



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
LANCASTER

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Town-Gown Council Informs University Initiatives

USC Lancaster wrapped up its 2021-22 Town-Gown Initiative prior to Commencement with support and direction from Town-Gown Council members. Lancaster leaders serving on the Council met four times over the past nine months to learn about the university's priorities and challenges, inform its initiatives, and build support for collaborations between the university and the city and county.

Membership in the Council consists of both university staff and faculty, and leaders in the Lancaster community. Council members from the past year are: Albert Blackmon, Kristen Blanchard, Courtney Catledge, Walter Collins, Stephen Criswell, Deborah Cureton, Susan DeVenny, Elizabeth Easley, Ramey Fesperman, Chris Gordon, Flip Hutfles, Debbie Jaillette, Todd Lekan, Charlene McGriff, Sharon Novinger, Suzanne Penuel, Jonathan Phipps, Mary Rathel, Stefanie Stacks, Elisabeth Streeter, Brittany Taylor-Driggers, Brenda Thompson, and Beverly Timmons. Many things were accomplished during the sessions this year.

At the first meeting in September, Dr. Todd Lekan, Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, solicited suggestions for ways the university could enhance community engagement through its programming at the new iCarolina Learning Lab. Several ideas were generated and will be implemented as the lab has now fully opened. Other discussions resulted in the well-attended, free personal finance boot camp held in the spring with similar future programming being planned. Prof. Albert Blackmon, USCL's Director of Corporate Partnership and Engagement, discussed other initiatives, particularly those the university is undertaking in Indian Land. Bridgett Plexico, Internship Coordinator, shared services such as internships that the university has implemented to better connect students with the workforce.

In November, Council members Sharon Novinger and Charlene McGriff highlighted the importance of grants to both the community and the university, particularly the Promise Neighborhood grant awarded to Lancaster in September 2021 by the Department of Education – one of only 7 communities nationwide to receive this grant. Regional Campus Dean Dr. Walter Collins invited input into the creation of a grant writer position at the university. This position has since been approved for the 2022-2023 school year. Dr. Collins added, "The input and feedback from the Town-Gown Council remains vital to the work of our campus. Enhanced campus and community relationships provide untold opportunities for our students, faculty, and staff."

At the February gathering, local leaders John McCain (Lancaster Chamber of Commerce), Flip Hutfles (Lancaster City Manager), and real estate developer John Kennedy gave council members a sense of Lancaster's innovation landscape, economic development, and downtown planning. Facilitator Beth Crews led participants through a series of interactive dialogues to explore trends and challenges surrounding innovation, growth and development.

Hierarchies and silos can obscure the contributions of innovators. During the final meeting of the academic year, Council members were challenged to consider these obstacles, and the opportunities that might also exist within the challenges. Working in groups, council members suggested ways they might effect change and enhance communication across systems. In this way, the work of the Town-Gown Council transcends hierarchies, reduces informational silos, and informs both the campus's strategic planning and its specific initiatives.

Those interested in supporting the university through the work of the Town-Gown Council should contact Dr. Collins's office at 803-313-7001.

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