

<b>AGENCY NAME:</b>	<b>University of South Carolina Sumter</b>		
<b>AGENCY CODE:</b>	<b>H390</b>	<b>SECTION:</b>	<b>20G</b>

## **AGENCY'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

The University of South Carolina Sumter has a long history of providing higher education opportunities and intellectual leadership for the counties of Clarendon, Lee, Kershaw, Sumter, and Williamsburg. It provides innovative and inclusive curricular pathways focused on student success, nurturing critical thinking, civic engagement, and career development, while preparing students to continue their education throughout life.

As a regional Palmetto College campus, the University offers associate degrees in arts and science, while providing substantial local support for numerous baccalaureate degrees offered by four year colleges within the University of South Carolina system. It employs a teaching faculty and administrative staff of high quality, dedicated to excellence in instruction, scholarship, public and professional service, and creative endeavors, thus enriching classroom and life development experiences for its students.

### **FY 2025 Analysis**

Over the past several years, the University of South Carolina Sumter has maintained its commitment to excellence in pursuit of mission objectives as needs for organizational restructuring, deferred maintenance projects, addressing budgetary constraints, and faculty and staff attrition presented as critical internal priorities.

This commitment to excellence and the effectiveness of restructured processes and increased personnel capacity in enrollment management, including the offices of admissions and recruitment, and financial aid, have occurred alongside greater institutional commitment to high quality full-time faculty hires directed toward meeting critical curricular needs, and extensive expansion of Tutoring Services. These changes, which themselves are continually assessed and readjusted where appropriate, have yielded tangible results in the areas of: 1) *enrollment and recruitment*; 2) *student success, transfer rates, and timely degree completion*; 3) *faculty and staff excellence*; 4) *service and community engagement*; and 5) *sustainability of financial and organizational resources*.

USC Sumter has seen significant growth in overall headcount the past several years. The fall 2024 headcount of 1,804 was the highest overall headcount in the institution's history dating back to 1966. This reflects an 8.4% increase over the previous fall 2023 headcount which itself had been the highest recorded in the institution's history and a 23.22% increase in the average headcount of the previous 5 years. Trends in enrollment of first-time freshmen have also been on the rise. The fall 2024 first time freshman headcount of 282 reflects a 12.53% increase over the average first time freshman headcount of the previous 5 years. These trends reflect similar success in growth of applications, and admits, while maintaining commitment to quality admissions standards.

In terms of degree completion and student success, official IPEDS graduation rates have been trending upwards over the past several years. The graduation rate for first-time full-time freshman students receiving degrees within 150% time of admission was 36.1% for the fall 2020 cohort, a 10.3% increase over the fall 2019 cohort and a 7.46% increase over the previous 5 years. Meanwhile, the CHE success rates, a measure of either graduation or transfer in 150% time from first term of admission, or retention at original institution one term past 150% time was 71.9% for the fall 2020 cohort, a 6.9% increase over the fall 2019 cohort.

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Establishing a sustainable student recruitment and onboarding plan has been a top priority the Enrollment Services Student Support Offices of Admissions and Recruitment, Financial Aid, Advisement, Registrar, and Student Life. Utilization of the CRM, SMS texting, and e-mail and phone campaigns have contributed to an increase in applicants and admits. The admissions processing unit has been reorganized to review and make decisions on applicant files in a more timely and efficient manner leading to more significant increases in early admission decisions.

Increased high school visits and enhanced follow-up communication plans have helped streamline the recruitment of new students, and prepare admits for structured orientations with advisement and registration processes that enable enrollments in a quicker and more efficient manner.

The University of South Carolina is committed to attracting and admitting students who are likely to be successful and who will return to us for a second year and degree completion. The school offers several academic support services and student life opportunities designed to aid in student retention. These efforts are directed both at the academic success of the students as well as their social and cultural development.

From the academic side, USC Sumter offers faculty-led academic advising. Faculty members are paired with students whose professed academic goals align with the training and interests of the faculty. This level of familiarity with both the programs and the students engenders effective advising on the part of the advisor. USC Sumter also offers tutoring services free of charge for students in the areas in which many students often struggle. These include math, sciences, foreign languages, and writing among others. These services are centralized in the Anderson Library with regularly scheduled hours and appointment capability.

