

USCA State of the University Address 2025

State of the University Address
September 9, 2025
Chancellor Daniel Heimmermann, PhD

Good morning. It is my honor to be with you today as we reflect on the incredible successes we have had during the past year and look at our exciting path forward. The University of South Carolina Aiken continues to intrepidly pursue its noble mission of supporting high-quality academics and engaged teaching and learning, impactful research, and service to our community. It seems like yesterday that we recently assembled to celebrate spring commencement. Our May 2025 Commencement ceremony was a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of a USCA education, as we celebrated the achievements of more than 400 graduates, including the commissioning of four new U.S. Army officers and the recognition of our inaugural cohort of USCA Life Program students. Likewise, the start another academic year and the return of our students to campus a few weeks ago remind us of the renewed and bright promise for the future of our university, state, region, and nation

Before I begin, I would like to welcome some of our distinguished guests: Representatives from the Aiken County Commission on Higher Education, the Aiken Partnership Board, as well as our elected public officials, faculty, staff, alumni, students, and others who are with us today. Thank you!

I also would like to make a few introductions of persons new to their leadership roles here at USCA. First, Mr. Nathan Rice, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, Ms. Karma Al-ja-rudi, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management. Mr. Daniel Elwell, Vice Chancellor for Development and Alumni Affairs, Dr. David Buckman, Dean of the School of Education, and also Dr. Ravi Narayanaswamy who has moved into a new role as Dean of the School of Business. We also recognize Robert Murphy to a new role as the Director of USCA Continuing Education and Campus Safety Coordinator. Also, we are pleased to have welcomed fifteen new faculty and 53 new staff persons to our campus this year across various disciplines and departments this past year.

Challenges and Path Forward

As I mentioned many times before: the greatest challenge and responsibility for universities today is to ensure that they remain responsive and relevant to the people and communities they serve. Universities must never take for granted public support for or trust in higher education.

This support and trust must be continuously earned. Like the pursuit of excellence, it is not once achieved and then can be forgotten; it must be striven for, intentionally, and relentlessly. Our fidelity to these principles is being pursued by the fulfillment of our Strategic Plan, 2030 (*Educate. Innovate. Inspire*) which calls for reaffirming and supporting the primacy of our academic mission by the development of high-quality academic programs that respond to current and future workforce needs, an enhanced institutional focus and support for improving student success outcomes, engaging teaching and learning, enhancing the campus experience, addressing regional needs, and bolstering a sustainable institutional foundation. As you will hear in the minutes that follow, during the past year, we continue to intrepidly advance these goals.

Pillar 1: Deliver a Flexible and Relevant Curriculum

USCA remains committed to delivering a flexible and relevant curriculum that prepares our graduates to meet South Carolina's current and future workforce needs. We have responded with flexible, industry-aligned graduate, undergraduate and certification offerings not only in technical, health, and business-related fields but also in the liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities whose imparted transferable skills not only well-prepare graduates to be career ready upon graduation but make them highly adaptable, employable--indeed "future proof" in the ever-changing job world.

This past year USCA faculty developed a master of science program in strength and conditioning. Our MBA program added specializations in high-demand areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Corporate Governance, and Sports Management. Additionally, faculty will offer new baccalaureate programs in Cyber Security and Electrical Engineering. I would like to extend my thanks the faculty, chairs, and deans for their leadership in these efforts

Internships and Experiential Learning

All our academic programs prepare our graduates to hit the ground running in their chosen field as most of our programs include out-of-class learning experiences such as internships, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other experiential learning which provide our students with a deeper, applied, real-world learning experience making them job-ready on day one.

During the past year over 105 employers sponsored one or more internships. Many of these out-of-class experiences are done in partnership with local industries and organizations like SRS, SRMC, SRNL and other agencies and businesses, schools, and health care organizations which

support our science, business, education and nursing students' capstone and internship experiences.

USCA's cyber security program, for example, remains unique in the nation not only for its industry-aligned curriculum but by its close collaboration with the Department of Energy and Department of Defense. Indeed, our partnerships with these agencies not only affords USCA students with opportunities with world-class facilities and professionals but also facilitated security clearances enabling them to be employable with DOE and DOD and other agencies immediately upon graduation.

