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11/05/98
Agenda Item 3.02.C



SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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November 5, 1998

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. R. Austin Gilbert, Jr., Chairman, and Members,
Commission on Higher Education

From: Mr. Winfred S. Greene, Chairman, Committee on Academic Affairs

W.S.G./am

Annual Evaluation of Associate Degree Programs
FY 1997-1998

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 to be continued are responsive to employment trends and meet minimum standards and 2) to identify programs which need to be strengthened.

The procedures for this review, as approved by the Commission in 1981, 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.

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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.

In addition, the Commission also made several requests of the two-year institutions based upon the evaluation of programs. The emerging importance of the AA/AS programs (viewed both from the perspective of course offerings and degree completions) at the sixteen technical colleges shows increasing importance for their capacity to provide eventual access to baccalaureate instruction at the four-year institutions. At several of the technical colleges, the AA/AS program is now the first or second most productive program of study in terms of the annual number of students graduating in the program. Recognition of the importance of the AA/AS program for providing access to additional higher education moved the Commission to request that the administrations of the technical colleges schedule courses in the AA/AS program at times and in places which would maximize the potential for students to take the coursework for this degree. Together with the growth of the AA/AS at the 16 technical colleges and the Commission's adoption in May 1996 of a statewide transfer plan, it became increasingly important to track the AA/AS students who have transferred to matriculate in four-year public institutions in South Carolina. For this reason, the Commission further requested that all two-year institutions (USC's two-year regional campuses and the sixteen technical colleges) institute mechanisms to assure that they could identify students who completed one of the five statewide "transfer blocks" (i.e., coursework guaranteed to transfer toward a four-year degree in all public four-year institutions and certain participating private institutions in South Carolina.)

Likewise, the Commission applauded the multi-year grant which the National Science Foundation had awarded to the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education

(SBTCE) for strengthening the engineering technology programs at the technical colleges. That grant is now in its third year of implementation. The Commission viewed the awarding of this grant as a great opportunity for proactively increasing recruitment, retention, and graduation from the technical colleges' important, but historically underenrolled, engineering technology degree programs. The importance of addressing recruitment and retention in the engineering technology programs can clearly be seen again in this year's analysis, which once more demonstrates that these programs constitute a large percentage of programs on probation because of their small enrollments and low graduation numbers.

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 1997 enrollment data and academic year 1996-1997 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 308 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 degree programs (i.e., those implemented within the past three years) have been excluded from this analysis.

Analysis of Degree Programs in the USC and Technical College Systems

This evaluation begins with associate degree programs found in the University of South Carolina's several campuses. It proceeds to the much larger and more varied set of associate degree programs offered in the State's sixteen technical colleges.

Changes in the USC System's Programs of Study

All of the five two-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina offer the Associate of Arts/Associate of Science degree programs. Each of the AA/AS programs at these campuses is enrolling and graduating students in satisfactory numbers. On average, the number of degree completers in these programs has increased over the past four years. This trend is a positive one and should continue, given the importance that Act 359 has placed on timely degree completion for performance-based funding.

Of the two-year regional campuses of the University, only Lancaster offers applied two-year technical degrees. Besides the AA/AS degree, programs at the USC-Lancaster campus include nursing, criminal justice, and business. In 1993 the Commission recommended a merger of two underperforming business-related programs at USC-Lancaster. Since that merger

took place in 1995 the combined business program has met the criteria for "good" for both enrollments and graduation rates.

In 1993 the staff of the Commission also suggested that the Criminal Justice associate degree program at USC-Aiken be transferred to Aiken Technical College. In 1996 Aiken Technical College proposed and the Commission approved in 1997 a new associate degree program in Criminal Justice at Aiken Technical College. The Aiken Technical College proposal carried with it a supportive letter from USC-Aiken pledging to phase out the USC-Aiken associate degree as the Aiken Technical College associate degree was to be implemented. Beginning Fall 1997 USC-Aiken has not admitted any more students into this program, and although the program will continue to graduate a few students who remain in the pipeline, the program is now officially closed.

