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Memorandum

TO: Chair Tim Hofferth and Members, SC Commission on Higher Education
FROM: Chair Terrye Seckinger and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of Annual Evaluation of Associate Degree Programs FY 2013-2014

Background

The *South Carolina Master Plan for Higher Education (1979)*¹ 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 performance indicators including time to degree and graduates' first-time passing rates on professional licensure examinations². This edition of the annual evaluation of associate degree programs provides an assessment of academic program performance across all disciplines during the 2013-2014 academic year for both the South Carolina Technical College System and the University of South Carolina Two Year Campuses. The Commission on Higher Education provides a general analysis of program enrollment, completions, and placement rates.

The purposes of this report remain relevant as part of the focus of both state and national governments on institutional accountability. The language of Act 359 maintained the purposes of this annual review as they had been articulated in earlier legislation and Commission policy as follows:

1. to ensure that programs demonstrate responsiveness to employment trends and meet minimum standards of enrollment, graduation, and placement.
2. to identify programs which need to be strengthened.

The purpose of this report is to provide insight into specific programs which are *exceptionally achieving* or are *underperforming* in relationship to the program criteria outlined below. 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 to this review process:

¹ South Carolina Master Plan for Higher Education. South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 1979. 24, 129.

² South Carolina, General Assembly. "S*1195 (Rat #0368, Act #0359 of 1996) General Bill." 1995-96 Bill 1195. May 20, 1996. Accessed December 23, 2014. http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess111_1995-1996/bills/1195.htm

1. Each program must produce at least six (6) 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 (16) students who generate 12 (12) full-time equivalents.
3. At least fifty percent (50%) 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 these criteria must be cancelled, suspended, or placed on probation unless their continuation is justified to the Commission. Justification for programs may take into consideration factors such as manpower requirements, funding, and employment “stop outs” of students. When a degree program is placed on probation, the institution may continue to offer it 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 temporarily discontinue the enrollment of new students in the program until the institution and program leadership can devise a plan for improvement.

Moreover, three programs—General Technology, Vocational-Technical Education, and General Engineering Technology—are provided exceptions due to the nature and intent of the programs. The Associate in General Technology and the Associate in Applied Science with a major in General Engineering Technology are subject to the criterion that states, “At least fifty percent (50%) 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.” The Associate in Applied Science in Vocational-Technical Education is assigned a status of *Good-EX* which means it is excluded from all program evaluation criteria.

Distribution of Associate Degree Programs by System

For this reporting period, associate degree programs exist in all 16 technical colleges and the Two Year Campuses of the University of South Carolina. In addition, associate degrees are offered by USC Columbia at Fort Jackson and by USC Beaufort³ for military only⁴.

This current assessment of associate degree programs in the state’s public institutions relies on academic year 2013-2014 graduation and employment data in addition to Fall 2014 enrollment data. Evaluation encompasses 314 associate degree programs in the technical college system, and nine associate degree programs in the USC System. New associate degree programs implemented within the past three years are excluded from this analysis.

I. South Carolina Technical College System

The South Carolina Technical College System is comprised of 16 colleges that focuses on accessibility, affordability, and workforce relevance for the students of the state of South Carolina. The South Carolina Technical College System remains the largest educator of undergraduates in the state with approximately

³ “Military Admissions” *University of South Carolina Beaufort*, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.uscb.edu/admissions/how-to-apply/military/>

⁴ “Fort Jackson” *Palmetto College of University of South Carolina*, accessed August 22, 2017,