Experiential learning, including undergraduate research, also takes place in the social sciences and the arts and humanities as well. For example Drs. Heather Peterson, Associate Professor of History, and Michelle Vieyra, Professor of Biology, led an inter-disciplinary study abroad trip to Costa Rica, expanding students' experiences and world views through the liberal arts. I would like to thank Corey Feraldi and Sumner Markwalter from Career Services and Tom Scott from our Workforce Development Office for their efforts in organizing and promoting these out of class learning experiences.

Grants, Research, and Creative Performance

Increasingly external funding support has and will become even more important as we pursue and achieve our mission and goals. During the past year USC Aiken researchers secured 29 percent more funding than in the previous year--nearly \$4.4 million in external grants from agencies such as the National Institute of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), US Department of Commerce, and the Department of Energy, as well as other national, state, and local agencies/organizations. Our Engineering and Cyber programs alone received nearly \$5 million from federal, state, and local partners to fund our Engineering and Cyber programs during the past two years.

Also, illustrative is the work of Dr. Virginia Shervette, whose project, "Collaborative Research and Capacity Building; Data-Poor Caribbean Reef Fishes, was funded (\$1,146,612) by US Department of Commerce. Meanwhile during the past year, Dr. Titan Paul, Professor of Engineering, published five articles and was the recipient of three externally funded grants, predominantly in the area of nanotechnology. Dr. Nathan Hancock, Professor of Biology, also published five articles, including one in the highly-rated journal *Nature*, and received an NSF-funded grant primarily focused on plant genome engineering.

USCA scholars in education, the social sciences, humanities, nursing and business also have distinguished themselves in the areas of research and creativity. In the Department of Languages and Literature, Dr. Eric Carlson, Associate Professor of English, published a co-edited anthology, *Vikings, Knights, Elves, and Ogres* (2025), and Dr. Todd Hagstette, Professor of English, and Deborah Harmon, Associate Professor of Library Science, received a grant from the Porter Fleming Fund to transcribe and digitize the contents of the Gregg-Graniteville Library's Archive. In the School of Business, Julie Steen, Associate Professor of Marketing, published an article, "The Retail Environment Design (RED) Scale: Conceptualization and Measurement," In the *European Journal of Marketing* (2024). I wish to thank these and other faculty for their scholarly and creative productivity during the past year.

Pillar 2: Reimagine the Composition of the Student Body (Student Success)

USCA students represent the breadth of our state. Nearly nine of ten USCA students hail from the Palmetto State with nearly three-quarters of our alumni remaining in South Carolina after graduation. USCA remains committed to responding to the changing nature and evolving needs of our students to support them on their educational journey.

Affordability and Access

In support of students and families we continue to expand educational access to qualified students by maintaining reasonable tuition rates. Indeed, this marks the eighth year that USCA has not increased tuition or fees; taking into account inflation during this period, this amounts to nearly a 30 percent reduction in tuition during the past few years. As a reminder, half of our students pay nothing out of pocket for tuition and fees and nearly three-fourths pay less than half.

Enrollment Management

In our commitment to increasing post-secondary educational attainment in our state and region we have enhanced our focus on strategic student recruitment, retention, and student success. This is important: over the next decade the number of traditional college-going students is estimated to decline by fifteen percent (650,000 students). In addition to the hiring of experienced enrollment management leaders, the university has engaged in strategic and aggressive modern enrollment management strategies. Closely coordinated with these initiatives, we have launched a comprehensive university marketing campaign featuring our dynamic new marks in order to promote and differentiate the USCA name and brand beyond our traditional service area.

Our enrollment and marketing initiatives already have produced dividends. Current enrollment projections indicate we will be up by 4-6% this fall. Growth is led by a 34% increase in transfer students, 11% increase in graduate students, and a 5% increase in continuing undergraduate students. Further, we have expanded our international student recruitment. This past year, we welcomed 20 students from our new India university partner (MIT–World Peace University (India)) for a summer-immersion program. Once again, we are on track for another record-setting enrollment year, including a record number of enrolled full-time students. Additionally, this past fall witnessed a ten percent increase housing occupancy from the previous year. I would like to thank our entire enrollment management team and our residence life staff for their tremendous effort.

Once enrolled in our university, we accept the responsibility to do all we can to see them graduate. Under the leadership of Dr. Katie Smith we now have in place a robust student success strategy and a coordinated framework that promotes high-quality academic experiences, including engaged, high-impact teaching and learning experiences. We have ensured that students have a supportive path to graduation with world-class academic advising and mentoring, and effective academic and non-academic support services that respond to students' holistic needs.

