

April 5, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Bettie Rose Horne, Chairman, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing, and Members

From: Dr. R. Lynn Kelley, Acting Director of Academic Affairs and Licensing

**Consideration of Annual Evaluation of Associate Degree Programs
FY 2004-2005**

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. Over time, the concept of accountability of institutions of higher education has grown on the national agenda.

The purposes of this study remain relevant as part of the focus of both state and national governments on institutional accountability. As found in prior state law and Commission policy, the language of Act 359 maintained the purposes of this annual review, as follows: 1) to insure that programs demonstrate responsiveness to employment trends and meet minimum standards of enrollment, graduation, and placement; and 2) to identify programs which need to be strengthened.

Given the preponderance of associate degree programs which are employment-related to specific occupations or occupational sectors, this report has for many years sought to provide insight into specific programs which are either exceptionally achieving their ends or are underperforming in relationship to the state's current and future economic development needs.

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 have been 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.

Distribution of Associate Degree Programs by System and Sector

For this reporting period, associate degree programs exist in the sixteen technical colleges, the four two-year regional branches of the University of South Carolina, and the four four-year campuses of the University of South Carolina. Although the four-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina at Aiken, Upstate, and Beaufort were pledged two years ago to discontinue the offering of all associate degree programs not later than academic year 2005-2006, USC-Beaufort has been permitted to continue to offer the associate of arts/associate of science degree program at the military bases in Beaufort, owing to a request from the military leadership in the Beaufort area and because of an agreement brokered by the Commission on Higher Education. All other associate degrees in public institutions of higher education in the state are, however, at

the time of this report only offered in two-year institutions with the sole exception of the AA/AS at Fort Jackson offered by USC-Columbia. However, associate degree programs at USC-Aiken and USC-Upstate will continue to have graduates until the final students in their associate degrees in nursing complete their studies during 2007.

The associate degree programs in the state's public institutions were evaluated using Fall 2005 enrollment data and academic year 2004-2005 graduation and employment data. Seven associate degree programs in the two-year USC campuses, four associate degree programs in the four-year USC campuses, and 301 associate degree programs in the technical college system were evaluated. The four associate degree programs which were in 2004-2005 still producing graduates in the four four-year campuses of USC included: 1) the Associate Degree in Nursing at USC-Aiken (to have all files closed by Spring 2006); 2) the Associate Degree in Nursing at USC-Upstate (to have all files closed by Fall 2007); 3) the Associate in Arts degree in Beaufort's military locations by USC-Beaufort; and 4) the Associate in Arts degree (USC-Columbia at Fort Jackson.)

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 during the past three years. Notwithstanding the charters of the USC two-year regional campuses, the likelihood that additional two-year programs will be opened at any of them is small, since 1) USC increasingly views these campuses as part of a larger concept (called "Palmetto College") which is to work with USC-Columbia for delivery of an array of programs; and 2) the Technical College System holds the view that it must pre-approve all new two-year degree programs leading to immediate employment.

General Analysis of the Programs of Study in the USC System

All USC regional campuses designated as "two-year," as well as USC-Beaufort (approved for four-year status in September 2002 by the CHE), and USC-Columbia at Fort Jackson, continue to offer Associate of Arts/Associate of Science degree programs. USC-Beaufort's approval as a four-year institution originally had carried with it a proviso that the AA/AS would be eliminated simultaneously with the institution's initiation of four-year programming. However, in 2004, in response to demand from military officials and their dependents in Beaufort and USC-Beaufort's request to continue the program, the Commission approved amending this position for the benefit of that population.

In February 1998, in response to the requirements of Act 359 and to earlier concerns about the perceived inappropriateness of one of the state's three research institutions offering an associate degree, USC-Columbia requested and received approval to revise its mission statement so that its ongoing offering of the Associate of Arts degree

program at Fort Jackson would be officially included as part of its institutional mission. However, enrollment and graduation data demonstrate (see **Table 1**) that this program is very small. Because it is neither large in numbers nor central to the mission of the state's comprehensive *research* university, the AA/AS at Fort Jackson would be more appropriately offered by a two-year institution, either USC-Sumter or Midlands Technical College. Staff suggested this consideration for several years.