For at-risk students with documented disabilities, USC Sumter has had a Trio Student Support Services program dubbed the Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP) operating on campus for many years. This federally funded program offers additional academic support for students who have met certain eligibility standards. Furthermore, USC Sumter has a dedicated Disability Services Coordinator who can offer academic support services for students diagnosed with a disability which potentially impacts their learning.

Campus-wide campaigns through electronic and traditional communication channels have proven successful in promoting early next-term registration and providing effective ongoing follow-up for students who are not enrolled.

In sum, these continually evolving processes have helped enable upward trends enrollment, retention, degree completion, and other key metrics used to assess and plan toward the University's strategic priorities and objectives regarding student success.

Along with the other PC regional campuses USC Sumter continues to offer the lowest rates of tuition in the USC System. USC Sumter continues to waive and subsidize fees for military personnel as needed. Utilizing state Lottery Scholarship funds our Early College Program allows select, highly qualified high school students an opportunity to earn an associate degree upon completion of high school, tuition free. Our expanding dual enrollment program offers many other high school students the same tuition free opportunity for up to 24 hours of Carolina Core college credit. Utilizing Lottery Scholarship funds and institutional subsidies, our Sumter's Scholars program offers free tuition for first-time fulltime freshman that finished in the top 25% of their high school class cohorts.

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Along with the other regional Palmetto College campuses, USC Sumter continues to offer the lowest rates of tuition in the USC System. USC Sumter granted \$136,558.25 in private scholarship support for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, an 8% increase over the previous 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Strategies and objectives geared toward the mission of educating future innovative thinkers and transformative leaders focus on: measured growth in the enrollment and recruitment of a competitive and diverse student population; improvement of student retention, success, and timely graduation; high quality faculty and curricular offerings; and student leadership and service learning opportunities that engage the University's broader community of stakeholders. To help accomplish this mission the University of South Carolina Sumter is committed to affordably providing students with flexible and quality access to a general educational background necessary to complete not just associate degrees and but also baccalaureate degrees, and the opportunities to learn knowledge and skills needed for lifelong education and success.

USC Sumter seeks to provide students with a quality faculty capable of providing the variety of curriculum offerings and educational delivery modes needed to effect mission objectives along with a highly qualified and dedicated staff to provide academic and administrative support services to students and critical university stakeholders.

With the continued increase in headcount over the past several years USC Sumter requires and continues to maintain a world class faculty dedicated to teaching, scholarship, and student success, as this is an essential component to meeting such objectives. USC Sumter continues to maintain a low student-faculty ratio of 17:1, ensuring students receive quality personalized attention and support. These efforts at ensuring a world class faculty and a low student faculty ratio are intricately intertwined with objectives associated with retention, student success and transfer, and timely degree completion.

USC Sumter continues to make strategic tenure track hires in disciplinary areas that can make immediate contributions to critical curriculum need areas both at USC Sumter and for Palmetto College Programs.

The University also continues to promote faculty participating in distributive education course offerings, professional development training programs, and new distributive education course development. Faculty scholarship continues to be supported by ample institutional commitment to the resources needed for presentations at state, regional, national, and international peer academic conferences. Faculty are offered up to \$1,500 in travel costs each year to present research at academic conferences. Faculty are invited to take part in USC Sumter Seminar Series to present their work for feedback. Faculty are encouraged to apply for grants including Aspire, RISE, PURE and the USC Sumter Summer Stipend to support research projects. Faculty may apply for a course reduction to facilitate research. Faculty may apply for a sabbatical to facilitate research. Faculty performing research are honored each year at Faculty Scholarship Reception.

Faculty engagement in teaching, research, and service is central to each faculty member's annual and peer review processes which ultimately serves as the basis of decisions regarding their tenure and promotion. Faculty are provided with travel money, many Library resources, including access to USC Columbia holdings, and formal and informal links to institutions in Sumter including, the Sumter County Gallery of Art, the Sumter Little Theatre, the Sumter County Library, and the Sumter County Museum, among others. An endowed grant from the Korn Trust affords faculty from the Division of Arts & Letters funding for various cultural events and the annual sponsorship of a public Seminar series.