In February 1998, USC-Columbia proposed revision of its mission statement. Among other changes included in this revision was one which explicitly recognizes as part of USC-Columbia's mission the offering of an Associate of Arts degree at Fort Jackson. This particular change was offered in response to the requirements of Act 359 and to earlier concerns about the inappropriateness of the State's flagship research institution offering any associate degree programs. 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.

Similarly, during academic year 1997-1998, the mission statements of USC-Aiken and USC-Spartanburg were revised by the USC Board of Trustees. Each of these two campuses' revised mission statements recognizes the offering of an Associate Degree in Nursing as part of the respective institution's mission. The Commission has accepted these revisions. Notwithstanding the revised mission statement at USC-Aiken, the administration of that campus has indicated that the administration and nursing faculty there are studying the Aiken area's needs for nurses. Together, the study at USC-Aiken and the statewide Colleagues in Caring grant may eventually lead to USC-Aiken's developing a rationale for a four-year generic program of nursing to replace the current associate degree.

General Analysis of Associate Degree Programs in the Technical Colleges

A summary of the number of programs evaluated over the past fifteen years in various categories at the technical colleges is found on Table 1 of this report. Overall, for this reporting year 29 programs of study (out of a total of 308 which were analyzed) at the technical colleges are on probation during the current reporting period. Of these, 21 are in the first year of probation; four are in the second year of probation; and four are in the third year of probation. (By comparison, last year's report showed a total of 25 on probation; and the previous year 35 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.

Historically and again this year, the programs on probation are found primarily in the program clusters of Business, Engineering Technologies, and Industrial Technologies. This

concentration suggests that there are potentially too many underenrolled programs in these program clusters and perhaps a great deal of overlapping coursework that should be considered for programmatic consolidations. Last year, the Commission's report on two-year programs of study urged the technical colleges to be proactive in the recruitment of historically underrepresented groups into these programs. Analysis of the data this year shows that women and minorities--but especially women--are underrepresented in enrollments and graduation from engineering technology programs. The data suggests that the more single-sex male an engineering program is in enrollment, the more likely it is to be a small enrolling program. Because the field of engineering technology is one which pays high salaries, persons with this formal academic background can provide better for their families and help create economic development for the State of South Carolina. For all these reasons, a plan should be developed to increase student recruitment, retention, and graduation in the engineering technology programs of the State's technical colleges.

Therefore, the Commission urges the Technical College state office, in cooperation with the sixteen technical colleges, to prepare, fund, and implement a multi-year recruitment and retention program to increase enrollments and graduation of students in the engineering technology programs. This plan should target college-preparatory students in high school and should especially target women and minorities. Many talented persons who are attracted to the engineering technology fields desire to complete a baccalaureate degree at some point in their careers. Therefore, this plan should also seek to increase the numbers of students completing an engineering technology associate degree who then transfer directly to a four-year engineering technology or business or engineering degree program.

Currently, only one four-year Engineering Technology degree program is active in South Carolina. This program is found at South Carolina State University. Historically, it has had modest enrollments and modest annual numbers of graduates, although in recent years these numbers have been increasing. There is an apparent need for this program and others which complement at the baccalaureate level the skills and interests of associate degree holders in engineering technology fields to be extended geographically. (The recently approved Bachelor of Science in Management of Technology at USC-Spartanburg also represents a promising baccalaureate program for persons with an engineering technology degree at the associate level.) Extension of these programs geographically might be best and most efficiently accomplished with a combination of distance education offerings and use for technically-oriented courses by the four-year institution of existing facilities and equipment of the two-year campuses.

Discussions with the staff of the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education indicate that the SBTCE intends to re-apply for additional funding from the National Science Foundation to continue its multi-million dollar grant to strengthen the engineering technology programs of the Technical Colleges. According to those discussions, the State Board staff is also preparing a statewide marketing campaign for the promotion of these programs. These activities are encouraging. Women and minorities should be a focus of this campaign. Concerted, focused efforts to increase the numbers of students (especially women and minorities) in these programs and the number of graduates from these programs should be

promoted, if South Carolina is to achieve its ambitious goals of attracting and retaining high-tech business and industry.