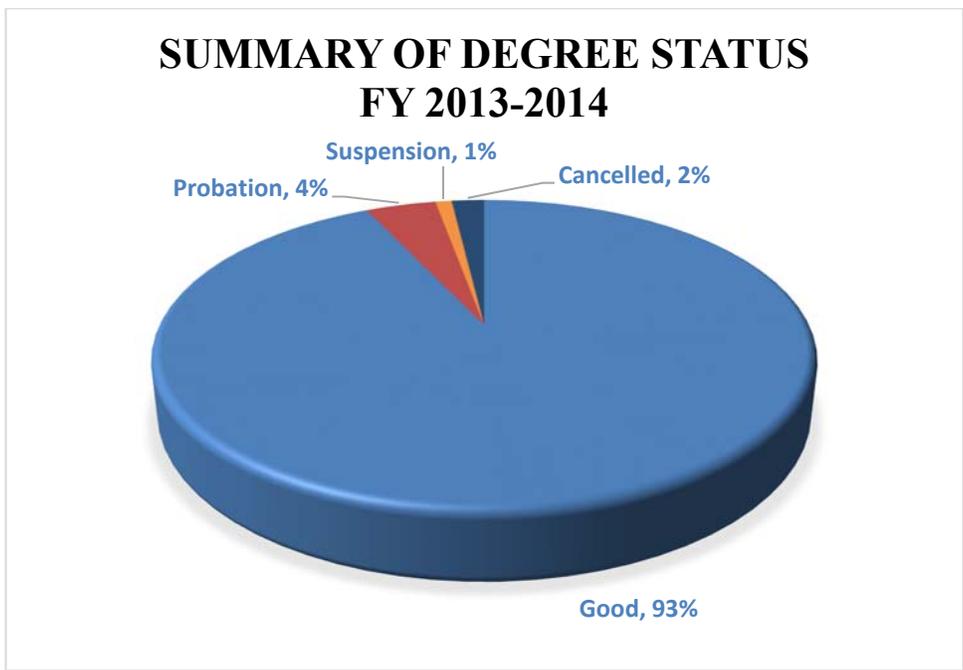
http://www.sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/palmetto_college/internal/current_students/fort_jackson/

300 associate degree programs and a multitude of articulation agreements that span institutions and majors. Given the sheer numbers of programs and articulation agreements that encompass every region of the state, the South Carolina Technical College System is actively fulfilling its mission of “providing learning opportunities that promote the economic and human resource development of the state”⁵.

- **Analysis of Associate Program Status**

Across the South Carolina Technical System only thirteen programs are on probation (4%), three are suspended (1%), and six are cancelled (2%). South Carolina Technical College System programs overwhelmingly (93%) meet the evaluation criteria set forth by Act 359 (See Graph 1).

Graph 1



For fiscal year 2013-2014, six of the 16 colleges in the South Carolina Technical College System have programs that are all in good standing: Central Carolina Technical College, Florence-Darlington Technical College, Horry-Georgetown Technical College, Northeastern Technical College, Trident Technical College and York Technical College. Notably, Trident Technical College offered 31 programs that were eligible for evaluation—the second highest behind Greenville Technical College—and every program has the *Good* designation based upon the aforementioned criterion.

In fiscal year 2012-2013 the South Carolina Technical System had seven programs on probation; two programs under suspension; and one program cancelled. Although the number of programs on probation, under suspension and cancelled have risen, so has the number of programs offered by the system.

For fiscal year 2013-2014 there were 12 new programs placed on probationary status. Of the 12 programs four (33%) were from the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) cluster with HEA

⁵ “About Us” *South Carolina Technical College System*, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.sctechsystem.com/about-us/index.html>

(Health) and MFG (Manufacturing) with three (25%) programs each (See Table 1). The other two programs were in the Finance cluster and the Human Services cluster. Aiken Technical College had the highest number of new programs on probationary status—three—with Tri-County Technical College and Piedmont Technical College having two new programs on probationary status each.

There are 13 programs, total, on probationary status. Twelve of the programs are new to probationary status (see **Table 1**) with Marketing of Aiken Technical College in *Prob-3* status. *Prob-3* means that the program is in its third year of probation and can still accept students at this time. There are three programs entering their first year of suspension which prohibits them from accepting additional students at this time. Greenville Technical College has two programs—Biotechnology and Geomatics Technology—and Williamsburg Technical College has the third program, Administrative Office Technology. Three programs have restored *Good* status after being *Probation* status for fiscal year 2012-2013. The programs are as follows: Civil Engineering Technology (Trident Technical College), Criminal Justice Technology (Greenville Technical College) and Early Care and Education (Aiken Technical College).

