



January 4th, 2024

The year 2023 was exciting for the University of South Carolina Upstate. We worked hard for our many wins and faced all challenges with grit, determination, and grace. In this letter, I'd like to share some of those highlights and tell you more about how we have helped our students, faculty, staff, and community continue to Reach Greater Heights.

All of this work has centered around some crucial themes for USC Upstate:

Student Health and Wellness

With three out of five college students struggling with a psychological or psychiatric issue, double the number reported a decade before, it's become exceedingly important to promote mental wellness in our schools and our communities. We were thrilled to partner with Denny's Corporation—a leader in this space—to discuss this issue, discuss solutions, and show our students that care and concern exist in the corporate world.

Attendees of the 2023 **"Denny's Together: Mental Health and Wellness"** event benefitted greatly from two panel discussions—"Food Connected to Wellness: Mindful Eating" and "Wellness at Work: Wellness in The Workplace/Community"—and learned a great deal about how universities, corporations, and individuals can better manage and improve their mental health and wellness.

Also last year, USC Upstate was awarded a **grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's Garret Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Program**. The three-year, \$303,807 grant supports implementing a new three-tier health and wellness program, Spartans Helping Spartans, focusing on first-year, first-generation, Pell-eligible, and transfer students. Additionally, the University of South Carolina Upstate was awarded a two-year, \$425,311 grant for a **summer bridge program** to enable students to earn college credit. At the same time, they learn the soft skills necessary to navigate college life successfully. The grant, approved by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and funded through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, aims to address the learning loss that stemmed from the pandemic.

Increased Degree Attainment

For the second year, up to 90 recent high school graduates from Spartanburg County were selected for the opportunity to earn their bachelor's degrees—debt-free—at USC Upstate as part of the **Upstate Promise Scholars Program**, our commitment to helping more people achieve their dreams through education. Additionally, we added 20 Promise Scholars from Greenville, Cherokee, and Union counties to this year's cohort. Between the two cohorts, we currently have 206 Promise Scholars.

Launched in June of 2022, the Upstate Promise Scholars Program is funded by up to \$2.5 million from USC Upstate's budget. As a public institution in South Carolina, the university may invest up to 4 percent of its annual budget in scholarships. USC Upstate intends to raise additional funding for the program to extend into future years.

The students are chosen for their academic achievements, community service, and excellence. They are given unique opportunities to network, attend panel discussions with industry and civic leaders, and other events that provide an inside look at economic expansion, community involvement, employment growth, financial mobility, cultural revitalization, and health and wellness.

Last year also saw the creation of the **Chancellor's Leadership Academy**. Selected students attended seven sessions to earn a certification and better understand how to hone their talents as leaders and lead in a way that helps drive change and positivity at USC Upstate. This identification helps keep these students engaged and connected to the university, thereby increasing the likelihood that these students will complete their degrees.

Classroom to Career

Our first-ever **Upstate Talent Forum** was a transformative, one-day event. Co-convened by Allen Smith, president and CEO of OneSpartanburg Inc., and Carlos Phillips, president and CEO of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, the Forum brought together regional employers, local partners, and members of the university community to further align employment needs with educational programs and amplify our Quality Enhancement Program's goal of career readiness for students.

Also last year, we saw the creation of **USC Upstate's National Security & Government Institute** and the naming of its inaugural executive director, retired Maj. Gen. Glenn Davis.

The launch event drew elected officials, corporate and government leaders, military officers, Upstate faculty, staff, and students. Davis provided an overview of the Institute, giving all at the launch an excellent understanding of the planned programming, professional development, and critical national security and government research.

Among our goals is to pinpoint the areas of need in the workforce and train our students to meet that demand, moving from campus to career.

About 300 students and recent University of South Carolina Upstate graduates connected with 20 global companies at the **2023 Global Career Forum** to learn about transformative opportunities. The event featured an idea exchange, expert panels, and lively discussions.

