Welcome to the Spring 2015 semester! I hope you got some much deserved rest and time with friends and family over the break and are ready for the new semester. Personally, Michael and I succumbed to some of the illnesses sweeping through our community and spent most of our holiday convalescing...but, our son took a break from his doctoral studies in France, and once we were beyond being contagious, we enjoyed spending some extended time together as a family here in Aiken.

At the end of each semester I write a report on the accomplishments of the University, so, during the break I've reflected much on the fall semester. In my estimation, it was a very successful semester. We've made measurable progress on our Forward Together Plan, our enrollment is up, we designed a salary adjustment plan that will help us begin to address out of alignment salaries, we received additional recognition for our focus on Veteran and Military students, we built several new partnerships, we co-hosted another highly successful Oktoberfest in downtown Aiken, we were highly ranked (#1 out of 600+ universities across 12 states) by US News & World Report, several programs received positive accreditation reviews and two of our online programs (Educational Technology and Nursing) were ranked nationally, and we are implementing several meaningful partnerships with our community and state. This is pretty impressive when you stop to remember that we’re only halfway through the academic year! I’m confident that more great things are in store for us in the coming months.

This won’t necessarily be an easy semester. Many can feel the sands shifting as local boards, legislators, the Department of Education, and some national pundits continue to “take aim” at public higher education by criticizing everything from tuition increases, to faculty loads, and “wasteful spending!” Still, experience has taught me that if we work earnestly and tirelessly on the institutional mission, we will fair well.

As we jump into the Spring 2015 semester, we want to redouble our efforts on what is most important: educating our students, serving our community and region, and building upon existing knowledge. Just as important to each of us, is our ability to work collaboratively to sustain a campus culture that focuses on student achievement, nurtures individuals, and creates opportunities for collegial dialogue and intellectual discovery.

Once again I will be hosting opportunities for us to engage in informal discussions. Please watch for announcements of those events and plan to attend. Meanwhile, best wishes for a fruitful and fulfilling spring semester!!

Sincerely,

Sandra J. Jordan
During the FY2014-15 budget planning process, the University employed additional steps to increase understanding and transparency. These additional steps received positive feedback and will again be utilized for 2015-16 planning. The Chancellor and Cabinet of USC Aiken aim to promote enhanced understanding of budgetary decisions and wanted to provide the overview of the process below. As you will see the 2015-16 planning process is well underway: The adoption of the USC Aiken budget is a result of the convergence between the State budget process, the USC System budget process and the USC Aiken budget process. The USC Aiken budget process begins with the University’s strategic plan and continues with departmental reviews of annual performance. Based on the annual departmental reviews as well as new departmental and institutional strategic initiatives, budget requests were solicited in November 2014 from the campus using the TRACDAT system. All submitted requests have been synthesized and are in the process of being reviewed and prioritized by each member of the Chancellor’s Cabinet. In March 2015 (tentatively) the prioritized list of all requests will be shared with the campus via a Campus Budget Forum. Feedback from the Campus Budget Forum and input from the Campus Budget and Planning Committee in FY15 will then be used to develop a final priority of requests. From now through June 2015, as the State budget process develops, USC Aiken will gain a better sense of new appropriations as well as mandated new expenditures (compensation changes, retirement increases, health increases, etc.) Additionally, as the USC System budget progresses with the State budget process, USC Aiken will gain a sense of the tuition increase, additional tuition revenue, as well as additional USC System mandated expenses. With each change in the State and USC System budget process (which likely will occur well into the month of June) USC Aiken will update models and reassess resources likely to be available. By having the prioritized list of requests developed through the USC Aiken budget process, the University will be better positioned to make quick adjustments and produce a budget reflective of institutional priorities, economic realities and with aspirational foundations.

If you have any questions regarding any of the information above, please do not hesitate to contact me at JoeS@usca.edu.

National News

The Rating System for Higher Education

Recently, the Department of Education released the framework for implementing President Obama’s plan to rate colleges and universities. While the plan is not fully developed, it is clear that the College Ratings will be focused on metrics that measure:

• Access, such as percentage of students receiving Pell grants;
• Affordability, such as net price and loan debt, tuition increases; and
• Outcomes, such as graduation rates, transfer rates, earnings of graduates, jobs obtained by students upon graduation, and completion of advanced degrees.

The Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, claims that they will do all that they can to prevent the ratings from being seen as a national college ranking program. Instead, the stated purpose of national rating of universities is to increase transparency and accountability and to give prospective college students and their families another tool to evaluate institutions. According to the State Department of Education, the President’s plan will:

• Challenge states to fund public colleges based on performance metrics.
• Hold students and colleges receiving student aid responsible for making progress toward a degree.

While the details are still unclear, the current plan is to publish the ratings annually to guide college choices. Additionally, the ratings will be incorporated into the Department of Education’s College Scorecard for public institutions. Additionally, during the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the President will seek legislation allocating financial aid to colleges based upon their college ratings. Thus, students wishing to maximize their student aid will want to consider those institutions with the highest ratings. Private institutions will not be included in the ratings system. Public opinion will be sought to develop the metrics used to rate colleges. The rating system does not attempt to rate the “quality” of the educational experience provided by individual institutions. If you are interested in shaping this dialogue, be aware that the State Department of Education plans to hold focus groups, conduct public meetings, and issue surveys to seek input.
The Campus Citizen of the Month award is given in recognition of good citizenship. All faculty, classified and unclassified staff, and university partners who have been with the University for one year and are in good standing are eligible. The nomination remains active indefinitely in the pool of candidates. The nomination form must be signed by the nominee’s supervisor and sent to the nominee’s Vice Chancellor in that unit. The criteria to be used in the nomination are:

- Initiative/Creativity: Exhibits ingenuity and resourcefulness. Examples: Improved work methods, efficiency within the department.
- Loyalty/Dedication: Willing to go the “extra mile” without being asked.
- Positive Attitude: Maintains effective relationships with others both on and off campus; serves as role model. Example: Consistently delivers prompt, friendly service.
- Leadership: Acknowledge those whose efforts have inspired and supported the performance and achievement of others.

Congratulations to our Campus Citizen Dr. Veronica Outlaw

Dr. Veronica Outlaw
Director of Distance Learning

Congratulations Dr. Veronica Outlaw, Director of Distance Learning, USC Aiken’s January 2015 Campus Citizen of the Month for January. Thanks to her efforts, she will receive a $20 gift card, a sign for her desk, and a parking spot.

In her nomination, a peer stated Veronica has had a huge impact on campus in her short time at the University. From February until June, Dr. Outlaw worked with 22 faculty members developing, designing, and evaluating their online courses. As a result of this, USC Aiken doubled the number of online courses offered, resulting in the highest summer enrollment in five years.

It was also stated that Dr. Outlaw worked tirelessly with the faculty, working weekends and nights, to make sure their courses were ready when Summer II started. Faculty evaluations of Dr. Outlaw have been very positive, with one faculty member writing, "What did we do before Veronica?"

In addition to working with faculty, she initiated a series of Friday workshops for faculty, and started a Distance Learning newsletter. She also reached out to other system campuses and the result was a Distance Learning conference held on our campus in November.

In recognition of her positive attitude, diligence, and tireless efforts, Dr. Veronica Outlaw has been named the January Campus Citizen of the Month. Congratulations Dr. Outlaw!

Monday Group will review the nominations and select each month’s winner.

Contact Maria Chandler at MariaC@USCA.edu for more information.
SC Aiken is launching a set of initiatives bundled under the name “Healthy 4 Life,” which focuses upon improving health and wellness of the campus community. Wellness is much more than merely physical health, exercise or nutrition. It is the full integration of states of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The model used by our campus includes social, emotional, environmental, intellectual and physical wellness. Each of these dimensions act and interact in a way that contributes to our own quality of life and falls under one of the four Healthy 4 Life categories: Healthy Mind, Healthy Body, Healthy Habits, and Healthy Environment.

**A Healthy Mind** includes aspects of social, emotional and mental wellness. Social Wellness is the ability to relate to and connect with other people in our community and world. Our ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with family, friends and co-workers contributes to our Social Wellness. Emotional wellness is the ability to understand ourselves and cope with the challenges life can bring. The ability to acknowledge and share feelings of anger, fear, sadness or stress; hope, love, joy and happiness in a productive manner contributes to our Emotional Wellness. Mental wellness includes a focus on emotional well-being, the capacity to live a full and creative life, and the flexibility to deal with life’s inevitable challenges. This includes managing stress, and living life in the balance.

**A Healthy Body** supports the campus effort to foster health and create a campus environment in which opportunities to eat healthy is readily accessible to all faculty, staff, and students. It includes eating healthy, affordable, and sustainable food with an emphasis on foods that are minimally processed, and prepared in a way that enhances nutritional value.