USC-Beaufort's continued offering of the AA/AS degree presents a special case. Data from that institution show that the number of AA/AS associate degree students is still reported as a single category of degree recipients (N=56) at an institution that has only recently assumed baccalaureate degree-granting responsibilities.

Over the past four years the numbers of graduates from the AA/AS programs in the University of South Carolina system have varied considerably, as Table 1 shows. The self-reported data from the institution, corroborated by the CHEMIS staff at the Commission, shows that for 2004-2005 three of the six USC campuses offering the AA/AS program have experienced decreases in graduates for 2004-2005 over the 2003-2004 academic year. The three campuses experiencing increases in graduates are all two-year regional campuses. The total number of AA/AS recipients for the system has decreased 4.7 percent from 2003-04 to 2004-2005, but among the USC two-year regional campuses there has been an increase of 2.8%.

Completion of an AA/AS degree prior to transferring to a four-year institution has been shown to be a factor in increasing the odds that a person will complete a baccalaureate degree. That fact, linked with students' eligibility for the Legislative Tuition Assistance Program while working toward their AA/AS, suggests that the two-year USC regional campuses should consider preparation of a master plan to increase the numbers of AA/AS degree recipients each year for the next decade. This suggestion was made in this report for each of the past two years, but has thus not elicited action from the University. The suggestion is worthy of reiteration, nonetheless, both as a service to the individual students affected and by the value that increased numbers of baccalaureate-seeking students mean for the state's economic and civic development.

Table 1
USC-System AA/AS Program Graduates
1999-00 2000-01 2001-02 2002-03 2003-04 2004-05

4-Year:						
USC-Columbia (Ft. Jackson)	12	14	19	14	12	4
USC-Beaufort	87	63	72	79	73	56
SUB-TOTAL	99	77	91	93	85	60
 2-Year:						
USC-Lancaster	74	86	96	81	69	71
USC-Salkehatchie	93	83	90	80	84	92
USC-Sumter	152	160	161	119	70	74
USC-Union	51	35	52	45	55	49
SUB-TOTAL	370	364	399	325	278	286
 TOTAL	 469	 441	 490	 418	 363	 346

Source: USC annual reports on associate degree data

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

The Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) was terminated at two four-year campuses of the University. USC-Upstate terminated its associate degree program in nursing at the end of Spring Semester 2004, and USC-Aiken terminated its associate degree program in nursing at the end of Fall Semester 2005. In each case, however, there will continue to be graduates shown in this report and the report next year, since students already in the pipeline must necessarily be given the opportunity to complete their program of study.

The two-year campuses of the USC System present another important avenue for the promotion of higher education opportunity in South Carolina. Three of the four of these two-year regional campuses are found in communities where no technical college is neither nor found nearby. These three campuses are USC-Lancaster, USC-Salkehatchie, and USC-Union.

Of these three, only USC-Lancaster offers occupationally-specific degree programs, although neither the authorizing legislation nor Act 359 prohibits the others from offering occupational degrees. The occupational programs at USC-Lancaster are nursing, criminal justice, and business. Graduates from the occupationally-specific two-

year programs at USC-Lancaster, USC-Aiken, and USC-Upstate are listed below for 2004-05:

Table 2
USC System Graduates of Two-Year Occupationally-Specific
Programs of Study
(Academic Year 2004-2005)

	Nursing	Criminal Justice	Business
USC-Aiken	49	---	---
USC-Lancaster	12	10	27
USC-Upstate	41	---	---

Two years ago, this annual report suggested the inclusion-or, in the case of Lancaster, the increase of-two-year occupationally-related degree programs in the curricula of the three remaining two-year regional USC campuses located in communities where no technical college is located (i.e., Lancaster, Union, and Salkehatchie) as an initiative to spur economic development in those communities. The State Technical College System's interprets state statutes to require that any new Technical degree programs to be offered by any public institution be approved by the State Technical College System. This interpretation has been unchallenged by the University of South Carolina. Thus, these two system's views on the subject increase for a USC two-year regional campus to offer new associate degree programs, other than those already on the books.