Table 1

Degree Programs Placed on Probation (Prob-1 Status)

Cluster	Program Title	College
Finance	Accounting	Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College
Health Science	Radiologic Technology	Aiken Technical College
Health Science	Cardiovascular Technology	Piedmont Technical College
Health Science	Respiratory Care	Piedmont Technical College
Science, Technology Engineering, and Math	Civil Engineering Technology	Midlands Technical College
Science, Technology Engineering, and Math	Civil Engineering Technology	Technical College of the Lowcountry
Science, Technology Engineering, and Math	Electronics Engineering Technology	Aiken Technical College
Manufacturing	Manufacturing Management and Leadership	Tri-County Technical College
Science, Technology Engineering, and Math	Radiation Protection Technology	Spartanburg Community College
Manufacturing	Machine Tool Technology	Tri-County Technical College
Manufacturing	Industrial Maintenance Technology	Greenville Technical College
Human Services	Human Services	Aiken Technical College

- **High Graduate Producing Programs**

The South Carolina Technical College System awarded more than 9,300 associate degrees in fiscal year 2014—fulfilling its mission of providing learning opportunities to South Carolina’s students. Eleven of the 16 South Carolina Technical System Colleges increased their number of graduates from fiscal year 2012-2013 to fiscal year 2013- 2014. Most notable is Tri-County Technical College which increased its number of graduate awards from 650 to 993—an increase of nearly 53%.

Given the sheer numbers of students graduating from the South Carolina Technical College System it is beneficial to explore which programs are producing the most graduates at each college. This aspect lends itself to the South Carolina Technical College System mission of fulfilling workforce needs⁶.

Table 2

Total Graduates: Job or Continued Education Placement

College	Total Number of Graduate Awards (2014)	Percentage of Graduate Placements in Major Related Job or Continuing Education
Aiken Technical College	324	87
Central Carolina Technical College	317	91
Denmark Technical College	82	85
Florence-Darlington Technical College	506	86
Greenville Technical College	1209	85
Horry-Georgetown Technical College	981	93
Midlands Technical College	1067	86
Northeastern Technical College	144	96
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	223	97
Piedmont Technical College	623	86
Spartanburg Community College	546	86
Technical College of the Lowcountry	197	98
Tri-County Technical College	993	85
Trident Technical College	1612	89
Williamsburg Technical College	64	89
York County Technical College	470	95

- **Associate Degree of Nursing**

According to the Department of Employment and Workforce’s Dashboard, of the *Top Occupations Advertised Online* Nursing is the number one job advertised in the state with over 4,100 postings online as of January 22, 2017⁷. This notable figure overshadows the second most advertised industry (First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers) by over 2100 postings. The South Carolina Technical College System appears to be responsive to workforce needs with over 1300 students graduating from the Nursing discipline. Moreover, in eight of the 16 colleges nursing was one of the top two producing programs.

- **South Carolina Transfer and Articulation Center (SC TRAC)**

In conjunction with the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and South Carolina’s public four-year institutions, the South Carolina Technical College System is able to offer students a comprehensive

⁶ “About Us,” *South Carolina Technical System*, accessed on February 19, 2017, <http://www.sctechsystem.com/about-us/index.html>

⁷ “SC Works Online Services” *South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce*, Accessed January 22, 2017, https://jobs.scworks.org/vosnet/dashboards/defaultana.aspx?menuid=MENU_START_PAGE_SERVICES_ANA&apane=MENU_GROUP_LMI_CUR&pu=1&plang=E