In addition to our university-wide student success and retention programs/efforts, several colleges, schools, and departments have introduced unit-level student success initiatives. One program is the School of Nursing PASS Program. This Peer Ambassador for Student Success (PASS) Program assists students to succeed in foundational nursing courses. The program integrates weekly peer-led study sessions to provide opportunities for students to ask questions, clarify concepts, compare notes, discuss readings, complete learning activities to improve critical thinking, and develop academic tools such as time management and study skills. I would like to thank Dean Chargualaff and her team of Nursing faculty and staff for their remarkable work.

Likewise, our math faculty made great strides in lowering the DFW rates in a traditional gatekeeper course, Math 108. After significant revision to the course the success rates in these courses between Fall 2022 and Fall 2024 increased by more than fifty percent. I would like to thank our math faculty, in particular Professor Terlizzi, for their dedication to this effort which in no small part contributed to our increased university retention rate this past year which contributed too this fall's record enrollment.

Ensuring students are engaged inside and outside the classroom afford them a deeper academic experience. The Callen Center for Engaged Teaching continues to offer support for faculty on new teaching and learning methodologies, advisement and engagement approaches, and assistance with systems integration in the classroom. This past year, the Callen Center sponsored thirty-one (31) workshops for faculty and staff on topics ranging from the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence to engaging GEN Z students in the classroom through AI. The Center offered four (4) certificate-earning workshop series, including the Master Teachers Series, the Master Writers Series, the Advisor Academy, and New Faculty CONNECTIONs, a series of workshops specifically designed to help new faculty adapt to professional life at USC Aiken. Overall, the Center facilitated 420 individual faculty and staff registrations. Among those who participated last year, some faculty and staff took advantage of the Center's offerings by attending numerous sessions. Special recognition goes to Dr. Carl Ciccarelli, Professor Buck Harris, Professor Kate Channell, and Dr. DeAnna Gore. Their ongoing commitment to engaged teaching and learning reflects their dedication to student success. I also want to thank Dr. Tim Lintner for his leadership and willingness to champion the mission of the Callen Center.

Like other universities, our library serves as the heart of campus. Appropriately, the Gregg Graniteville library is the home of the Student Success Center. Officially dedicated this past fall, the Student Success Center serves as a central access point for student success support, including library services, academic advising, supplemental instruction, academic coaching and mentoring, computer and technology support, the math lab, as well as a one-stop-shop help desk that can support and triage any question about the university's academic and non-academic services or with help just navigating the university. I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Ennis, Dean of the Gregg-Graniteville Library and their staffs for her collaborative leadership.

It is well-known that high-quality academic advising is crucial for student success. USCA, through our strategic plan, has doubled-down on its support of faculty-led advising. During the 2024-2025 academic year, the university introduced an exciting new initiative called the Advisor Academy. The Advisor Academy was established to onboard new Faculty Advisors and provide a professional development opportunity for existing Faculty Advisors. Faculty engaged in collaborative discussions centered on the specific role they play in the advising process, how to effectively use technology to support and enhance advising, predicting student concerns both before and during advising, and understanding the holistic, student-centered approach of excellent advising. Twenty-three faculty members attended all four Advisor Academy workshops

and received a Certification of Recognition for their dedication to outstanding advising at USC Aiken. Thanks to Collytte Medders for leading these efforts.

Our newly implemented student retention initiatives already have produced dividends; indeed, during our fall 2024 to spring 2025 retention stood at a record high 91 percent. Our first-year retention rate has increased nearly ten percent. These increases in retention will ensure that more students obtain their degree and increase the number of students who hold a USCA credential. This past year the University produced more than 800 graduates, the overwhelming majority of whom are from our region and remain in our state. Ninety-four percent of our graduates reported satisfaction with their first position after graduation.

Pillar 3: Enhance the Campus Experience

A supportive and engaging campus environment is integral not only to attract more students and providing them with holistic, enhanced educational experiences but in instilling in students a sense of belonging and pride in their university resulting in higher persistence levels and overall satisfaction. USCA has 91 active organizations ranging from intramurals to Greek life. During the past year, the campus hosted over 700 student events. Additionally, last year Student Affairs successfully launched Campus ESP, a family communication portal, enrolling over 3,500 family members who are actively engaged with it. I would like to thank Vice Chancellor Ahmed Samaha and his staff as well as faculty for their leadership providing our students with these robust campus experiences. Special recognition also goes to Mila Padgett, Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, received the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association's Region 2 Award of Merit.

