered medical home accreditation, students are automatically screened for signs of depression. Those who score high are seen by a behavioral health specialist, while others with high blood pressure or weight issues are introduced to a dietitian or wellness and fitness staff.

As the size of the university’s student body has increased in recent years, the health center staff has grown accordingly and now includes 14 board-certified physicians, about a dozen nurse practitioners and physician’s assistants, and a similar number of registered nurses. The new center has 32 examination rooms for primary care visits, 12 rooms for women’s health and eight more for physical therapy and sports medicine. An optometry shop will open later in the academic year.

“At the full height of the fall and spring semesters, we see as many as 500 students per day,” Beck says, “and our colleagues at other universities tell us to expect a 25 percent increase in visits with the new building.”
Beck says she wants students to not only check out the new building but also stop by to meet a health care provider — each student is assigned to a physician, nurse practitioner or physician’s assistant.

“We want the students to trust us and for their parents to trust us,” she says. “For students who might be away from home for the first time, we want them to feel safe and welcome when they’re coming in for the first time.

“And we will work with their own home physician — send them notes after a visit here, and their physician can share information with us.”

The health center offers the same comprehensive services that any large family practice provides, Beck says, including casts for broken bones, stitches and treatment for asthma, colds, the flu and similar ailments. The center also has the advantage of an in-house X-ray lab and pharmacy. Operating hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 2-8 p.m. on Sundays.
What are you working on right now?

We just finished a survey of first-year experience programs. We used to do a survey of first-year seminars, but we had been talking for so long about the idea that the first-year experience is more than just a seminar, that we realized that we wanted to really put our research money where our scholarly practice mouth was, so to speak. So we reconceptualized our bread and butter survey and did it a different way for the first time since 1988. And we just got around to analyzing the results.

What are you hoping to discover?

There are a couple of things we wanted to learn about. We had been conducting surveys about the first-year seminar for over 25 years and had a pretty good sense of what respondents were telling us in those surveys. Based on what we had seen over the course of time, we expected to continue to see a greater proportion of colleges and universities offer academic-based seminars and a smaller percentage of those who offer extended orientation first-year seminars. So, while we reconceptualized the survey, we wanted to maintain the research agenda that has served the higher education community for so long. However, the first-year experience is only one way institutions support first-year student success. That was the primary impetus for reconceptualizing the survey. We wanted to understand, from a broader point of view, the collection of first-year support programs that colleges and universities across the U.S. were offering. Based on the limited information that was out there, from an empirical standpoint, we were open to learning what institutions might tell us. One thing we were really excited to learn was what first-year programs “showed up” together on campuses. For example, when institutions offer first-year leadership programs, what other first-year programs and initiatives did they also offer? This is a first step in understanding where opportunities for an integrated approach to the first-year experience might lie.

And is this going to help you with creating the new CAS standards?

Well, I think that the two will work hand in hand. We were approached by the Council for Advancement of Standards to write the frameworks for the Cross-Functional First-Year Experience because of all the research we had done over the years, and it was all...
about articulating what things we had determined to be successful markers of a program — best practices, if you will. It’s funny because we started this process last June, and I think we actually had the thing written by about this point last year, and so in the past year, it’s all been about edits. And they pilot-tested it this summer, and I’m anxious to find out how this pilot test went.

**How do you make sure that you’re going about your research in the best possible way?**

This is an interesting question, because it’s kind of a meta-question. In essence, you’re asking, “How do we make sure we gather knowledge about our knowledge-gathering activities?” There are a few ways we go about this. The first is to put our research out there into the intellectual marketplace. My colleagues at the center and I are consistently proposing our research for presentation at national and international conferences. This gives us feedback through the review process as well as with people who attend our presentations. People are very engaging and will freely share areas where the research resonates with them and where they see potential gaps in methods or reasoning. While we’re at these meetings, we have the chance to attend other sessions and learn from others about current conversations in higher education. We also learn about how to improve our work through peer review of our research reports and articles. Whether we submit a paper to an academic journal or we publish a research report, we go through peer review. This gives us the opportunity to hear from other scholars ways in which we have succeeded in or have fallen short of meeting standards of high-quality research. Finally, we look for opportunities to collaborate with other scholars in the field who help us to stave off too much insular thinking and who bring their own expertise to bear on a project. All of these processes are useful to us in making sure we are conducting meaningful research that can be trusted.
WHAT A VIEW!

Student Life distributed 15,000 pairs of eclipse glasses so that students, employees and visitors could safely view the total solar eclipse on Aug. 21, 2017. Columbia experienced the longest period of total darkness of any metropolitan area along the East Coast and was identified as one of the top places in the nation to watch the remarkable event.

5,874

The largest freshman class in university history — 5,874 students strong — enrolled at USC in fall 2017.

raising retention

The EAB Student Success Collaborative advising platform combines best practices from national research with USC’s own institutional data to identify and assist at-risk students. The platform allows for easy referrals to key campus offices that can offer targeted support to students. Since its launch, the Student Success Collaborative has contributed to a retention rate increase of 1 percent for all students and 2.9 percent for Pell Grant recipients.

one thousand

In May 2017, the 1,000th student to earn Graduation with Leadership Distinction crossed the commencement stage. Since its inception in 2014, 1,031 students have earned 1,091 instances of the university’s honor for integrative learning.

5IVE

Five division staff members earned Lean yellow belt and practitioner designations. These trained Lean practitioners — part of USC’s Lean Community of Practice — are using Lean Six Sigma tools to solve problems, streamline work processes and improve service to customers.
It Takes a Village

Construction is set to begin soon on Campus Village, the project that will transform 18 acres of USC’s south campus. The public-private partnership will create housing for 3,750 students, along with courtyards and green space, parking, dining and retail outlets that will enliven the area. The project is slated to open in three phases between 2020 and 2024.

Digital Domain

Undergraduate students interested in digital technology will have a new home on campus when USC launches the Rhodos Fellows Living and Learning Community in fall 2018. The community will help students cultivate relationships with peers and faculty and staff members and explore research projects, community service and leadership programs, and internship opportunities.

Following the Leaders

A pair of retirements at the associate vice president level is opening the door for new leadership in the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support. Jerry Brewer, formerly student life and development, and Gene Luna, formerly housing and student development, are retiring from their roles after a combined total of nearly 50 years of service to the university. In the first half of 2018, the division will hire outstanding professionals to fill those roles, as well as a brand new one: dean of students and deputy Title IX coordinator.
We make South Carolina stronger.

Caryn Ramelb is usually too busy in her roles as AFROTC wing commander, graduating senior and member of a national service sorority to think of her actions as groundbreaking. She says she’s just pursuing her dreams. But as she prepares to graduate, Caryn has also realized that encouraging other women to follow in her footsteps is just as important as blazing a trail.