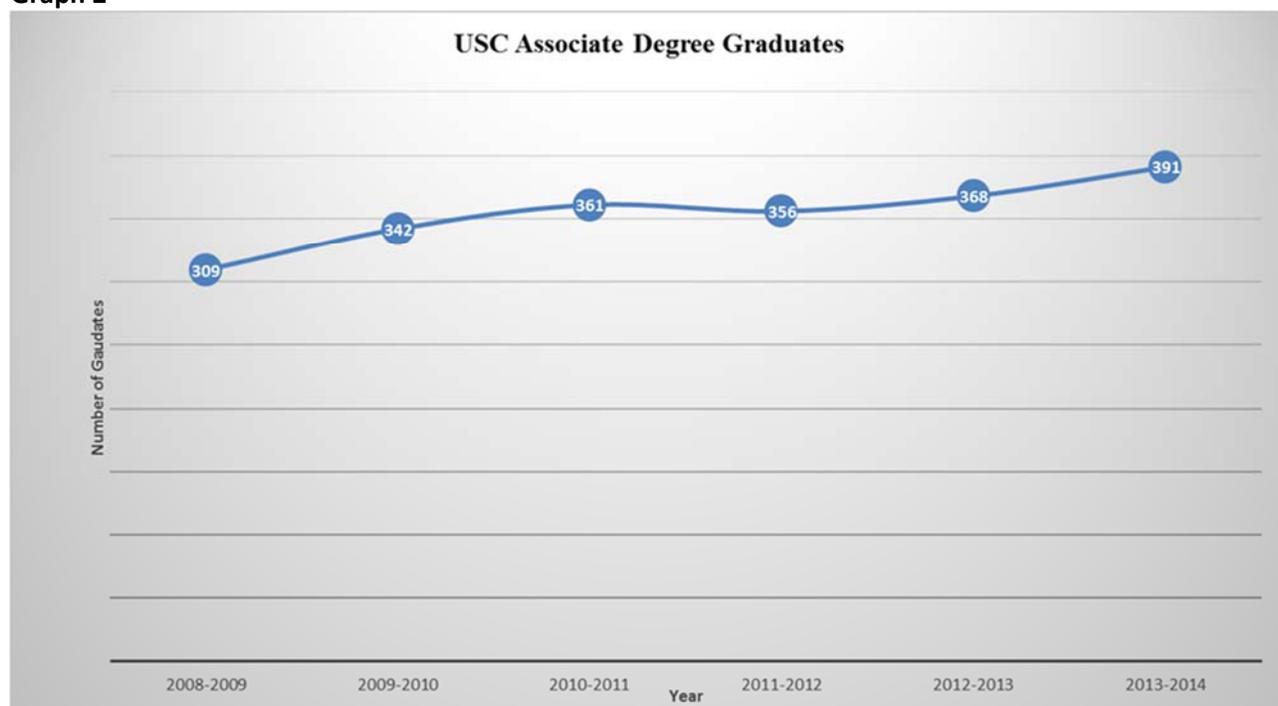
website that allows them to explore topics such as articulation agreements, transfer events, and the transfer processes⁸. Additionally, the website allows for an interactive system that guides students through a transcript review process that indicates which credit hours are accepted at specific institutions and major programs of study. This website assists students in mapping their curriculum from the South Carolina Technical College System to the states' public four-year institutions. This process helps students to maximize their time at the technical college while preparing them to transfer into a public four-year university with information and support.

SC Trac further assists students by offering information about course and exam equivalencies, policies on statewide transfer information as well as a *college profile* that provides students with a snapshot of institutions that they may be interested in attending.

II. Two Year Campuses of the University of South Carolina System

The University of South Carolina Two Year Campuses are USC Salkehatchie, USC Sumter, USC Union, and USC Lancaster. Additionally, USC Beaufort and USC Fort Jackson offer associate degrees for military personnel and their dependents. All of the Two Year campuses of USC offer the General Arts and Sciences degrees. USC Lancaster also offers General Business, Nursing, and Criminal Justice.