**Healthy Habits** maintain a healthy quality of life that allows us to get through our daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress. The ability to recognize that our behaviors have a significant impact on our wellness and adopting healthful habits (routine checkups, exercise, etc.) while avoiding destructive habits (tobacco, drugs, alcohol, etc.) will lead to optimal physical health. **Healthy Environment** captures dimensions associated with workplace safety, emergency procedures, chemical free cleaning products, sustainable energy, environmentally responsible buildings and grounds, and a smoke-free/tobacco-free campus environment. Thanks to the work of the Tobacco Free Taskforce in 2014 and the current work of the Healthy 4 Life Committee, the institution will be launching a number of initiatives to help our campus community build a stronger wellness culture. In the upcoming months this will include: seeking out sustainable energy, investigating the possibility of a battery charging site for battery cars, increasing campus recycling, launching a tobacco free campus campaign, installing vegetable gardens, and coordinating campus wellness workshops. Thanks to all who contributed to the Healthy 4 Life project: Mila Padgett, Brian Enter, and Brian Parr (co-chairs), Hope Smith-Dunbar, Andy Dye, Carla Hayes, Ross Philbeck, Patti McGrath, Kevin Liles, Eric Jeffrey Wehrmann, Carmen Williams, Darren Waters, Michelle Vieyra, Len Engel, Ike Ofoje, Jason Daniel, Juanita Palmer, and Maureen Carrigan. Additionally, thanks are due to the Tobacco Free Task Force and Subcommittee members: Mila Padgett, Len Engle, Ahmed Samaha, Maria Chandler, Carmen Williams, Brandon Aiken, Tim Lintner, Hope Smith-Dunbar, Cindy Gelineas, Director, Karen Morgan, Ross Philbeck, Douglas Higbee, Sam LaMunion, Terell Douglas Williams, Jesse Seilern, and Paige Hall.
USC Aiken Pedestrian Bridge Update

For some time, USC Aiken has been pursuing the addition of a Pedestrian bridge to provide safe passage of our students, faculty and staff across the Robert M. Bell Parkway. The last set of project bids received all came in well over the original budget of $1.3M. This caused the need for us to pause and re-group and test our assumptions. To allow the project to continue, USC Aiken personnel have worked together with USC System personnel to gain new cost estimates. Unfortunately, the new cost estimates have confirmed what the last set of bids indicated: due to the rising cost of steel and other materials, as well as the unique market for specialized builders, the estimated cost of the project is higher than expected. Revised estimates now indicate that the project will cost somewhere between $2.5M and $2.8M. This change will require approval from the USC Board of Trustees as well as the State Budget and Control Board, and parties from both USC Aiken and the USC System are preparing for that process. The pedestrian bridge project remains a priority for our campus and was one of our main requests proposed for the FY15-16 Governor’s budget. While it was not included in Governor Haley’s list of priorities, we remain hopeful that our legislative delegation will find a way to support the bridge during the 2015-16 budget discussions for the State. We will continue to keep you updated as the “journey” towards the bridge develops. In the meantime, if you find yourself in a position to discuss items with members of the Aiken Legislative Delegation, please thank them for their continued support of USC Aiken and let them know that the addition of a pedestrian bridge remains an important safety priority for us!

UNIVERSITY NATIONALLY RANKED

USC Aiken has ranked in the top 100 nationally in the 2015 U.S. News & World Report Best Online Programs. The University was ranked number 65 in the nation for its undergraduate online nursing program, and ranked number 2 in the state of South Carolina. In addition, USC Aiken ranked number 125 in the nation for it graduate education technology program, and number 2 in the state of South Carolina.