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

Last year's report reviewed the success to date of the AA/AS programs in the technical colleges. Nine of these programs had entered into the third reporting cycle for meeting program productivity criteria since they had just been approved in 1989. In Fall 1997 all 16 of the AA/AS programs were in the "good" category with respect to enrollments and numbers of graduates. This year 15 of the 16 are in the "good" category. Technical College of the Lowcountry's AA/AS program is being placed on first-year probationary status, owing to the low number of graduates for this reporting year. However, the number of graduates for the next reporting year is already known to be sufficient to remove the probationary status at Technical College of the Lowcountry.

The sustained successes of these AA/AS programs and their relatively low cost to both students and the State underscore the importance of assuring their continuation. Because these programs offer such low-cost educational access for many persons and groups who historically have been underrepresented in higher education, the technical colleges need to assure students of the availability of appropriate course offerings and scheduling so students can maximize the possibility of their degree completions in a timely manner and prepare for transfer to the four-year institution of their choice. Maximizing this kind of student participation will minimize costs to students and the State for obtaining a baccalaureate degree and will contribute to the economic development of the State of South Carolina.

The provisions for performance-based funding found in Act 359 are designed, among other things, to reward an institution's high rates of student retention and degree completion. The development under Act 359 of the "Mission Resource Requirements" continues to make certain that the offering of associate degree work at four-year institutions will be more costly to the State than the same offerings at public USC branches and technical colleges which are two-year institutions. Tuition at two-year institutions will also continue to be less expensive than tuition at four-year institutions. Thus, two-year campuses will continue to be less expensive for students and their families. For these reasons both types of two-year technical colleges need to intensify efforts to have appropriately classified AA/AS students complete as much of their transfer work as possible at the two-year institution prior to moving to a four-year institution. To assist in this direction, and in keeping with the June 1998 Strategic Plan for Higher Education of the Commission, the technological capacity of the institutions to provide distance education should be coordinated as much as possible to increase course offerings within the two-year institutions. In this way, the institutions can best respond to the need for providing persons within the State with affordable, high quality academic instruction in their localities for completion of the transfer-related AA/AS degree and any other programmatic offerings which are principally didactic in mode of delivery.

Degree Programs No Longer on Probation

For the current reporting year, a total of 11 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., 1997) reporting period. These programs are:

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Central Carolina	AET	Civil Engineering Technology
Denmark Tech	AIT	Electronics Technology
Florence-Darlington	AHS	Respiratory Therapy
Florence-Darlington	AIT	Heat/Vent/Airconditioning
Greenville Tech	AET	Architectural Engineering
Greenville Tech	AET	Construction Engineering Technology
Midlands Tech	AIT	Machine Tool Technology
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AET	Electronic Instrumentation Technology
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AET	Electronics Engineering Technology
Spartanburg Tech	AET	Electronics 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**Fifteen Year Summary
Annual Associate Degree Program Evaluation**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Good Standing</u>	<u>On Probation</u>	<u>Under Suspension</u>	<u>Canceled</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

Thirty-two of the programs are labeled "good" for reasons of unique characteristics of their programs, which have kept them in this column although they do not otherwise meet the modest requirements otherwise needed to be categorized "good."

Table 2

**Associate Degree Programs on Probation
(Or Remaining on Probation 2nd or 3rd Years)
in Fall 1997**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Aiken Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Aiken Technical College	AET	Electro-Mechanical Engineering (1)
Central Carolina Tech	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Central Carolina Tech	AET	Electronics Engineering Technology (1)
Chesterfield-Marlboro Tech	ABUS	Office Systems Technology (1)
Denmark Technical College	ABUS	Office Systems Technology (1)
Denmark Technical College	AET	Electro-Mechanical Engineering (1)
Florence-Darlington Tech	AET	Engineering Graphics Technology (1)
Florence-Darlington Tech	AIT	Aircraft Maintenance Technology (3)
Florence-Darlington Tech	AIT	Automotive Technology (3)
Horry-Georgetown Tech	AIT	Machine Tool Technology (2)
Midlands Technical College	ABUS	Court Reporting (2)
Midlands Technical College	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (1)
Midlands Technical College	AHS	Health Information Management (1)
Midlands Technical College	APS	Criminal Justice Technology (1)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AGR	Forest Products Technology (3)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (2)
Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech	AHS	Medical Laboratory Technology (2)
Piedmont Technical College	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (1)
Spartanburg Technical College	AET	Engineering Graphics Technology (1)
Spartanburg Technical College	AET	Textile Management Technology (1)
Technical College of the L'Ctry	AA/AS	Assoc. of Arts/Assoc. of Science (1)
Technical College of the L'Ctry	AIT	Building Construction Technology (1)
Tri-County Technical College	AET	Electronics Engineering Technology (1)
Tri-County Technical College	AIT	Machine Tool Technology (1)
Trident Technical College	ABUS	Culinary Arts Technology (2)
Trident Technical College	AET	Chemical Engineering Technology (3)
Trident Technical College	AET	Mechanical Engineering Technology (1)
Trident Technical College	AIT	Machine Tool Technology (2)