The State Technical College System responded to last year's request on this item by noting the efforts the technical colleges are making to meet needs of residents and businesses in regions where USC two-year campuses exist. That response notes new physical facilities leased or to be built. The intent of the Commission's request was to save tax payers resources and prevent unnecessary duplication of properties, buildings, faculty, and other resources by developing cooperative programming.

USC-Columbia did not respond to last year's request. It is planning to offer a USC-Columbia based B.S.N.-option at USC-Salkehatchie. Again, while that option is interesting and commendable, this programmatic response does not address the concern of lack of active collaboration between the Technical College System and the USC-System to offer two-year technical programs of study collaborating on USC two-year campuses.

Regardless of the current lack of interest by the two systems or their affiliated institutional campuses in offering joint degree programs, the counties served by USC two-year regional campuses are in need of technical degree programs and there is no need to establish unnecessarily duplicative buildings for a neighboring technical college to offer coursework that

could be offered by joint agreement at the University campus. Cooperation between the two systems could be accomplished if there were sufficient political will to do so. A dialogue between the State Tech and USC systems should begin to establish a legal, functional, and administrative arrangement to promote in Union, Salkehatchie/Allendale, and Lancaster an organizational basis for wide-ranging cooperation for planning and implementing technical college programs on the two-year regional campuses.

Summary of USC System Offerings in Associate Degrees

Graduation rates 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, but the system is producing fewer graduates with these degrees than in the recent past. The three occupational programs at USC-Lancaster are producing relatively small numbers of graduates, which in part reflects the relatively sparse population of the area served.

The institutional decisions taken at USC-Upstate and USC-Aiken to cease to offer the associate degree in nursing have resulted in the transfer of these programs to neighboring technical colleges. Plans for enrollments and degree completions in the two new ADN programs at the technical colleges suggest that each of these area programs will produce more graduates than their predecessor programs had produced.

General Analysis of Associate Degree Programs in the Technical Colleges

A summary of the number of programs evaluated over the past 23 years in various categories at the technical colleges is found below.

Table 3
Twenty-three Year Summary
Annual Associate Degree Program Evaluation
In the Technical Colleges

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
2001	269	22	9	7	307
2002	294	26	10	2	332
2003	297	19	14	1	331
2004	265	22	11	5	303
2005	276	13	8	4	301

In the data for the current annual report, 13(4.3%) programs of study out of a total of 301 which were analyzed at the technical colleges are on probation. By comparison, last year's report showed a total of 22 degree programs on probation; and the previous year 19 programs were on probation. It should be noted that the current reporting period has the lowest number and percentage of programs found as "noncompliant" in the entire history of this report. For this reporting year, the specific programs (by degree and institution) on probation can be found in **Table 6**.

Engineering and Industrial Technology programs.

In last year's report, Engineering Technology programs were at the top of the categorical list of programs on probation (N=10) with Industrial Technology programs second (N=7). While Engineering remains at the top of the probation category with five (5) programs on probation, and the Industrial Technology programs remain second with four (4), and these two categories of programs account for 69.2% of all associate degree programs on probation, they also account for 81.8% of the programs moving from "Probation" to "Good." Fewer programs are on probation in Health (N=2), Public Service (N=1) and Business (N=1).

Given the commendable reduction in the number of programs on probation, especially those in the Engineering and Industrial Technology areas, it is also noteworthy that the State Technical College System included in its report to the Commission last year a short analysis of initiatives undertaken to address the small numbers of students in these important programs. These initiatives may be accurately summarized as follows: 1) elimination of excess course credits from some programs; 2) consolidation of programs which are very similar in curricular requirements; 3) efforts to provide incentives to major in Engineering Technology in a technical college by recruiting high school students to take engineering technology coursework (or pre-engineering technology prerequisites) while still in high school and receive dual credit for these courses. The short term results appear to be encouraging and studied for further analysis in the next several reporting periods.

In past reports, the Commission has suggested that a series of steps might help alleviate the problem of low enrollment in these important areas. Through the auspices of the EEDA, such projects as Project Lead the Way are gaining greater visibility at the same time that initiatives like the Career Clusters curricula are exposing more secondary and middle school students to technical careers.

