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Executive Director

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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Mr. Dalton B. Floyd, Jr., Chairman, and Members,  
Commission on Higher Education

**From:** Ms. Dianne Chinnes, Chairman, *DC*  
Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

**Annual Evaluation of Associate Degree Programs**  
**FY 1999-2000**

**Background**

The South Carolina 1979 Master Plan requires the annual review of associate degrees in the State's public higher education institutions. In 1996, the passage of Act 359 underscored the importance of program accountability by focusing on questions related to time to degree and graduates' first-time passing rates on professional licensure examinations. The purposes of this annual review remained unchanged by Act 359. Those purposes have been and remain 1) to insure that programs which are continued demonstrate responsiveness to employment trends and meet minimum standards of enrollment, graduation, and placement; and 2) to identify programs which need to be strengthened.

The procedures for this review require each program's productivity to be evaluated in terms of enrollment, number of graduates, and percent of graduates placed in a related job or continuing their studies full-time. The following criteria apply:

1. Each program must produce at least six graduates during the evaluation year or an average of at least six graduates over the most recent three-year period.
2. At the most recent fall term, each program must enroll at least 16 students who generate 12 full-time equivalents.

3. At least 50 percent of the graduates available for job placement must be placed in a job related to their education or continue their education on a full-time basis.

Programs which fail to meet the above criteria must be canceled, suspended, or put on probation unless their continuation is justified to the Commission. Justification for programs may take into consideration such factors as manpower requirements, funding, and employment "stop outs" of students. In addition, three programs—General Technology, Vocational Technical Education, and General Engineering Technology—have historically had different and much more flexible standards of evaluation, because of the unique needs they have filled and the low enrollments which they were expected to produce.

When a program is placed on probation, the institution may continue to offer the program but must provide a plan for the program to meet all criteria within three years. Suspension means that the program's inability to meet the minimum criteria is serious enough to discontinue temporarily the enrollment of new students in the program until the institution can study the need and demand for the program.

Programs such as General Technology, Vocational Technical Education, and General Engineering Technology have historically been considered "justified" for continuation regardless of whether they met the evaluation requirements. The Commission decided in 1996 to discontinue exceptions to the three-year probationary period for any but the handful of "exceptional programs" referred to above.

### **Distribution of Associate Degree Programs by System and Sector**

Associate degree programs exist in all the technical colleges, all the two-year regional branches of the University of South Carolina, and all three of the four-year campuses of the University of South Carolina. The programs were evaluated using Fall 1999 enrollment data and academic year 1998-1999 graduation and employment data. For this reporting period, eight associate degree programs in the two-year USC campuses, three associate degree programs in the four-year USC campuses, and 301 associate degree programs in the technical college system were evaluated. The three associate degree programs offered by the three four-year campuses of the University are: 1) the associate degree in Nursing (USC-Aiken); 2) the associate degree in Nursing (USC-Spartanburg); and 3) the Associate in Arts degree (USC-Columbia at Fort Jackson.) These are discussed in greater detail in the section on the USC system's associate degree programs.

New associate degree programs (i.e., those implemented within the past three years) have been excluded from this analysis. No new associate degree programs have been added at any of the USC two-year campuses or four-year campuses in the past three years.

## General Analysis of the Programs of Study in the USC System

### *The AA/AS Degree Program at USC Two-year Regional Campuses and at USC-Columbia*

All of the five two-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina, as well as USC-Columbia at Fort Jackson, offer the Associate of Arts/Associate of Science degree programs. In February 1998, in response to the requirements of Act 359 and to earlier concerns about the perceived inappropriateness of the State's flagship institution offering two-year degrees, USC-Columbia proposed a revision of its mission statement so that explicit recognition of its offering of an Associate of Arts degree at Fort Jackson would be included in its mission. The Commission's acceptance of this revision has now made the offering of this associate degree by USC-Columbia an official part of the institution's mission.

Each of the AA/AS programs at these campuses is enrolling and graduating students in satisfactory numbers. The total number of degree completers in these programs decreased in 1999 over the previous year by 3% for the system (from 431 to 421). This downward fluctuation is within a normal year-to-year variation. Only two institutional campuses noted decreases of graduates. The figures for each campus are recorded below:

#### USC-System AA/AS Program Graduates

	1998	1999
USC-Columbia	17	17
USC-Beaufort	75	61
USC-Lancaster	56	72
USC-Salkehatchie	89	94
USC-Sumter	155	156
USC-Union	39	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>421</b>

Because the two-year regional campuses all have a mission to promote transfer, and because of the importance which Act 359 has placed on timely degree completion, it will continue to be important for the University's two-year regional campuses to maximize the numbers of students graduating with an AA/AS degree.