Athletics is a major contributor to the USCA campus experience. The men's basketball team again won the PBC Tournament, marking the third straight year the team has won a Peach Belt championship. A special shout out to coach Vanderslice, his coaches, and teams. As you know, our student athletes also serve as role models for our students on campus and in the community; 92 percent of our student-athletes were named to the PBC Academic Honor Roll. Pacer athletes and student organizations also serve our community through volunteerism, service, and local appearances at a variety of events and venues in and around town. Indeed, student athletes logged in 151 hours of community service totally 50 events during the past year. Additionally, we would like to welcome our new coaches in cross country (Jim Sprecher), women's basketball (Brittany Batts), and baseball (Keith Gorman). I would like to express my gratitude to Athletic

Director Todd Wilkinson and his coaches and staff for leading a program that creates winners both on and off the court/field.

New and Improved Campus Facilities/Infrastructure

In support of our student athletes and others, the past year witnessed investments in our physical campus, ensuring they are provided with best-in-class facilities such as the new softball field, which was dedicated this past spring, and the soon-to-be constructed soccer field.

In addition to these projects, during the past year Brian Enter and his staff completed nearly \$13 million of deferred maintenance to our campus facilities. Among other projects, the Ruth Patrick Center, Penland Building, B&E Building, Etherredge Center, and Baseball facility received upgrades to roofing and/or HVAC. A special thanks goes out to Brian and his hardworking staff for their splendid work in maintaining our physical campus.

We also invested nearly \$2 million in technology infrastructure. The university committed over \$1 million in new computers and instructional technology upgrades in nearly 20 classrooms, the SAC Mezzanine, Pacer Smart classroom in the B&E building, as well as computer classrooms in Penland for Science and Engineering. Also, in conjunction with the College of Sciences and Engineering, the Technology Services Division presently is building a High-Performance Computing research cluster that will provide USCA researchers with significant processing power that will enable complex computations such as AI research. The 2024-25 years also was marked by milestones for USCA's Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC). In addition to protecting the university's network, the student-run RSOC expanded its role to include protection for some of our area's underserved areas such as: the town of Wagner, Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA), and in the near future, Aiken Electric Cooperative and Aiken County Public School District. I would like to thank Vice Chancellor Ernest Pringle and his team for their work on these projects.

Finally, this past year a facilities master plan was completed will serve as a comprehensive guide for campus growth, facility improvements, and sustainability efforts. The core focus of this plan is to plan for intentional growth and transition our physical footprint from a commuter to a residential campus through the creation of gathering spaces, including more green spaces, wayfinding/signage, and improving student amenities like outdoors performance space, dining halls, and other recreation areas. Among other initiatives, the plan calls for enhancements to the campus quad, improved and more defined campus entrances and wayfinding, and other infrastructure upgrades that will elevate the experience of students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Additional academic buildings are also included in the plan to accommodate future program growth.

As part of our campus facilities planning, the university has also engaged a firm to conduct a market feasibility study for public-private partnerships to assess the potential for future campus investments and projects, including new student housing, mixed-use spaces, and other amenities--such as student housing, retail, office, hotel, conference center/event space, entertainment/restaurants--to enhance the quality of campus life and our surrounding area. The initial plan projects, aligned with the university's strategic priorities, will include: landscaping and the construction of a lighted pedestrian pathway that will efficiently integrate and connect the AMC and the Cyber Integration Center to the campus. The revitalization of the campus quad, enhancements to campus entrances and its periphery, as well as other projects potentially resulting from future public-private partnerships. I look forward to sharing more news about these exciting ventures in the coming months. I would especially like to thank the Aiken County Commission on Higher Education and the Aiken Partnership Board for their generous support for this project.

Pillar 4: Address the Pressing Needs of the Region

USCA's impact on our community and its commitment to solving our regions' more pressing needs cannot be overstated. As you may know, the university contributes \$350 million annually to our local economy and supports more than 1,500 jobs, and it serves the region in many other ways. As already mentioned, the mission of our Security Operations Center to a Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC) is one of many examples of our servant-oriented mission.