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Four endowed Chairs support the exhibition of excellence by USC Sumter faculty: the McDavid Professorship of Business & Economics; the Williams-Brice-Edwards Professor of Social Science; the Julian T. Buxton Professor of Business Administration; and the R.J. “Chic” Mathis Professorship.

Leaders at USC Sumter recognize the challenges facing students when their college path takes longer than needed or expected. This is particularly true of an institution like USC Sumter whose student population reflects large numbers of first-generation and low-income college students.

USC Sumter faculty and staff provide our tutoring services free of charge for students in the areas in which many students often struggle, including math, the sciences, foreign language, and writing.

USC Sumter has long had a very successful TRIOS Student Support Services program (OSP) offers additional academic support for students who are categorized as at-risk students and those diagnosed with disabilities. In addition, during the 2021-2022 FY USC Sumter secured an additional 5 years of funding for its TRIO Upward We also offer a TRIOS Upward Bound Grant with Manning High School in Manning SC. Upward Bound programs support rising secondary school students who come from low -income areas better prepare for the rigors of post-secondary education.

There can be challenges involved in striking a balance between teaching, scholarship, and service at a campus institutionally organized as a teaching institution. The mission prioritizes teaching and places a demanding teaching load on full-time faculty. To ameliorate this potential constraint, efforts are made to provide course load reductions and sabbaticals to enhance research productivity and service as resources and circumstances reasonably allow. These efforts have allowed the USC Sumter faculty to continue to increase the quantity and quality of scholarly research and service to a broad range of stakeholders.

As a regional Palmetto College campus, USC Sumter seeks to achieve mission objectives by continually strengthening current relationships, and building new relationships, with community partners and stakeholders. Such service and community engagement are critical to not just the University’s academic mission but its larger mission to improve the economic output and quality of life for stakeholders in its service area.

Continued creativity and innovation in curricular offerings, course delivery modalities, and service learning opportunities, such as that associated with the University’s Graduation with Leadership Distinction program, help sustain and increase patterns of retention, success and transfer, and timely graduation of both traditional and non-traditional students – such opportunities also critically prepare students for employment after graduation. In addition to academic coursework, University offerings include non-credit courses, seminars, and workshops made available to the community for cultural enrichment and professional development. The addition of the iCarolina Apple computer lab reflects a key addition to facilities and resources available to community stakeholders. In addition, USC Sumter offers an Emerging Leaders Program called *The Link* which connects us directly with local students in partnership with our local Economic Development group and offers a broad range of non-degree oriented adult continuing education opportunities and certifications.

USC Sumter strives to be a destination of choice for students residing in its services area, while attracting top faculty and staff from a variety of backgrounds, races, cultures, and creeds. To recruit and retain high-achieving and high-quality faculty, staff, and students, the University recognizes that the quality of life on the University campus must be welcoming, inclusive, and encouraging.

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USC Sumter promotes a variety of cultural events along with clubs and organizations that include people from all walks of life.

Student experiences with clubs and organizations build networks spanning beyond peer groups and the classroom to include a broader range of activity with faculty, staff, and external University stakeholders. Extra-curricular activities facilitate exposure to situations enabling growth in intrapersonal skills and team building. Such activities provide situational contexts broadening social networks to ameliorate daily interactions on campus and during planned events. Thus, such activities channel a camaraderie among diverse stakeholders into a sustainable campus community.

The OSP program annually participates in the Student Leadership & Diversity Conference on the USC Columbia campus and provides funds for wide variety of students to attend the SC Day at the State House. Student Life promotes and holds social mixers for students, staff and faculty designed to engage extra and co-curricular activities, and a campus “community” of peers.

We continue to hold our annual Martin Luther King Day Walk with the campus community and other Sumter community stakeholders. We hold poetry readings and faculty seminars associated with topics extending to inclusivity and barriers to inclusivity.

There are more than a half dozen clubs/organizations on campus that are very active. The University Ambassadors organization continues to grow and transition students into the university’s Graduation with Leadership Distinction program.

In addition, USC Sumter has made a significant commitment to full participation in the University of South Carolina initiatives put forth by the Office of Access and Opportunity programs including the development of an active standing institutional committee to promote these initiatives on the USC Sumter campus.