The Technical College System should be congratulated on its initiatives in studying questions related to Engineering Technology over the past year and encouraged to develop a system plan in cooperation and dialogue with public four-year institutions with engineering technology-related programs to which associate degree graduates in the field of engineering technology can transfer with ease. Especially given the responsibility of higher education for economic development efforts of the state as found in the provisions of the Education and Economic Development Act of 2005, the State Technical College System, the relevant four-year public institutions, and the Commission itself should be attentive to this need work together to develop a comprehensive approach to meet the needs of the state.

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

The AA/AS is the transfer degree program in the public two-year institutions that has as its sole reason for existence the preparation of students for transfer into

baccalaureate programs. In South Carolina, AA/AS programs were begun in the 1970s in response to the needs of persons who for reasons of finance, geography, and/or historical under-representation in higher education (especially mature students, women, and minorities) found it much more possible to begin a baccalaureate degree program by taking the first two years of coursework at a technical college.

In 1998, for the first time, the nine technical colleges with the most recently approved AA/AS programs had their programs reviewed for productivity. Only in the reports of 1998, 2001, and 2002 (and, in the latter two reports, only on a technicality) did one of the 16 technical colleges fail to meet the productivity standards for the AA/AS.

For this reporting year, **all** AA/AS programs in the Technical College System are in the “good” category. Denmark Technical College experienced the greatest reduction in AA/AS graduates, going from 45 graduates in 2004 to 11(-75%) in 2005. Although the number of graduates in 2004 appears to be unusually high, the 11 graduates in 2005 are also significantly fewer (-45%) than the 20 graduates in 2003. If this trend continues, Denmark Tech in the near future could find itself at risk of not meeting productivity standards for these degrees. Likewise, although Orangeburg-Calhoun met the productivity standards in 2005, there appears to be an anomaly between AA/AS enrollments and graduates. As an institution, Orangeburg-Calhoun is the eleventh largest of the 16 technical colleges. In recent years, it has had robust enrollments in the AA/AS program (e.g., Fall 2002=99; Fall 2003=101; Fall 2004=92; Fall 2005=141), but in the past three years it has graduated fewer students (N=26; three-year average=8.66) than several smaller institutions in the system, including the smallest technical college in the system (N=36; three-year average=12). Especially in the period of the EEDA legislation, these data suggest that the Orangeburg region could benefit by the College’s development of a plan with measurable goals focused on graduating and transferring larger numbers of AA/AS students. **Table 4** shows the AA/AS graduate numbers for the technical colleges for the last four years.

Table 4

Technical College System AA/AS Graduates:

	<u>Year</u>			
	2005	2004	2003	2002
Technical College				
Aiken Tech	36	26	28	31
Central Carolina	29	36	31	28
Denmark	11	45	20	22
Florence-Darlington	61	76	56	58
Greenville	155	177	155	136
Horry-Georgetown	72	73	66	71
Midlands	249	223	228	200
Northeastern	27	30	18	24
Orangeburg-Calhoun	10	5	11	9
Piedmont	52	79	54	52
Spartanburg Community College*	69	79	61	42
Lowcountry	34	12	13	16
Tri-County	75	73	54	66
Trident	290	315	378	328
Williamsburg	16	12	8	13
York	37	26	29	21
TOTAL	1223	1287	1206	1117

*Formerly Spartanburg Technical College

In summary, the AA/AS programs in the Technical College System have been a great success in opening up the possibilities of a four-year degree to many South Carolinians. The data for 2004-2005 show that (the programs continue to produce a significant number of graduates) although there was a slight decrease (5%) of completions in the AA/AS programs of the Technical College system over the completions for 2003-2004.

The sole reason for the AA/AS is preparation for the baccalaureate degree completion. Because graduating with an AA/AS is financially efficient for students and because attainment of a baccalaureate degree after completing the AA/AS is so important to economic resources, all technical colleges should work to increase numbers of AA/AS graduates virtually every year.