USCA is responding to our state and region's current and future workforce needs through our relevant academic programs producing workforce ready graduates. Also, in support of regional employers the university has created a Center for Workforce Development that will facilitate and manage industry partnerships established by our academic leadership and faculty. We also have implemented workforce development scholarships to underwrite and promote affordable credential attainment for incumbent workers needing certifications, skill development, and upskilling. Our employer-partners benefit through preferred learning agreements that lead to direct enrollment in our accessible certificate and degree programs. I would like to thank Tom Scott for his efforts on this crucial initiative.

Unquestionably, the newly opened Savannah River National Laboratory's (SRNLO Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative (AMC) on our campus will strengthen our collaboration with SRNL and provide unlimited opportunities for our students and researchers. The AMC will serve as a vital partnership between the university, industry, and government, conducting research and equipping students with skills needed to excel in high-demand fields such as engineering, virtual and augmented reality, robotics and automation, additive manufacturing, computational chemistry, smart manufacturing, cybersecurity, and other areas vital to our region and nation's economic development and security. The AMC will also create countless opportunities for innovation and collaboration between national scientists and USCA students and faculty.

During the past year, in support of the mission of the AMC, the university has taken steps to build its related expertise, academic programs, applied research capabilities, facilities, and infrastructure to fully support the AMC's mission. More specifically, USCA hired additional faculty in materials science engineering, electrical engineering, cybersecurity-AI, software engineering-AI, cryptography, data science, and analytical chemistry. We also brought on a number of research affiliates (retired scientists and engineers from SRNL) who bring to the university unique and relevant expertise in areas critical to our region's workforce need.

Further, the university established several new applied research environments, centers, and laboratories that will focus on areas such as high-performance computing (HPC) and multi-scale modeling, 3D printing and prototyping, and others. The HPC environment will support collaborative work for energy grid resiliency, cybersecurity, data science, network security, and other areas. These facilities and USCA faculty/students will be able to assist regional companies that have aligned applied research interests with the SRNL/AMC.

Similarly, the South Carolina National Guard (SCNG) Cyber Integration Center (CIC) will afford unique opportunities for deepened partnerships, innovation, and student opportunities in service of our state and region. As you may recall, this past May the university, along with our partners at the South Carolina National Guard, members of our legislative delegation, and Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette, broke ground on the Cyber Integration Center (a 26,000-square-foot, \$30 million state investment) and the National Guard Readiness Center

Through our collaboration with the National Guard, USCA will connect students, soldiers, and professionals in shared training and cutting-edge research environments that serve national security and industry needs. Indeed, USCA remains committed to strengthening national defense

through workforce readiness and regional collaboration and proudly represents South Carolina's cyber and STEM innovation on the national stage.

In addition to the Cyber Integration Center, the USCA campus will host the National Guard Readiness Center--the construction of which also is scheduled to start later this year. In addition to providing training space for guardsmen on the weekends, the facility's conference rooms, classrooms, and other spaces will be available to USCA the other days of the week.

These campus-based developments represent a new chapter in the university's leadership in cybersecurity and innovation making USCA the anchor of Aiken's emerging Innovation Corridor. USCA students, faculty and staff will have facilities and opportunities that is nearly unrivaled at peer (and other) universities.

USCA also is taking its academic and service-based mission off campus into the heart of Aiken in a first-class way. The city of Aiken's 36,000 square foot mixed-use facility, located on Newberry Street in downtown, will offer USCA space to showcase how the university advances regional economic and workforce development through its academic programs and applied research, supporting job creation, fostering educational partnerships, and driving technological advancements in the region. The building is scheduled for completion later this spring/summer. I would like to thank Aiken Mayor Teddy Milner, the Aiken City Council, Aiken City Manager Stuart Bedenbaugh, and the Aiken Corp. for its generous willingness to partner with its hometown university.

USCA also has remained faithful to its commitment to the educational and cultural enrichment of our wider community. Our Cultural Series programs, which bring the arts and letters to our community, are renowned. This past year the university renewed its commitment to Center for Lifelong Learning (CLL) which provides residents with diverse continuing educational programs. At the risk of putting in a shameless plug, I will mention that, once again, next month I am looking forward to teaching a Halloween-appropriate course on the history of witchcraft, vampires, and superstition in early-modern Europe. Thank you to Paul Crook and Robert Murphy and their staff, and the legions of volunteers who make the Cultural Series and the Center for Lifelong Learning.