In the Spring of 2025, USC Sumter was voted the best college/university in Sumter by The Item Newspaper readers. More than 100,000 votes from the community were recorded for the 2025 Best of Sumter contest. The Item Newspaper reaches more than 150,000 unique users each month through print and digital products and is the primary media outlet for Sumter, Lee, and Clarendon counties.

Niche, a website that helps students discover the school and neighborhoods that are right for them, released its 2025 College Rankings. The University of South Carolina Sumter was named the #2 Best Two-Year College in South Carolina. Niche analyzes over 4,000 colleges to create rankings and Niche grades for all aspects of campus life, including academics, student life, and value. These rankings and grades are based on rigorous analysis of academic, admissions, financial, and student data from the U.S. Department of Education along with millions of reviews from students and alumni.

USC Sumter was awarded the Silver Military Friendly School designation by Victory in 2025. Institutions earning the Military Friendly School designation were evaluated using both public data sources and responses from a proprietary survey. Over 1,800 schools participated in the 2025-2026 survey with 830 earning the designation.

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The USC Sumter institutional committee charged with pursuing initiatives associated with the University of South Carolina Office of Access and Opportunity continues to focus on developing programs/events that promote access and opportunities on campus as a critical part of achieving academic institutional excellence. That process involves proposing, planning, and helping execute educational, cultural, and other activities that enliven campus life to draw students, staff, and faculty together to learn about and celebrate our differences and promote empathy and understanding.

New strategic initiatives are currently in the planning stage, with some underway and some at or near completion. These include: the creation of a Student Success Center; the opening of a Food and Clothing Pantry, a new Wellness, Health, and an Athletics facility on campus, which will include a new gym to support our growing and highly successful athletics program.

USC Sumter continues to build relationships with local organizations and businesses, including hosting private sector organizations with space for meetings and training, and hosting Chamber of Commerce events and weekly Rotary Club meetings.

USC Sumter continues to maintain a low expense-to-total-budget ratio and increase the reserve fund carry-forward balance. Those quantities for FY 2024-2025 the ratio was 91%, and the carryforward was \$5,269,000.

We've continued physical and technological enhancements to the USC Sumter campus, including completion of major renovation of the Science Building and interior and mechanical upgrades to other buildings on campus, and upgraded parking lots. Other planned projects for 2025-2026 and beyond include an outdoor classroom, a new Wellness Building, a new Facilities Building, and a partnership with SCETV for the construction of a new Collaboration Lab.

### **Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies**

Increasing enrollment at USC Sumter continues to be a primary focus, especially efforts to enroll first time freshman. The tuition differential between us and CCTC next door, as well as an unfortunate growing overlap in mission, is a significant challenge in recruiting students. We have grave concerns that the SC Technical College system is positioning itself to deliver bachelor's degrees soon, marking the greatest over-reach and confusion of mission yet attempted by this major competitor. Many of the students we serve are first generation students who have little experience or understanding of the white-collar job market. They see the promises from CCTC of free tuition, lower admissions standards, and promises of a high paying technical job at a local plant as a better "deal" than a four-year time commitment, paying higher tuition, to get a job they don't have much personal experience with or understanding of (e.g., middle-management, professional services, etc.). If CCTC begins to offer bachelor's degrees, the differentiation between the two institutions will likely be completely lost on the students we serve.

Recruiting students in this climate of competition is difficult, but several things would help. We need to add campus housing to attract a talented student body from across the state to come here, see the careers that are available in Sumter, and to recognize that Sumter is quickly becoming a destination of choice for major employers. Additional tuition mitigation would help us compete with CCTC—we need to be able to offer the same free-tuition programs as CCTC does. The ability to offer on-ground bachelor's degrees of interest to specific industries and constituents in our area is of critical importance to enhance those offered by Palmetto

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College online. Already our partnerships with Aiken to deliver bachelor's degrees nursing, early childhood education and element education have demonstrated that such programs will fill overnight and lead to the production of needed talent in Sumter and surrounding areas. Finally, improved facilities such as the current upgrade of the science building will continue the effort to provide state-of-the-art educational experiences enhancing recruitment and educational efforts.