



# IMAGINE INSPIRE INVOLVE

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*2024 - 2025 Annual Report*



**Student Affairs and  
Academic Support**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



# FOREVER TO THEE



*A letter from the*

# **VICE PRESIDENT**

**It is an honor to share the annual report from the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support at the University of South Carolina. This report reflects a year of collaboration and progress in support of our students from the moment they become Gamecocks to the paths they take beyond graduation.**

Throughout the 2024–25 academic year, our division focused on creating an experience that supports every part of student development. That includes academic support, personal growth, leadership opportunities, career preparation and connections across campus. Our strategic priorities of student success, research and impact and operational strength guided this work. Across our units and across other university departments, we increased access to services, expanded programs and strengthened how we serve students. From career initiatives to enhancements in health and well-being services and student involvement opportunities, the goal has been the same: helping students reach their academic, personal and professional goals.

This year the division benefited from Give 4 Garnet, the university's annual day of giving. Student Affairs and Academic Support received more than 750 gifts totaling over \$100,000. These contributions supported emergency financial aid, mental health resources and student leadership development, reinforcing our mission to provide responsive student-focused services across campus life.

We also looked inward by improving systems, updating communication strategies and simplifying processes to build a stronger more student-centered division. These changes are helping us deliver a better student experience and create space for staff to lead, collaborate and grow.

Staff across the division contributed in many ways including research, professional development, community outreach and the daily service that keeps our work moving. Their knowledge and dedication shape the Gamecock experience in powerful ways.

Thank you to everyone who played a part this year. Whether through leadership, partnership or support, your role made a difference.

### *Forever to Thee.*

 Christopher Bestler

**J. Rex Tolliver**  
**Vice President for Student Affairs**  
**and Academic Support**  
**University of South Carolina**





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# THE STUDENT THREAD

The student experience is not one moment. It is a continuous thread, woven from academic guidance, personal milestones, challenges, community and growth. Throughout 2024–25, our division focused on strengthening that experience by building the relationships, resources and routines that shape a student's day, semester and future.

Teams from many different units work directly with students through first-year programs, health and well-being services, peer leadership, student employment and identity-based engagement. These stories show how students are supported at every stage, both in and out of the classroom.

We know that meaningful experiences contribute to student success, and success looks different for every student. From residence halls to student media offices, from academic coaching to wellness outreach, our goal is to meet students where they are and help them get where they want to go.

## 38,532

Total Columbia Enrollment

30,187 Undergraduate / 8,345 Graduate

## GENDER 2024 - 25

Undergraduate

MALE	12,341
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FEMALE	17,846
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## ETHNICITY 2024 - 25

Undergraduate

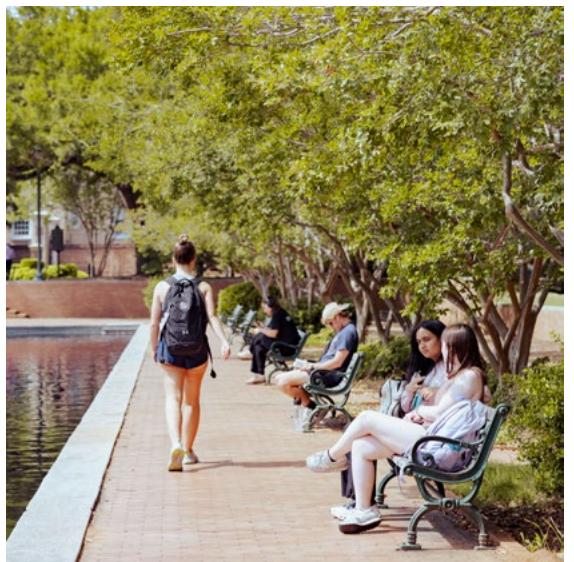
WHITE	21,671
BLACK	2,960
HISPANIC/LATINO	2,037
TWO OR MORE RACES	1,317
ASIAN	1,294
NONRESIDENTS	536
RACE OR ETHNICITY UNKNOWN	309
AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	44
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	19