All of this helps prepare our students and graduates for real-world opportunities that pay dividends for employers, our region, and our world.

Additionally, we received a **\$50,000 award from Power:Ed** to prepare state students for careers in the life sciences through the summer research program ER(Up)T, also known as Engaged Research and Training at Upstate.

ER(Up)T allows USC Upstate students to engage in faculty-mentored research in the biomedical sciences, to be paid \$3,800 for their full-time eight-week summer research internship, participate in career development workshops, and present their research at local and regional conferences. The Power:Ed funding also will create additional paid research experiences for students.

Community Connection

The work done at USC Upstate does not occur in an academic bubble; we are intimately connected to our communities, our state, and the world and committed to making a difference. Some connections occurred nearby, as with our **unique reverse transfer agreement with Greenville Technical College**.

This agreement allows USC Upstate to transfer college credit back to Greenville Tech, thus allowing USC Upstate students who transfer from Greenville Tech without an associate degree to receive an associate degree from Greenville Tech while achieving their bachelor's degree from USC Upstate.

On the state level, we forged many new relationships and strengthened others. One example of a new partnership: USC Upstate joined the South Carolina Veteran Coalition, building on our reputation for providing resources and services tailored specifically to veterans, military students, and their families. Connecting with the South Carolina Veteran Coalition provides military and veteran students at the university with additional resources to assist them with their academic development and other needs.

Additionally, we signed a comprehensive **articulation agreement with the South Carolina Technical College system** that enables thousands of students to make the seamless and successful transition to USC Upstate.

In another essential partnership, USC Upstate joined Spartanburg County colleges, businesses, and nonprofits for Movement 2030, a new county-wide initiative to improve school readiness, post-secondary degree attainment, and neighborhood outcomes for 60,000 Spartanburg County residents.

Movement 2030 has raised \$100 million from Blue Meridian Partners' Place Matters portfolio—which provides capital to local organizations that lead place-based partnerships—and other local, regional, and national funders. The initiative expects to unlock another \$120 million in public and private capital during its seven-year period.

Nationally, USC Upstate's influence was felt when **Anita Nag, Ph.D., assistant professor of chemistry, was awarded a prestigious grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH)**.

Though COVID-19 was no longer considered a pandemic by May 2023, the virus remained a concern in our communities, particularly as variants emerged. So it was good timing that Nag was awarded a three-year, \$406,504 grant leading to groundbreaking research. Nag's grant proposal, "Exploring the dynamics of nsp1 and RNA interaction in SARS-CoV with undergraduate researchers," also provided invaluable opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in hands-on scientific research and contribute to advancing knowledge in this critical area of study.

New Faces, Exciting Changes

In 2023, we welcomed some new and distinguished leaders to the USC Upstate family, including:

Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. T. Glenn Davis, who was named the inaugural executive director of the newly established National Security and Government Institute. Davis's exceptional leadership and extensive experience in national security and corporate operations made him a natural pick to lead the new Institute and its work in national security education and research.

Matthew Martin, who was named vice chancellor and director of intercollegiate athletics. Succeeding Daniel Feig, Martin is responsible for directing and overseeing intercollegiate athletics' programming, planning, and budgeting; fundraising in support of athletic activities; and representing the athletic program on campus and in the larger community. He oversees some awe-inspiring programs here, including women's soccer—which played for a championship in 2023 for the first time—and the baseball team, which enjoyed an historic and highly successful season.

Jeffrey Stinson, PhD, who was chosen as the next dean of USC Upstate's George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics (JCBE). In this role, Stinson oversees the JCBE's academic programs, centers, faculty, and staff, and the nearly 600 students enrolled in the college, which is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

These are just some of the exciting developments from the year 2023 at USC Upstate. They would not have been possible without the dedication, expertise, and innovative spirit of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, community partners, and donors.

Thank you for being part of the USC Upstate family and for your continued support of our institution as we reach even greater heights in the new year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "H".

Bennie L. Harris, PhD
Chancellor