



October 7, 2025

As October unfolds across the Upstate, the trees on our campus are starting to change, reminding us that growth is both transformational and steady. The trees' roots hold firm while their branches reach for light, a balance that reflects the heart of our university's mission.

This fall, in dedicating the new Learning Commons, that image takes on special meaning. The 22,000-square-foot expansion of our library is an architectural achievement. It also stands as a symbol of our ongoing commitment to student success and to the values that define USC Upstate.

Within the Learning Commons' walls, students will find space to think deeply, to collaborate, and to draw strength from one another. Learning will not be confined to classrooms; it will flourish through connection, curiosity, and shared purpose.

The Learning Commons brings together services that meet students where they are. Tutorial programs, advising, and writing assistance provide guidance when challenges arise. Our First-Generation Student Success initiatives create a network of support for those who are the first in their families to pursue higher education. Every element of this space reflects our promise to help students not only earn degrees but also gain confidence, resilience, and the tools to thrive.

The spirit of this work is captured in the story of Sha Meka Miller, a non-traditional student who returned to USC Upstate to complete her Spanish degree after 25 years away from college. She told me she felt nervous about returning to a world transformed by technology and new ways of learning. Yet she has found encouragement and kindness from the advisors, counselors, directors, and professors who have guided her. Their patience, compassion, and professionalism have reminded her that success is rarely a solitary journey. It is the result of a community that believes in you and helps you rediscover your strength.

Sha Meka's story is special, but it is not unusual at USC Upstate. This is a place where students, whatever their background or path, can grow and succeed. Like the tree motif that runs through its design, the Learning Commons reminds us that every student begins as a seed of possibility and that with the right care and support, these students can rise and flourish.

Autumn teaches us that change and growth are inseparable. In that same spirit, the Learning Commons represents renewal. It reaffirms that USC Upstate's mission—to serve as a catalyst for transformation through accessible, high-quality education—is alive and growing stronger with each season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bennie" being more prominent.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris

Chancellor