#1  
IN FIRST-YEAR STUDENT  
EXPERIENCE AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

# BUILDING UPON OUR #1 FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND BEYOND

*Programs that guide students from orientation to graduation*

## UNIVERSITY 101: THE STUDENT AT CAROLINA



University 101 remains the foundation of USC's first-year experience. Offered for three credits each semester, it serves as an engaging seminar that teaches students about academic strategies, campus life, wellness, values and career pathways. In 2024–25, approximately 6,100 students across 318 small group sections participated, maintaining strong evaluations with an average satisfaction score of 4.57 out of 5.

Thanks to its consistent quality, University 101 has earned a national reputation. During the year, USC was named the top public university in the nation for its first-year seminar by U.S. News & World Report. It was also among 13 institutions awarded Gold for excellence in first-year student experience by NASPA's Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

In the 2024–2025 school year, two new sections were introduced specifically for students identifying as first-generation college students. These were led by Amanda Therrell, Director of the Graduation and Retention Network and a first-generation graduate herself. The initiative connects students with targeted support, addressing academic expectations, campus engagement and community resources. Roughly 20 percent of USC's incoming class this fall identified as first-generation.

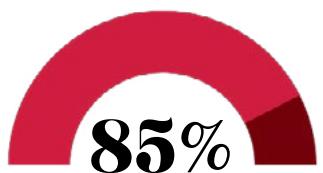
University 101 attracts a diverse instructor team that includes

faculty, staff and peer leaders. The program released its 15th annual Faculty Resource Manual in 2024. It was developed through campus-wide collaboration and refined using assessment data. Standout staff members received recognition and leadership opportunities.

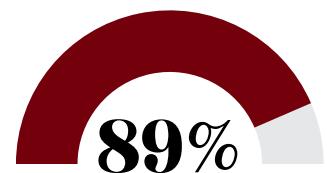
Emily Boardman, for example, co-presented at conferences such as the First-Year Experience national meeting and the Student Affairs and Academic Support (SAAS) Aspire and Advance Conference.

Each section includes out-of-classroom requirements such as service-learning or campus engagement reflections. These reinforce experiential learning. The course supports academic success through practical skill building in areas like time management, goal setting and using campus resources. It also introduces students to Carolina's history, traditions and the values of the Carolinian Creed.

Through regular program assessment, University 101 continues to adjust based on results. Factors tied to strong course evaluations include interactive teaching methods, early support for students facing challenges and a focus on building community within each section. These efforts support USC's retention rates and graduation outcomes. They show how the course contributes to student success in measurable ways.



First-Year cohort enroll in U101



U101 students agreed it helped their transition to college



## CENTER FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: CULTIVATING BELONGING AND LEADERSHIP

The Center for Student Engagement fosters a campus environment where students feel supported, valued and included. Through a wide range of events, mentoring initiatives and cultural resources, the center provides opportunities for students to build community and develop leadership rooted in identity, purpose and connection.

One of the center's cornerstone programs, the Multicultural Assistance Peer Program (MAPP), continued to support first-year students as they navigated the transition to college life. MAPP pairs incoming students with peer mentors who offer guidance, insight and encouragement throughout the academic year. The Fall 2024 semester began with an engaging kickoff event that brought together new participants and returning mentors for team-building activities and resource sharing.

Community-building remained a central focus through peer-led initiatives like EmpowerMENT and Q'afe. EmpowerMENT supports men of color as they explore shared experiences, challenges and aspirations. Q'afe creates a space for LGBTQ+ students to connect, reflect and cultivate meaningful relationships.

Cultural programming was a highlight of the 2024–25 academic year. Hip Hop Wednesday continued as a beloved weekly tradition on Greene Street, with music, local vendors and informal conversations

that brought the community together. Lunes Latino celebrated Latin culture with music, cultural displays and social gatherings during the spring semester.

A standout event of the year was Queer Connections: It's a Drag Brunch, one of the most well-attended programs, which invited students to enjoy performances in a welcoming, affirming space that celebrated identity and community.