“As learning methods are changing, the University is working to progress and develop programs both on campus and online that will meet not only the needs of the students, but provide them with a quality educational experience,” Dr. Jordan shares. “We are extremely pleased to be in the national rankings for two of our online programs.”
Mrs. Jeff Priest and Sandra Jordan will be attending the annual COPLAC Conference at the end of this week (January 22-24). The Council on Public Liberal Arts Colleges will be attending to association business and determining ways to best enhance student understanding of the value of a Liberal Arts curriculum and discussing opportunities to augment undergraduate research, student and faculty short study exchanges within the COPLAC institutions, and advocacy for public liberal arts colleges at the federal and state levels. In December, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni released a study entitled “What will they Learn?” It is a survey of core requirements at the nation’s universities. The study reviewed 1,098 four year colleges and universities to answer the question, “What will students learn?” The reviewers were looking for evidence that the colleges and universities they reviewed provided a coherent core curriculum that attempted to guide students through the fundamentals that every graduate needs for success. The core fundamentals were assessed to be Composition, Literature, Language, Government/History, Economics, Math and Science. Institutions were then given a grade based upon the review of the curriculum. Overall, the results could be seen as disappointing. Out of the 1,098 institutions, only 18% require students to complete a survey course in American history or government. Four out of ten do not require a college level mathematics course to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. And only 3.3% require students to take a basic course in economics. For the State of South Carolina, no institution received an “A”, several received a grade of “C” (Coker, Converse, Francis Marion, Furman, North Greenville University, USC Upstate, and Winthrop received grades of “C”), and the remainder, including our own USC Aiken received a “B.” Furman reported the highest graduation rate (80%) while USC Beaufort reported the lowest graduation rate (10%) in the state. Only 2% of institutions nationwide that achieved an “A” in this report, and they include: the University of Georgia, Baylor University, the U.S. Military Academy, and Pepperdine University. The report took institutions like Smith College to task for maintaining no required core classes, and Middlebury College for replacing more traditional and (the assumption is) more rigorous history courses in the core with courses of a more “popular” nature with narrow foci (the example given was replacing American History with a course on Mad Men and Women which uses the TV show as the narrative foundation). As tuitions rise, we should expect more accountability and more frequent “grading” of public universities by external entities. The questions we must ask are: Does USC Aiken offer a compelling, coherent general education (core) curriculum --outside the major--designed to equip students with the essential skills, knowledge, abilities and dispositions essential to address the demands of engaged citizenship, the modern workplace, and contemporary life? Do we have appropriately high standards? Do we have meaningful expectations?

With certainty, toward the end of this week the COPLAC presidents and provosts in attendance at the national conference will be using the ACTA report as the launching pad for substantive discussions about what it means to be a public liberal arts college.
SUPER BOWL COMMERCIAL

WAGT, the NBC affiliate for the CSRA, has sponsored a contest between USC Aiken’s School of Business and GRU’s School of Business. Each university was asked to have several School of Business students create and produce a commercial about their school to air during the Super Bowl. Then, after the Super Bowl, the public will be able to vote on which commercial they like best on WAGT’s website.

SC Aiken business students created their commercial in December, and marketing Professor Dr. Richard Heiens thought it was a beneficial project for the students. “They were able to actually experience the entire process that goes into producing a television commercial, from the initial idea to the completed advertisement,” he says. “The students envisioned the concept, created the script, designed the props, recruited the extras, organized the rehearsals, arranged for the production, and worked to complete the final product on time and on budget. Just the fact that they were able to do all of this in just a few months is impressive enough, but the quality of their effort is truly amazing. I personally love the ad they created, and they should be really proud of their achievement.”

“There’s so much that I enjoyed about the project,” says Natalie Garvin, one of the business students chosen for the project. “We had the freedom to create whatever we wanted, so it was fun coming up with ideas for the commercial. Watching our ideas come together during the rehearsals and shoot was so exciting. It was especially exciting to see the finished product because it showed how much everyone’s hard work paid off.”

Promos for the competition begin airing on Thursday, January 22, 2015. We encourage everyone to be part of the USC Aiken team. After the Super Bowl, go online and vote for USC Aiken. Don’t worry if you miss the commercial during the Super Bowl. It may be viewed again on WAGT’s website when you vote.

Go USC Aiken School of Business! Be sure to vote!

VETERAN STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

The Aiken/Augusta Wounded Warrior Golf Classic Golf Classic raised money for scholarships for four of our veteran students. Jahleel Stone, Kevin Main, Robert Brannen, and Thomas Gardiner were recognized at a ceremony earlier this month as the scholarship recipients. “These ‘Bridge the Gap’ awards are based on academic excellence,” Robert Murphy, Director of Veteran and Military Student Success, explains. The ceremony recognized not only the scholarship recipients but all the hard work and commitment of the Golf Classic Team. The Aiken/Augusta Wounded Warriors organization, and especially the Golf Classic, has raised thousands of dollars to support non-profits, and now the new scholarship program. USC Aiken is grateful for their scholarship support for our veteran students.