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2023 Report from the Board Chair

January 17, 2024

To Members of the University of South Carolina System Community:

The University of South Carolina (“USC”) System and the USC flagship university in Columbia celebrated momentous accomplishments in 2023, and the USC Board of Trustees fulfilled its responsibilities to the University System and to residents of the State of South Carolina by sustaining a governance environment in which higher education and academic research continue to flourish.

The Board began 2023 with a sense of promise and excitement, as its members presided at [the ceremonial investiture of President Michael Amiridis](#), the 30th President of the University of South Carolina, during the morning of January 20. Later that afternoon, the Board convened for its annual retreat, with a focus on [President Amiridis’s strategic priorities for the next five years](#).

USC enjoyed unprecedented and positive momentum in interest among applicants and their families in 2023, as prospective freshmen demonstrated remarkable excitement about the student experience and educational offerings at the flagship university in Columbia. The number of applicants to USC for fall 2023 reached an all-time high (and applications for fall 2024 have already surpassed the total received for fall 2023).

The number of South Carolinians entering USC Columbia as freshmen in fall 2023 reached an all-time high as well. All 46 South Carolina counties are represented in this newest freshman class, which is [the largest in the University’s history](#) – with 7,316 first-time, full-time students. New transfer students, new Palmetto Pathway and Gamecock Gateway students, and new non-degree students added over 2,000 additional undergraduates to the total for fall 2023, bringing the total number of new students on campus to more than 9,300.

Undergraduate, graduate, and professional students enrolled at USC Columbia during the fall of 2023 totaled some 36,538 students, while enrollment across the USC System totaled 53,455. South Carolinians account for 65% of students across the USC System overall.

Meanwhile, the Board of Trustees continues to create policies, approve strategies, and prioritize financial budgets to support these robust enrollment numbers, ensuring that each USC System institution fulfills its missions of teaching, research, creative endeavor, and service to the public.

Other achievements recorded by the Board of Trustees during 2023 included the following:

- [Ratifying an annual budget for 2023-24](#) that – thanks to remarkable support from the Governor and General Assembly – freezes in-state tuition for the fifth consecutive year (the sixth consecutive year for USC campuses other than Columbia), incentivizes student internships, establishes a Brain Health Center, renovates teaching and learning spaces for the sciences, and secures additional funding for STEM fields and the schools of Law and Medicine.
- [Approving a budget request for 2024-25](#) that prioritizes access and affordability for students and their families, along with the research capacity of the University and the health of South Carolinians.
- Conferring approximately 12,522 undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees and 422 certificates across the University System during graduation ceremonies in [April](#), [May](#), and [December](#), through authority delegated by the Board to the President and Chancellors.
- [Adopting the core principles of the “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression,” commonly known as “The Chicago Principles,”](#) established at the University of Chicago in 2014 in support of free speech on college and university campuses.
- [Creating a new articulation agreement with the S.C. Technical College System](#), to develop seamless pathways for students from any of the state’s 16 technical schools to a four-year degree at USC Columbia.
- [Supporting the new admissions practices](#) adopted by USC Columbia to guarantee acceptance to the top 10 percent of high school graduates in the state – and by USC Aiken, USC Beaufort, and USC Upstate to guarantee acceptance to the top 20 percent of high school graduates in the state.

- [Applauding the creation of the USC Commitment](#), a new merit-based award program, which will pay tuition and academic fees remaining after state scholarships and grants at any USC System institution, for in-state students who meet income requirements and who graduate in the top 10 percent of their respective high schools, beginning in fall 2024.
- [Establishing the First Generation Center](#), which will be housed in Maxcy College when it opens in fall 2024 and which will provide advising, mentoring, and other support services for USC Columbia’s growing population of students who are the first in their families to attend college.
- [Congratulating USC and its state-level partners from public and private enterprise in the Nexus for Advanced Resilient Energy \(SC Nexus\)](#) on being designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce as one of 31 Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs – which will enable development of new technologies and new jobs in South Carolina.
- [Dedicating the first building on our Columbia campus that is named in memory of an African American](#): Celia Dial Saxon, one of the most significant educators in the history of the state.
- [Marking the 60th anniversary of the desegregation of the University of South Carolina](#) by breaking ground at a site overlooking the historic Horseshoe, where a breathtaking monument will memorialize Robert G. Anderson, James L. Solomon Jr., and Henrie Monteith Treadwell, who enrolled at USC on September 11, 1963.
- [Reviewing and approving the first design renderings for USC Columbia’s new, state-of-the-art, \\$300-million School of Medicine and Health Sciences Campus](#), where the first building is expected to be completed by 2027, thanks to the generous support of the Governor and General Assembly.
- [Cutting the ceremonial ribbon at the Campus Village residential complex in Columbia](#), which – after finishing on time and on budget – became the largest construction project completed in the history of the University.
- [Approving a \\$30-million donation from Joe Rice and his family to name the University of South Carolina Joseph F. Rice School of Law](#) and to bolster scholarships, academic programs, and career support for the school’s students.

- [Approving a gift from Jane and Tommy Suggs to name the Betsy Blackmon Dance Program in memory of their daughter](#), to support excellence and create a unique experience for students participating in the program.
- [Approving three new undergraduate certificate programs at USC Columbia](#) – in Data Analytics and Visualization, Project Leadership and Management, and Strategic Thinking and Communications – demonstrating the University’s laser focus on students’ employability in high-demand fields and bringing the total number of undergraduate certificates offered by USC Columbia to four.
- [Awarding Carolina Trustee Professorships](#) from funds donated by Trustees to recognize teaching excellence among three distinguished members of the USC System faculty: Dr. John M. Grady, Professor of Sport and Entertainment Management in the College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management at USC Columbia; Dr. Angela D. Liese, Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics in the Arnold School of Public Health at USC Columbia; and Dr. P. Ellen Malphrus, Professor of English at USC Beaufort.
- Implementing a new process for the annual evaluation of President Amiridis that will include monitoring [goals, targets, and metrics for institutional improvement](#).
- Evaluating the Board’s own effectiveness by [implementing a self-assessment tool devised by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges](#).
- Receiving strategic-planning updates from the Chancellors of Palmetto College, USC Aiken, USC Beaufort, and USC Upstate, so that the Board is prepared to track the progress of each of these USC System institutions.
- Adopting a resolution celebrating our state and University’s unwavering commitment to the men and women who have served our nation in honor of Veterans Day 2023, [in keeping with the culture at USC Columbia that has been ranked nationally by the *Military Times* as especially supportive of veterans](#).
- [Condemning the October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel](#), while reminding University stakeholders of the value of all human lives.
- [Welcoming to the Board of Trustees](#) Henry “Hank” L. Jolly Jr. (7th Judicial Circuit), Reid T. Sherard (13th Judicial Circuit), and State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver – and providing a robust, improved orientation for these three new Trustees, pursuant to a new Board practice.

Finally, the Board completed an ambitious plan to review (and revise, as necessary) all of its Bylaws and policies. Combined with revamped orientation programs for new Trustees, continuing education for all Trustees, and access to Trustee development programs offered by national organizations, the Board ensures that its members are prepared to exercise their fiduciary duties in support of the USC System and in furtherance of the livelihoods of South Carolina households.

The USC Board of Trustees looks forward to a prosperous 2024. With the support of alumni and stakeholders, the University of South Carolina will extend its history of access, excellence, and relevance.

Forever To Thee,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thad H. Westbrook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thad H. Westbrook
Board Chair