The Importance of the Associate Degree Nursing Programs

For the past several years, this report has pointed out two issues associated with the nursing profession. The first of these relates to professional identity, centered on whether the associate or baccalaureate degree should be required for entry-level as a professional nurse, i.e., “Registered Nurse” (R.N.) Thus far, the South Carolina labor market has found both degrees desirable for initial employment and, in many employment settings, virtually indistinguishable in duties and in compensation. The associate degree-prepared graduates in South Carolina, as in many other states, account for about two-thirds of all first-time nursing graduates eligible to take the NCLEX examination to practice as Registered Nurses. The utility of the Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) is such that the number of technical colleges offering it continues to grow.

The second issue is the extent to which the state’s higher education associate degree programs in nursing are assisting in meeting state employers’ needs for a well-educated workforce in sufficient numbers to provide safe care in hospitals and other healthcare settings. To provide the optimal numbers of associate degree nursing graduates in the shortest possible time will require sustained commitment at each institution to enroll and graduate increasingly larger numbers of nurses annually. Historically, the associate degree programs have been the largest providers of new Registered Nurses.

Three years ago, the report on the graduates of the technical colleges' eleven ADN programs for the reporting year (2001-2002) showed a *decrease* of 3.6% over the previous year’s graduation numbers. In the following year (2002-2003), there was a 6% *increase* of graduates from the 11 programs over the 2001-2002 academic year. In 2003-2004 there was an even higher annual *increase* over the 2002-2003 year (+ 22.7%). In this year’s report, the increase continues (5.2%). **(See Table 5.) Since 2001-2002, there has been a total increase of 28% in the annual number of ADN graduates noted in this report***. The Technical College System and its constituent nursing programs are to be congratulated on their ability to increase graduations so quickly in this vital area of healthcare.

Since the closing of the USC-Aiken and USC-Upstate associate degree programs in nursing, the USC-Lancaster ADN program has become the sole associate degree in nursing in the state outside the technical college system. Two more associate degree programs have been added in the Technical College system (i.e., Spartanburg Community College and Aiken Technical College). Both new technical college programs are planning to enroll larger numbers of students than their now-defunct area predecessors had done in the past. The effect of these increased enrollments and graduations in existing associate degree nursing programs has led to a powerful systemic response to the in 2001 call to produce more first-time Registered Nurses.

* While not a subject of the current reporting period, the most recent year of data shows a further percentage increases ADN graduates over 2004-2005.

Table 5
Total Number of Graduates from Technical Colleges’
Associate Degree in Nursing Programs for Years
2000-2001 through 2004-2005

2000-2001	725
2001-2002	706
2002-2003	748
2003-2004	918
2004-2005	968

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 have been recommended by the State Technical College System for placement in good standing. In this group there were six programs in Engineering Technology, three programs in Industrial Technology and one program each in Business, and Health Technology. The degrees and institutional locales of all the programs moving from Probation to Good are found below in Table 6.

Table 6
Degree Programs Returning to
“Good” Status from “Probation” 2004-2005

Change all these below

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Denmark Technical College	ENGR	Electro-mechanical Engineering Technology
Florence-Darlington Technical College	ENGR	Engineering Graphics Technology
Florence-Darlington Technical College	IND	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning Technology
Midlands Technical College	ENGR	Civil Engineering Technology
Northeastern Technical College	BUS	Office Systems Technology
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	ENGR	Electronics Engineering Technology
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	HEA	Respiratory Care
Spartanburg Technical College	ENGR	Engineering Graphics Technology
Tri-County Technical College	ENGR	Tri-County Technical College
Tri-County Technical College	IND	Radio & Television Broadcasting
York Technical College	IND	Automotive Technology

Tabular Analysis of Associate Degree Programs

Tables 7, 8, and 9 provide a succinct quantitative analysis of the programs of the technical colleges for this period which are on probation, or suspension, or have been cancelled.