#### *Applied, Occupationally-Specific Two-Year Degrees in the USC System*

Two-year degrees which are occupationally-specific are offered at two of the four-year campuses of the USC system (i.e., Aiken and Spartanburg). Only one of the five two-year regional campuses (i.e., Lancaster) offers occupationally-specific degree programs, although legislation does not prohibit the offering of these kinds of degrees at the other four two-year regional campuses. In order to comply with Act 359 which appears to limit the offering of two-year programs to two-year campuses, during academic year 1997-1998 the mission statements

of USC-Aiken and USC-Spartanburg were revised by the USC Board of Trustees and approved by the CHE to permit the continued offering of the two-year nursing program at both these institutions.

The occupational programs at Lancaster are nursing, criminal justice, and business. In 1993 the Commission recommended a merger of two underperforming business-related programs at USC-Lancaster. Following that merger in 1995, the combined business program has always met the criteria for "good" for both enrollments and graduation rates. The data for this report shows that the combined business program is at its healthiest point ever in both enrollments and graduation rates. Graduates from the occupationally specific two-year programs at USC-Lancaster, USC-Aiken, and USC-Spartanburg are listed below for 1999.

**USC System Graduates of Two-Year Occupationally-Specific Programs of Study  
(1999)**

	<b>Nursing</b>	<b>Criminal Justice</b>	<b>Business</b>
USC-Aiken	64	7*	---
USC-Lancaster	6	15	13
USC-Spartanburg	52	---	---

\*Final class of graduates. Program discontinued May 1999.

The recommendation in 1993 by the Commission to transfer the Criminal Justice associate degree program at USC-Aiken be transferred to Aiken Technical College was acted upon, when, in 1996, Aiken Technical College proposed and the Commission approved in 1997 a new associate degree program in Criminal Justice at Aiken Technical College. In a supportive letter for the Aiken Tech proposal, USC-Aiken pledged to phase out its own associate degree in Criminal Justice. Accordingly, USC-Aiken discontinued admission of new students into its program in Fall 1997 and officially closed the program after May 1999 graduation.

Summary

The graduation numbers and student enrollment data for the current review period show that all the two-year programs in the USC system (AA/AS and occupational programs) are now meeting the productivity requirements for two-year programs. The two-year programs of nursing at USC-Aiken and USC-Spartanburg are producing relatively high numbers of graduates. The three occupational programs at USC-Lancaster are producing small, but acceptable, numbers of graduates, which reflect the relatively small population base of the area served by the Lancaster campus. Given the state's needs for increased numbers of Registered Nurses, the very small number of students graduating from the USC-Lancaster program should be examined.

## General Analysis of Associate Degree Programs in the Technical Colleges

A summary of the number of programs evaluated over the past sixteen years in various categories at the technical colleges is found in **Table 1** of this report. Overall, for this reporting year 31 programs of study (out of a total of 301 which were analyzed) at the technical colleges are on probation during the current reporting period. Of these, 20 are in the first year of probation; nine are in the second year of probation; and two are in the third year of probation. (By comparison, last year's report showed a total of 18 on probation; and the previous year 29 were on probation.) For this reporting year, the programs on probation and the number of years they have been on probation can be found in **Table 2**.

### *Engineering Technologies*

Historically and again this year, a large number of the programs on probation (15 of a total of 31) are found in the program clusters of the Engineering Technologies. Smaller numbers of programs on probation are to be found in Business (n=6), the Industrial Technologies (n=6), and a few other curricula (n=4.) The long-standing continuation of the pattern of overrepresentation of engineering technology programs on probation for lack of enrollments and/or graduations is a phenomenon which can be addressed positively, if two factors can be realized:

- Initiatives continue for consolidation of similar engineering technology programs at certain institutions, and
- A statewide plan to increase the numbers of minorities and women to be recruited into, retained in, and graduated from engineering technology programs is implemented.

Midlands Technical College has provided an example of a successful program consolidation of two underperforming degree majors in the engineering technology field into a broader degree program. The South Carolina Advanced Technology Education (SC ATE) project, located at the SBTCE offices and funded through an NSF grant, has developed a statewide plan. The SC ATE has a marketing concept underway. It also has developed novel curricular plans for both pre-engineering tech and first-year engineering tech students. It has funded these ideas in several of the sixteen technical colleges. It has included the idea that more minorities and more women should be included in these programs. In addition, SC STATE has prepared a monograph (June 2000) in which it is stated that more study of the issues and additional research of attitudes and perceptions of various publics needs to take place.