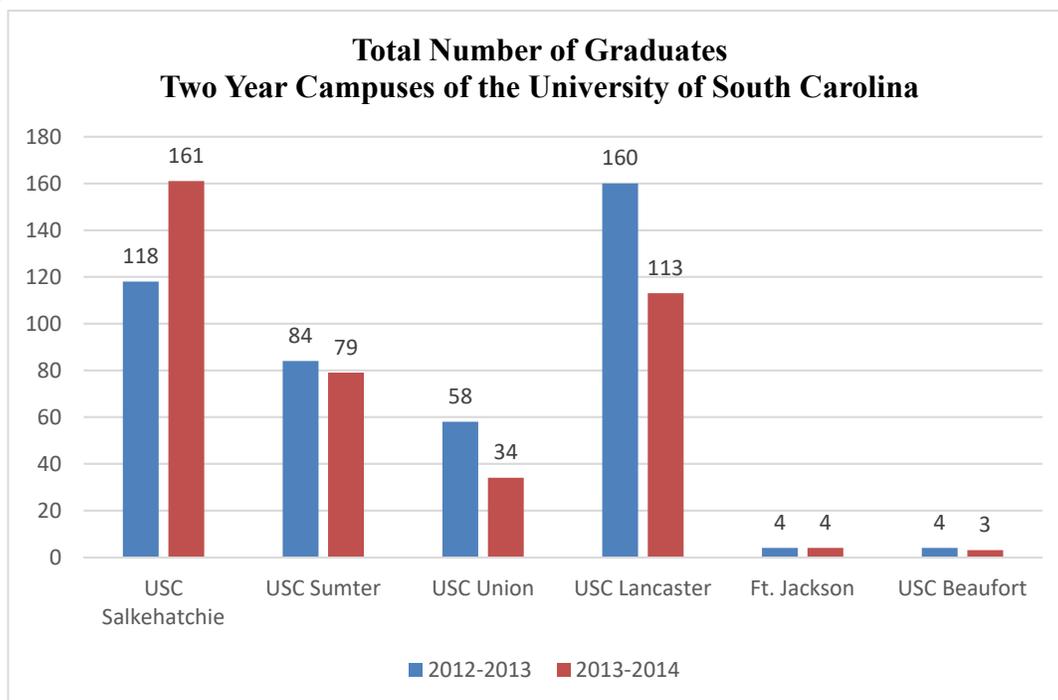
Graph 2



Over the past five years the USC Two Year campuses have experienced a modest yet steady increase in the number of graduates produced. With 391 graduates in 2014 (Graph 2), the Two Year campuses of the University of South Carolina have increased their number of graduates by 82 students in five years, nearly 21%. The Fort Jackson and USC Beaufort programs graduate much lower numbers than the overall Two Year Campus of University of South Carolina campuses (Graph 3).

⁸"South Carolina Transfer and Articulation Center," *SC Trac*, accessed on January 25, 2017, <https://www.sctrac.org>

Graph 3



The Fort Jackson campus exists to serve active-duty military personnel, family members of active duty military personnel, Department of Defense civilian employees, National Guard members, reservists, and veterans⁹. Although individuals who are not in the military can enroll into courses at this site, they cannot earn the associate degree from this site.

USC Salkehatchie experienced a significant increase of students which offset the overall decline that took place on the other three Two Year campuses. With an impressive 36.4% increase in graduates in one year, USC Salkehatchie’s achievement was able to continue a trend of increased graduates. Alternatively, USC Lancaster experienced the largest drop in graduates in one year with a 29.4% decrease from the previous year’s reporting period. USC Sumter and USC Union also lost a small number of graduates—five and 24 students, respectively.

In addition to the traditional associate degree programs offered at the Two Year campuses of USC, there is also the Palmetto College. Palmetto College’s purpose “... is to make a USC college education convenient and accessible to everyone. We do this through online learning programs and two-year campuses throughout the state that let students start their education wherever they are, without having to relocate or commute”¹⁰. This program allows its students to pursue their first 45 credit hours at one of the Two Year campuses—USC Lancaster, USC Salkehatchie, USC Sumter, or USC Union—and finish the remainder of the degree through one of USC’s four-year institutions. USC offers a number of bachelor’s degree programs through the Two Year campuses via the Palmetto College program. Depending upon the program, students can receive their degree from any one of the comprehensive institutions (Table 3)

⁹ “Fort Jackson” *Palmetto College of University of South Carolina*, accessed August 22, 2017, http://www.sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/palmetto_college/internal/current_students/fort_jackson/
¹⁰ “About Us,” *University of South Carolina, Two Year Campus of University of South Carolina*, accessed on August 21, 2017, http://sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/palmetto_college/about/index.php

Table 3**Two Year Campus of University of South Carolina Programs and Degree Granting Institution**

Program	Degree Granting Institution
Business Administration, Management	USC Aiken
Business Administration, Accounting	USC Aiken
Criminal Justice	USC Upstate
Elementary Education	USC Columbia
Health Informatics	USC Upstate
Health Promotion	USC Beaufort
Hospitality Management	USC Beaufort
Human Services	USC Beaufort
Information Management and Systems	USC Upstate
Information Science	USC Columbia
Liberal Studies	USC Columbia
Nursing	USC Upstate
Organizational Leadership	USC Columbia
Special Education	USC Aiken