Table 7
Associate Degree Programs on Probation
in Fall 2005

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Central Carolina Technical College	ENGR	Civil Engineering Technology
Denmark Technical College	IND	Electronics Technology
Florence-Darlington Technical College	ENGR	Civil Engineering Technology
Florence-Darlington Technical College	HEA	Medical Laboratory Technology
Florence-Darlington Technical College	IND	Machine Tool Technology
Midlands Technical College	ENGR	Engineering Design Technology
Midlands Technical College	IND	Automotive Technology
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	PSER	Criminal Justice Technology
Trident Technical College	ENGR	Civil Engineering Technology
Trident Technical College	ENGR	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Trident Technical College	HEA	Occupational Therapy Assistant
Trident Technical College	IND	Aircraft Maintenance Technology
Williamsburg Technical College	BUS	Office Systems Technology

Table 8

**Associate Degree Programs On Suspension in 2005
(or Continued for 2nd or 3rd Year Suspension)**

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
First Year:		
Aiken Technical College	IND	Machine Tool Technology
Technical College of the Lowcountry	IND	Building Construction Technology
Second Year:		
Aiken Technical College	ENGR	Computer Engineering Technology
Greenville Technical College	IND	Computer Electronics Technology
Third Year:		
Aiken Technical College	ENGR	Electro-mechanical Engineering Technology
Central Carolina Technical College	BUS	Marketing
Midlands Technical College	HEA	Pharmacy Technology
Spartanburg Technical College	PSER	Interpreting

Table 9

Associate Degrees Cancelled In Fall 2005

<u>College</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Program</u>
Greenville Technical College	ENGR	Environmental Health & Safety Management
Midlands Technical College	ENGR	Mechanical Engineering Technology
Midlands Technical College	BUS	Court Reporting
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	ENGR	Engineering Graphics Technology

Summary

All 11 of the associate degree programs in the University of South Carolina system and 276 (91.7%) of the 301 technical college programs evaluated for this report meet the “good” status requirements for this reporting year.

The numerical and percentage growth in recent years of the graduates of the Technical College System’s ADN nursing programs is an encouraging sign in a period of nursing shortage. If this trend can be sustained for the next ten years, it should do much to alleviate—if not remove for the time being—the perception of unmet demand for Registered Nurses. To know when the numbers of nursing graduates eligible to become Registered Nurses is approaching a satisfactory number to meet demand, South Carolina needs to have much more data than is currently available to measure demand. This is especially true for nursing demand emanating from hospitals, which continue to employ approximately two-thirds of all Registered Nurses in South Carolina.

As the chief vehicle for potentially seamless transition from associate to baccalaureate degree program transfer, the AA/AS programs in the state’s public two-year institutions are critical in efforts to meet South Carolina’s needs for an increasingly baccalaureate-educated citizenry in order to attract economic development. Although both the technical colleges and the USC regional two-year campuses have sufficient enrollments in these programs, greater effort should be focused on retention and graduation of students from the AA/AS program for purposes of transfer into baccalaureate programs within the state.

Finally, the state’s technical colleges should be commended for the overall decrease in the number of programs on probation overall and the sharp decrease in Engineering and Industrial Technology programs on probation.

Recommendations

The staff recommends that the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing commend favorably to the Commission this report’s designation of programs for the current reporting year as shown in **Tables 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9**. Because of the importance of certain associate degree programs to economic development in South Carolina, the staff further recommends that

- the Technical College System and two-year regional USC campuses be requested to develop plans for both their systems and individual institutions to address **increasing** enrollments and degree completions in AA/AS programs, as well as transfer to four-year institutions from the AA/AS transfer programs.

- the State Technical College system be requested to continue to develop a system plan for improving academic preparation for students interested in Engineering Technology programs; for linking EEDA elements for student recruitment; and for retaining of students through graduation and transfer to related in-state four-year programs of study; and
- the State Technical College System and the USC two-year Regional Campuses be requested to develop a cooperative and comprehensive statewide plan to offer non-duplicative, occupationally-related associate degree programs at USC-Lancaster, USC-Salkehatchie, and USC-Union as work-force and economic development needs suggest would be appropriate; and
- USC-Columbia be requested to consider transferring the AA/AS program at Fort Jackson either to USC-Sumter or Midlands Technical College and simultaneously request elimination of the AA/AS offering from its mission statement.