SOUTH CAROLINA

**Commission on
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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, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of Annual Evaluation of Associate Degree Programs
FY 2000-2001

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. A program may remain on suspension for three years.

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 2000 enrollment data and academic year 1999-2000 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 306 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) in the Technical College system 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 increased in 2000 over the previous year by 11.4% for the system (from 421 to 469). This fluctuation reverses a decline—a normal variation--from the report issued last year. This year's reported data show that three of the AA/AS programs offered by institutions within the University of South Carolina system (i.e., those at USC-Columbia [at Fort Jackson],USC-Sumter, and USC-Salkehatchie) have experienced decreases of graduates. The figures for each campus are recorded below:

USC-System AA/AS Program Graduates

	1999	2000
USC-Columbia	17	12
USC-Beaufort	61	87
USC-Lancaster	72	74
USC-Salkehatchie	94	93
USC-Sumter	157	152
USC-Union	21	51
TOTAL	**421**	**469**

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. More importantly, it will be crucial to the development of the state to make sure the graduates of these AA/AS programs continue their college work at least through the successful completion of a B.A. or B.S. degree program, given the very low percentage (16% according to the Federal Census of 1990) of baccalaureate degree holders in the state's adult population.

Occupationally specific associate degrees 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 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 2000.

USC System Graduates of Two-Year Occupationally-Specific Programs of Study (2000)

	Nursing	Criminal Justice	Business
USC-Aiken	43	*	---
USC-Lancaster	61	9	20
USC-Spartanburg	11	---	---

*USC Aiken ceased to enroll students in its associate degree program in Criminal Justice 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 fewer graduates than in the past, but continue to produce a significant number. The three occupational programs at USC-Lancaster are producing small, but acceptable, numbers of graduates. In part, these small numbers reflect a relatively small population base in the area served by the Lancaster campus.

It is noteworthy that the state is currently undergoing a shortage of Registered Nurses. This shortage is growing. Yet, the total number of graduates of the associate degree nursing programs in the three USC system institutions with these programs has declined from 122 in 1999 to 115 in 2000. Given the state's needs for increased numbers of Registered Nurses, the small number of students graduating from these three two-year nursing programs in the USC system is not a helpful sign for South Carolina to close the gap between supply and demand for RNs. These three programs should be given every encouragement to enroll and graduate significantly more associate degree nursing students than they have done in the past several years.

General Analysis of Associate Degree Programs in the Technical Colleges

A summary of the number of programs evaluated over the past eighteen years in various categories at the technical colleges is found in **Table 1** of this report. Overall, for this reporting year 30 programs of study (out of a total of 306 which were analyzed) at the technical colleges are on probation during the current reporting period. Of these, nine are in the first year of probation; 12 are in the second year of probation; and nine are in the third year of probation. (By comparison, last year's report showed a total of 31 on probation; and the previous year 18 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 (13 of a total of 30) are found in the program clusters of the Engineering Technologies. Smaller numbers of programs on probation are to be found in Health (n=7), Industrial Technologies (n=6), Business (n=2), and one each in two other areas (i.e., Interpreting for the Deaf and one AA/AS program.) This year's report continues the long-standing continuation of the pattern of overrepresentation of engineering technology programs on probation for lack of enrollments and/or graduations. This is a problem which can be overcome, 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 ATE 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 sole reason for being is to prepare students in the first two years of coursework for transfer to complete a four-year baccalaureate degree program. Programs in the AA/AS area were begun in the 1970s as a response to meeting the needs of persons from groups which for reasons of finance, geography, and/or historical underrepresentation in higher education (especially older women and African-Americans) found it much more possible to begin a baccalaureate degree program by taking the first two years of coursework at a technical college. In 1989, all sixteen technical colleges were finally approved by the Commission on Higher Education to offer the AA/AS degree. In 1998, for the first time, the nine technical colleges with the most recently approved AA/AS programs had their programs reviewed for productivity. 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. In 1999 and 2000, all 16 of the AA/AS programs were in the "good" category. This year, again, one of the sixteen (i.e., Florence-Darlington Technical College) has been placed in the probationary column, because of the institution's inability to supply data to show where the graduates have been placed.

The increased enrollment and graduation successes of the 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 are in their second year of programming to increase numbers through distance education coursework in the AA/AS degree. 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 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 Importance of the Associate Degree Nursing Programs

As stated in this report last year and in the statewide review of the baccalaureate and graduate programs in nursing which the Commission issued in 2001, the nursing profession continues to face what it has been exploring as a central question for some time: What degree should be entry-level for becoming a Registered Nurse (i.e., RN)? This continued questioning results from the fact that since the 1950's a person may become a RN either as a graduate of a two-year Associate Degree in Nursing or as a graduate of a four-year generic Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing. While institutions offering these two degrees have understandably different perspectives on this issue, the marketplace traditionally and historically has made no appreciable distinction between Registered Nurses with associate degrees and those with generic Bachelor of Science degrees in Nursing.