III. Summary and Recommendations

Overall, the South Carolina Technical College System as well as the University of South Carolina Two Year campuses have been fulfilling the missions of their respective organizations by offering educational opportunities to the citizens of South Carolina. The South Carolina Technical College system graduated 9,317 students from its campuses in fiscal year 2013-2014 with only 12 programs failing to meet the productivity criterion outlined in the *Background* section of this report. The success of the programs as well as the high placement rates in related jobs and continuing education would indicate that the South Carolina Technical College System’s campuses have managed to create educational environments where their students can thrive and experience success.

In addition, the University of South Carolina’s Two Year campuses are experiencing an increased level of robustness as the enrollment increased annually from 301 graduates during the 2008-2009 fiscal year to 391 graduates during the 2013-2014 fiscal year.

The recent state initiatives that encourage the increased credentialing of South Carolina residents are aspirational goals that the South Carolina Technical College System will be integral in helping to achieve. The South Carolina Technical College System has been successful in maintaining enrollment, substantial articulation agreements across the state, and job or continued education placement rates.

The increased collaboration between the South Carolina Technical College System, University of South Carolina Two Year campuses, military personnel, and local businesses is an admirable and welcomed trend. The multi-level collaboration has been a contributing factor to the continued growth in the technical college system. Additionally, the collaboration continues to strengthen the economic activity of South Carolina and benefits the citizens of this state.

- **Recommendation One: Enrollment and Completions for Military Focused Campuses**

The University of South Carolina Two Year campuses have been successful in maintaining or increasing their graduation rates for the past five years. Moreover, the offering of degree programs for military personnel at the Fort Jackson and USC Beaufort campuses are admirable. After review, CHE staff recommends increasing enrollment and graduation at the campuses because it would benefit the military population it serves and South Carolina citizenry.

- **Recommendation Two: Peer State Data Models**

In an effort to better realize the Commission on Higher Education's overarching goal of *Access, Affordability and Excellence*, there is a renewed focus on trend data and complete analysis that creates an accurate view of the institutions. Given the Lumina Foundation's national goal of 60% of Americans possessing post-secondary credentials by 2025¹¹, the South Carolina Technical College System and USC Two Year campuses will be integral in helping South Carolina move toward providing the workforce necessary to maintain our nationally top-ranked economy. Greater collaboration on data collections, analysis, and reporting assists policymakers in determining best practices and paths toward such goals.

Examples at peer state agencies are helpful in helping CHE envision how *Access, Affordability, and Excellence* can become the standard for South Carolina. Tennessee Higher Education Commission's Factbook¹² is a detailed, annual publication that provides the public with a complex analysis of both four and two year institutions in the state. This report tracks important information such as FTE and community college total enrollment (by college) as well as which colleges and universities their high school graduates attend. Additionally, this report is able to analyze the success rate of remedial and developmental students within the community college system. Similar in-depth analyses are available at the Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education and Alabama Commission on Higher Education. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education provides a comprehensive interactive online system that allows its users to access PDFs that indicate the transfer patterns of its students broken down by individual community colleges. The Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education provides similar access to community college data on their website with variables such as the percentage of low-income and underrepresented minority group success rates.¹³ These types of data provide a holistic picture of student achievement, areas of success, and areas of improvement for the colleges.

V. Conclusion

As post-secondary education and workforce development partners in South Carolina, the Commission on Higher Education, South Carolina Technical College System and the University of South Carolina Two Year campuses are performing well in providing quality academic programs that are relevant to the South Carolina's economic needs. The successes detailed in this report demonstrate the potential for greater fulfillment of *Access, Affordability and Excellence* in the near future.

¹¹ "Goal 2025," *Lumina Foundation*, Accessed on August 23, 2017, https://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025

¹² "Factbook," *Tennessee Commission on Higher Education*, Accessed on June 27, 2017, <http://tn.gov/thec/topic/fact-book>

¹³ "Data Tables," *Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education*, Accessed on June 27, 2017 <http://cpe.ky.gov/data/index.html>