

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION BTRU Board of Trustees		POLICY NUMBER BTRU 2.00
POLICY TITLE Commencement Exercises		
SCOPE OF POLICY USC System		DATE OF REVISION October 11, 2019 (New Policy)
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.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

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

University of South Carolina Mace: academic scepter that 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: ceremonies and events 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 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), The University of South Carolina 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 other academic ceremonies such as graduation cordings, hoodings, or other honorary events on the day of any official commencement ceremony 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.

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. System Commencement Committees

The System Commencement Committees oversee, coordinate, and establish standards for commencement exercises of the University of South Carolina on the respective campuses. The secretary of the Board of Trustees serves as chair of the system Commencement Committees.

B. Commencement Calendar

The University of South Carolina holds formal commencement exercises following final examinations for the fall and spring semesters at the Columbia campus and following final examinations at the end of the spring semester at the Comprehensive Universities and Regional Palmetto Colleges. The chair of the commencement committees informs the campus community of the official commencement dates for all campuses at least two years in advance.

C. Commencement Ceremonies

1. USC System

- a. Degree candidates/graduates march with their college/school in alphabetical order within their degree.
- b. In December of each year, the university will administer a Doctoral Hooding, and one Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercise. Candidates from the School of Law, the Schools of Medicine, the Comprehensive Universities and Regional Palmetto Colleges are invited to march with the Baccalaureate, Master’s and Professional Commencement Exercise.

2. Columbia Campus

At the end of each spring semester, 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.

3. Comprehensive Universities and Regional Palmetto Colleges

At the end of each spring semester, the comprehensive universities and regional Palmetto Colleges hold commencement exercises on their campuses for their degree candidates.

E. Standards for Commencement Exercises

- 1. The order of exercises, format and content of the commencement program, and processional for each USC campus are submitted to the chair of the system commencement committees for approval.
- 2. 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

APPENDIX 1: GUIDELINES FOR INVOCATION

The university is a public institution of learning with more than 50,000 students. 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.