Table 3

**Associate Degree Programs To Be Suspended
(or Continued for 2nd or 3rd Year Suspension) in Fall 1997**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Chesterfield-Marlboro Tech	ABUS	Accounting (2)
Greenville Technical College	AIT	Telecommunications Electronics (3)
Midlands Technical College	ABUS	Banking and Finance (1)
Midlands Technical College	AIT	Electronics Technology (1)
Piedmont Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (3)
Technical College of the L'Ctry	AGR	Horticulture Technology (3)
Tri-County Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Trident Technical College	ABUS	Marketing (1)
Trident Technical College	AET	Automated Manufacturing Technology (3)
York Technical College	AET	Civil Engineering Technology (2)
York Technical College	AET	Electro-Mechanical Eng'ring Technology (3)

Table 4

**Associate Degrees Cancelled
In Fall 1997**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Central Carolina Tech	AIT	Automotive Technology
Central Carolina Tech	AIT	Machine Tool Technology
Greenville Technical College	AET	Manufacturing Eng'ring Technology
Piedmont Technical College	AHS	Emergency Medical Technology
Piedmont Technical College	AHS	Medical Assistant Technology
Technical College of the L'Ctry	AIT	Heat/Vent/Airconditioning

Summary

All 11 of the associate degree programs in the University of South Carolina system and 262 (85 percent) of the 308 technical college programs eligible for evaluation meet the "good" status requirements for this reporting year.

The increasing number of students enrolled in the AA/AS transfer programs at the technical colleges provides a clear sign that these programs are increasingly looked upon by the citizenry of the State as an important point of access for public higher education. The hopes of the Technical College system when it requested that the Commission grant all the technical colleges the right to offer the AA/AS appear to have been realized conclusively in this regard, since these programs are providing access to pre-baccalaureate transfer programs for growing numbers of historically excluded South Carolinians. They should receive the fiscal support on their campuses which the demand for them requires for ensuring adequacy in offerings and availability of support resources (e.g., library materials and so forth). Thus, continuing emphasis should be placed on scheduling course sections at times and in sufficient numbers to maximize student participation. Distance education should be increased in all these courses to assure the courses' availability, particularly in those courses offered in the five transfer blocks.

The importance of the engineering technology programs to the State's goals for economic development and for increasing family incomes strongly suggests that a comprehensive statewide plan be developed so that these programs are enrolling significantly increased numbers of qualified students who are retained to graduation and who are capable of pursuing baccalaureate programs in engineering, engineering technologies, or business-related applications of these programs. Distance education should be employed to provide coursework which might otherwise be too expensive to supply on site. Women, minorities, and the college-preparatory graduates of high schools should especially be targeted in this plan as potential engineering technology students.

Recommendation

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

The Committee further suggests that the technical college system and its constituent colleges develop, fund, and implement a multi-year marketing and recruitment plan to identify talented college-preparatory students and others, especially targeting women and minorities, in order to increase significantly enrollments and graduations in programs in the engineering technologies.

The Committee further suggests that four-year programs such as the B.S. in Engineering Technology at South Carolina State University and the recently approved B.S. in Management of Technology at USC-Spartanburg be encouraged to be offered by their institutions on a wider geographical basis to meet student need for "laddered progression" beginning with an associate degree in engineering technology. Distance education should be explored as a mechanism to increase the accessibility of these programs in the several regions of the State.

/jb