### **Continuing Success of the AA/AS Programs in the Technical Colleges**

The AA/AS is the college transfer degree program in the public two-year institutions. Its principal reason for being is to prepare students in the first two years of coursework for transfer to complete a four-year baccalaureate degree program. In 1998, for the first time, the AA/AS program at nine South Carolina technical colleges became eligible to be reviewed for productivity. These AA/AS programs were those which had been approved by the Commission

in 1989. In 1998's report, 15 of 16 of the technical colleges' AA/AS programs (including 8 of the 9 new ones) were in the "good" category with respect to enrollments, graduates, and placements. Last year and this year, all of the 16 are in the "good" category.

The increased enrollment and graduation success of these AA/AS programs, their ability to create access to higher education, their potential for increasing upper-division enrollments in South Carolina's public four-year institutions, and their low cost to students and the State underscore the importance of assuring their continuation. Because these programs hold the promise of low-cost access to higher education for those who historically have been underrepresented, students need to be assured by the technical colleges offering the AA/AS that appropriate course offerings and scheduling will be available so the promise of access becomes a reality and so that they can minimize the time between enrollment and transfer to a four-year institution

Distance education modes for providing multiple scheduling opportunities are increasingly important for addressing the needs of growing numbers of AA/AS seeking students for coursework on a timely basis. It is gratifying, therefore, that several technical colleges have embarked upon increasing numbers of distance education coursework that is part of the AA/AS degree for reaching students. At present, two technical colleges, Florence-Darlington Technical College and Piedmont Technical College, are offering the entire Associate in Arts program through the Southern Regional Electronic Campus.

The "MRR" (Mission Resource Requirement) provides reimbursement to two-year colleges at lower cost to the state for the offering of lower-division coursework than it does to four-year institutions. Likewise, tuition at two-year institutions is lower than at four-year institutions. Thus, for increased access to lower-division higher education coursework at the most economical price, it is important to South Carolina that both types of two-year colleges (i.e., the technical colleges and the two-year branches of the University of South Carolina) intensify their efforts to have appropriately classified AA/AS students complete as much of their transfer work as possible at a two-year institution, before they transfer to a four-year institution. In the effort to promote increased course offerings at public two-year institutions, performance funding appears to have made a positive difference. As a result of the Performance Funding audits the following two decisions have been made:

- The technical college system is committed to working toward offering all coursework for all the statewide approved Transfer Blocks through distance education available for delivery at all technical colleges by academic year 2001-2002.
- The University of South Carolina's five two-year branches have committed to offer all coursework on all the Transfer Blocks within a year, even though the statewide policy in this regard was not intended to apply to the two-year institutions.

The use of distance education to expand course offerings should contribute positively to promoting the completion of the AA/AS degree and broadening access to undergraduate higher education to as many South Carolinians as can benefit from it.

### **The Dilemma of the Associate Degree Nursing Programs**

As the State newspaper reported on page A-1 of August 27, 2000, all of South Carolina is experiencing a nursing shortage. The numbers of employed Registered Nurses in South Carolina has risen about 5% each year for each of the past 10 years. In the early 1990s the Budget and Control Board's Office of Research and Statistics had developed a predictive model of supply and demand, which showed that there would be approximately an oversupply of 20% of Registered Nurses by the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. That predictive model was built upon a set of assumptions that foresaw a large penetration of managed care in South Carolina. When much of the managed care failed to materialize, the gap between the supply of nurses and the demand for them grew wider than it had been before.

Now, South Carolina is faced with a dilemma of some major proportions. On the one hand, the need for new Registered Nurses appears great. On the other hand, significant numbers of the leadership of the nursing profession have proposed that in the face of the nursing shortage the current numbers of students in associate degree nursing programs be stabilized and the baccalaureate programs should be expanded in the numbers of students they prepare.

Both the associate and the baccalaureate programs prepare students to take the same licensure examination for the same licensure, i.e., Registered Nurse. The Colleagues in Caring project, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and funded in part by a number of state agencies including the Commission on Higher Education and the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education, has called for the implementation by employers of a concept known as "differential practice" which would assign significantly different roles in the practice setting to Registered Nurses who are baccalaureate-prepared from those who are associate degree-prepared. (Presumably, differences in remuneration would accompany the differential in scope of practice, too.) While recognizing that the baccalaureate degree programs are more expensive to the state and students and less timely for meeting employers' needs for R.N.s, the position of the BSN-prepared professional nursing community is that these costs are worth the effort, since they believe that the nursing profession of the future will require baccalaureate-prepared graduates who are more deeply prepared than associate degree graduates, especially in two of the nursing content areas (community health and leadership) and who are more broadly prepared than associate degree graduates in content outside nursing dealing with cultural sensitivity and critical thinking. The state, the Commission on Higher Education, the two and four-year institutions, and the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education need to be aware of these tensions within the nursing profession.