A final example of our commitment to our region and educational access is our celebrated USCA Life Program, a transformative two and now four-year program serving students with intellectual disabilities, entered its second year this fall. This comprehensive program integrates individual support services, focuses on academic and social inclusion, provides access and skills for gainful

employment, and offers a meaningful credential, all aimed at fostering a vibrant campus culture where every student can thrive. As aforementioned, this past year we witnessed the graduation of our first cohort of Pacer Life students and welcomed students in our expanded four-year program. I want to thank Dr. Melissa Martin and her team and the School of Education for their vision and the devotional work they invest in this special program.

Pillar 5: Bolster a Sustainable Foundation

Fulfilling the university mission, including increasing the number of graduates, supporting high-quality academics, impactful research and service, and raising external funds hinges on the ability of the university to effectively and consistently tell its story in the most compelling light.

Our newly adopted university marks and athletic logos and, most importantly, the launch of the university's first ever fully integrated, comprehensive marketing campaign will ensure that the USCA name and its brand of high-quality academics, personalized and supportive environment and world-class opportunities, will become known and resonates with prospective students and their families throughout our state and region. These initiatives, and those of our Enrollment Management division, will promote greater awareness enabling us to succeed in the increasingly competitive market for future college-going students. Thanks to Vice Chancellor Christen Engel and her staff for making USCA no longer our region's "best kept secret."

Fundraising/Alumni

There is no question that our university could not fully achieve its mission without the financial support of our state and that of our generous donors, alumni, and friends.

Legislative Support

The effective advocacy of our local legislative delegation has enabled USCA to meet and exceed its expected goals. We are grateful to our elected officials, led by Senator Tom Young, for a highly successful legislative year for the university which included full funding for the modernization of our science building. We also are grateful to our federal supporters, most notable Senator Lindsey Graham and Congressman Joe Wilson.

Fundraising

However, as I have mentioned previously, universities cannot take for granted the financial support we receive from our state or the federal government. Accordingly, our new strategic plan calls for aggressive approaches develop additional, diversified revenue streams from external

grants and private giving. In addition to the aforementioned received grant funding, this past year we have raised over \$2.1 million in private donations and \$3.3 million in estate gifts during the past year. The Aiken Partnership Board and the USC Foundation supplemented USCA's budget by over \$3 million—an increase of over a half a million dollars from last year—over \$1 million of which was allocated to student scholarships and the remainder to 29 endowed chair positions and assisting faculty, staff, and student initiatives. I would like to thank the Advancement staff and the Aiken Partnership Board, chaired by Dr. Liz Stewart, for their excellent work this past year.

Alumni Affairs

Much of this giving came from our loyal alumni base. Alumni Affairs continues to engage our past graduates through exciting alumni events such as Homecoming and dynamic publications, featuring the post-graduation successes of alumni in all programs of study. I would like to thank the Carmen Williams, Director of Alumni Affairs, for her impressive work during the past year.

As I mentioned at the start of my presentation the past year the university conducted a highly successful national search for a new Vice Chancellor for Development Dan Elwell. With Dan's experienced and energetic leadership the university advancement/development is well-positioned for philanthropic growth and greater alumni engagement.

USCA Faculty and Staff

Finally, it goes without saying that the foundation of this or any other organization is its people: our devoted faculty and staff. In order to retain and reward the best and brightest faculty and staff this past year the university continues to invest in and reward our hard-working and loyal employees with cost-of-living adjustments as well promotions and merit awards. As you recall, last year we invested over \$1 million to address faculty and staff salary compression which amounted to largest amount devoted to such a measure. This year, in addition to across the board raises for all faculty and staff, 29 faculty received tenure, promotion, and successful post-tenure reviews, and nearly 50 staff were awarded with merit increases. In the coming year we hope to continue our efforts bring up faculty and staff salaries based on market salary studies. These efforts stand as a testament to USCA's commitment to our faculty and staff and the confidence and support that the university has in their noble work of educating and supporting the next generation of professionals and leaders in our state, region, and nation.

Closing

To close I would like to reaffirm that, while the world of higher education continues to be fraught with daunting uncertainties and challenges, what remains assured and proven is this university's resolve and ability to faithfully and intrepidly carry out its noble mission. With your continued support, building upon our tremendous legacy, USCA will continue its responsive and impactful service to its students and our community in fulfillment of its original promise made over six decades ago. Again, I express my heartfelt appreciation for all of those in attendance this morning who have enabled our fulfillment of this sacred vow to serve our region, state, and nation.

Thank you and, as always,
Go Pacers!