In the USC section of this report, South Carolina—like the rest of the country—is shown to be facing a growing shortage of nurses. Multiple reasons for this shortage are discussed in prior reports of the Commission and underlie the two agenda items previously considered (Agenda items 2 and 3.) The shortage makes it imperative that there be an efficient production of associate degree nurses to close the large and growing gap between supply and demand of entry-level RNs.

As is true of the USC system's three associate degree programs in nursing, data from the technical colleges' eleven associate degree programs demonstrate that these programs have not kept pace in enrollments or in number of graduates with the increased need for Registered Nurses. In 1999, the Technical College System's eleven associate degree programs graduated 699 nursing students. In 2000, they graduated 580, a decline of 119 associate degree nursing graduates over the previous year. (The USC section of this report shows a decline of seven graduates for the same time period.) While the South Carolina Colleagues in Caring report recommends that the numbers of associate degree graduates remain stable and the number of baccalaureate graduates increase, the decline in the number of associate degree graduates makes this a moot point, especially in light of the gap between falling supply of and rising demand for Registered Nurses. Until that gap can be addressed, the Technical College System should be given strong encouragement to increase enrolled nursing students and graduates in each of its associate degree programs.

Degree Programs No Longer on Probation

For the current reporting year, a total of nine 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:

College	Degree	Program
Aiken Tech	ABUS	Marketing
Central Carolina	ENG	Civil Engineering Technology
Denmark Tech	IND	Electronics Technology
Greenville Tech	ABUS	Management
Greenville Tech	ABUS	Marketing
Greenville Tech	ENG	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Greenville Tech	BUS	Office Systems Technology
Trident Tech	ENG	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Williamsburg Tech	ABUS	Office Systems 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.

Table 1
Eighteen Year Summary
Annual Associate Degree Program Evaluation

Year Evaluated	Good Standing	On Probation	Under Suspension	Cancelled	Total
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
2000	**264**	**30**	**7**	**5**	**306**

Table 2
Associate Degree Programs on Probation
(Or Remaining on Probation 2nd or 3rd Years) in Fall 2000

College	Degree	Program
Aiken Tech	ENGR	Electro-Mechanical Technology(1)
Aiken Tech	ENGR	Nuclear Engr Technology (3)
Aiken Tech	IND	Machine Tool Technology (2)
Central Carolina Tech	ENGR	Engr Graphics Technology (1)
Florence-Darlington Tech	AA/AS	Associate in Arts/Science (1)
Florence-Darlington Tech	HEA	Health Information Management (1)
Florence-Darlington Tech	IND	Automotive Technology (2)
Greenville Tech	ENGR	Arch Engr Technology (2)
Greenville Tech	ENGR	Construction Engr Technology (3)
Greenville Tech	IND	Industrial Electronics Technology (3)
Greenville Tech	ENGR	Hazardous Materials Technology (3)
Horry-Georgetown Tech	IND	Machine Tool Technology (2)
Midlands Tech	HEA	Health Information Management (1)
Midlands Tech	HEA	Pharmacy Technology (1)
Midlands Tech	HEA	Physical Therapy Assistant (1)
Midlands Tech	ABUS	Court Reporting (2)
Midlands Tech	ENGR	Arch Engr Technology (2)
Midlands Tech	ENGR	Engr GraphicsTechnology(3)
Midlands Tech	ENGR	Mechanical Engr Technology (2)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	HEA	Medical Laboratory Technology (2)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	ENGR	Electronics Engr Technology (3)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	ENGR	Engr Graphics Technology (2)
Spartanburg Tech	ENGR	Engr Graphics Technology (2)
Spartanburg Tech	ENGR	Civil Engr Technology (1)
Spartanburg Tech	ABUS	Marketing (3)
Spartanburg Tech	PSER	Interpreting (3)
Spartanburg Tech	IND	Heat, Vent, AC (2)
Tech College of Lowcountry	IND	Building Construction Technology (2)
Trident Tech	HEA	Medical Laboratory Technology (1)
Trident Tech	HEA	Occupational Therapy Assistant (1)

Table 3

Associate Degree Programs To Be Suspended
(or Continued for 2nd or 3rd Year Suspension) in Fall 2000

College	Degree	Program
Florence-Darlington Tech	IND	Aircraft Maintenance Technology (3)
Horry-Georgetown Tech	IND	Heating, Ventilation, AC (1)
Horry-Georgetown Tech	ENGR	Electronics Engineering Technology (1)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AGR	Forest Products Technology (3)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	ENGR	Electronic Instrumentation Technology (1)
Spartanburg Tech	ENGR	Textile Management Technology (1)
Trident Tech	ENGR	Chemical Engineering Technology (3)

Table 4

Associate Degrees Cancelled In Fall 2000

College	Degree	Program
Midlands Tech	ABUS	Banking and Finance
Midlands Tech	IND	Electronics Technology
Tri-County Tech	ABUS	Marketing
Trident Tech	ABUS	Marketing
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	ENGR	Mechanical Engineering Technology

Summary

All 11 of the associate degree programs in the University of South Carolina system and 264 (86.3 percent) of the 306 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.

Recommendation

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