### **Degree Programs No Longer on Probation**

For the current reporting year, a total of seven programs which had been on probation in the technical colleges for last year's reporting period are in good standing for the current (i.e., 1999) reporting period. These programs are:

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Aiken Tech	AET	Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology
Central Carolina Tech	ABUS	Marketing
Midlands Tech	HEA	Medical Laboratory Technology
Piedmont Tech	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Spartanburg Tech	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Tech Coll of Lowcountry	COM	Computer Technology
Trident Tech	AIT	Aircraft Maintenance Technology

### **Tabular Analysis of Associate Degree Programs in the Technical Colleges**

The following tables provide a succinct quantitative analysis of the programs of the technical colleges for this period.

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Table 1

**Sixteen Year Summary**  
**Annual Associate Degree Program Evaluation**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Good Standing</u>	<u>On Probation</u>	<u>Under Suspension</u>	<u>Cancelled</u>	<u>Total Evaluated</u>
1983	198	30	10	12	250
1984	206	33	2	9	250
1985	214	16	17	9	256
1986	212	30	11	9	262
1987	216	29	11	6	262
1988	204	44	15	4	267
1989	215	41	13	5	274
1990	254	44	12	8	318
1991	244	46	6	10	306
1992	251	36	11	4	302
1993	247	36	16	1	300
1994	260	31	16	5	312
1995	275	35	5	5	320
1996	267	25	14	6	312
1997	262	29	11	6	308
1998	270	18	9	7	304
1999	261	31	7	2	301

Table 2

**Associate Degree Programs on Probation  
(Or Remaining on Probation 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Years)  
in Fall 1999**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Aiken Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Aiken Technical College	AET	Nuclear Engineering Technology (2)
Aiken Technical College	AIT	Machine Tool Technology (1)
Central Carolina Tech	AET	Civil Engineering Technology (2)
Denmark Tech	AIT	Electronics Technology (1)
Florence Darlington Tech	AIT	Automotive Technology (1)
Greenville Tech	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Greenville Tech	ABUS	Materials Management (1)
Greenville Tech	AET	Arch. Engineering Technology (1)
Greenville Tech	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (1)
Greenville Tech	AET	Construction Eng. Technology (2)
Greenville Tech	AET	Hazardous Materials Technology (2)
Greenville Tech	ABUS	Management (1)
Greenville Tech	AIT	Industrial Electronics Technology (2)
Horry-Georgetown Tech	AIT	Machine Tool Technology (1)
Midlands Tech	AHS	Court Reporting (1)
Midlands Tech	AET	Engineering Graphics Technology (2)
Midlands Tech	AET	Arch. Engineering Technology (1)
Midlands Tech	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (1)
Orangeburg Calhoun Tech	AET	Engineering Graphics Technology (1)
Orangeburg Calhoun Tech	AET	Electronics Engineering Technology (2)
Orangeburg Calhoun Tech	AET	Electronic Instrument. Technology (1)
Orangeburg Calhoun Tech	AHS	Medical Laboratory Technology (1)
Spartanburg Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (2)
Spartanburg Technical College	AET	Engineering Graphics Technology (1)
Spartanburg Technical College	AET	Mechanical Eng. Technology (3)
Spartanburg Technical College	AIT	Heat, Vent, AC (1)
Spartanburg Technical College	APS	[Deaf] Interpreting (2)
Tech College of the Lowcountry	AIT	Building Construction Technology (1)
Trident Technical College	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (3)
Williamsburg Technical College	ABUS	Office Systems Technology (1)

**Table 3**

**Associate Degree Programs To Be Suspended  
(or Continued for 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Suspension) in Fall 1999**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Florence-Darlington Tech	AIT	Automotive Technology (2)
Midlands Technical College	ABUS	Banking and Finance (3)
Midlands Technical College	AIT	Electronics Technology (3)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AGR	Forest Products Technology (2)
Tri-County Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (3)
Trident Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (3)
Trident Technical College	AET	Chemical Engineering Technology (3)

**Table 4**

**Associate Degrees Cancelled In Fall 1999**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
York Technical College	AET	Civil Engineering Technology
Chesterfield Marlboro Tech	ABUS	Accounting

**Summary**

All 11 of the associate degree programs in the University of South Carolina system and 261 (86.7 percent) of the 301 technical college programs evaluated for this report meet the "good" status requirements for this reporting year.

The large and continuing numbers of students enrolled in and a growing number graduating from the AA/AS transfer programs at the technical colleges demonstrate their indispensability as a point of access for public higher education. Likewise, all the AA/AS programs at the two-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina are in good standing.

**Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the Commission approve this report's designation of programs for the current reporting year (Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4).

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