The Identity365 initiative remained active throughout the year, offering workshops and social events focused on cultural pride, dialogue and creative self-expression. The Celebration of Excellence honored student leaders and organizations who made significant contributions to campus inclusion. Graduating seniors were celebrated at the Senior Recognition Ceremony, which acknowledged their leadership, involvement and impact on the university community.

Additionally, the Safe Zone Allies program trained faculty, staff and students who sought to become more effective advocates for LGBTQ+ communities on campus.

Together, these programs and initiatives strengthened the sense of belonging at the University of South Carolina, empowering students to thrive and express their authentic selves.

# 1,032

*Participants in Safe Zone training and other workshops*

# 350

*Student organizations participated in Center for Student Engagement programs*

# FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE

# \$1,381,531

*Donated to charitable organizations*

## COMMUNITY NUMBERS

**20**

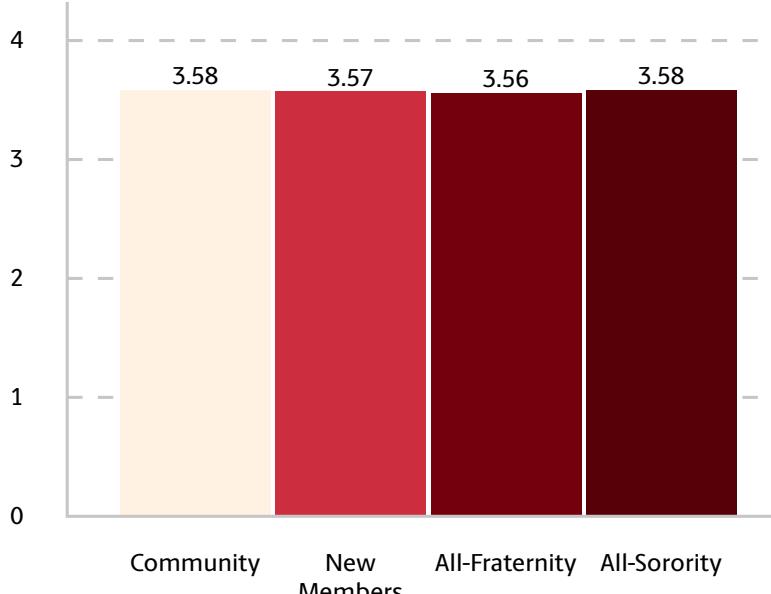
Houses in Greek Village

**17**

Programs and events held by FSL



## FSL GPAS SPRING 2025



**52**

*Chapters*

# 284,630

*Service Hours Completed*



## USC GREEK LIFE: CONNECTING CAMPUS WITH COLUMBIA THROUGH TRICK-OR-TREAT

Each fall, University of South Carolina's Greek Village opens to children from the campus and Columbia communities for "Trick or Treat with the Greeks." Hosted by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life with support from Greek chapters, the event runs in the early evening with village streets closed to traffic to create a safe space for families.

Greek houses are decorated for Halloween, and students hand out candy to children in costume. Activities like bounce houses, face painting, cake walks and carnival games give families more ways to engage in the festive atmosphere.

Now a long-standing tradition, the event reflects USC's focus on community outreach and service. It gives Greek students the chance to connect with local families, practice event planning and show how their organizations contribute to the campus and beyond. "Trick or Treat with the Greeks" remains one of the university's most visible and popular public engagement events.

**28%**

*Students with 4.0 GPAs*

**588**

*Miles walked for cancer research*

**1,525**

*Cans donated to Gamecock Community Shop*

# \$574,028

*Philanthropy dollars raised by Fraternity and Sorority chapters*

**9,066**

*Fraternity and Sorority Members*

**3,833**

*Programming Attendance*

# GAMECOCK ENTERTAINMENT

Gamecock Entertainment plays a steady role in bringing students together through regular events that promote connection, enjoyment and involvement. Each year, the team organizes more than 100 programs, including themed parties, movie nights and large-scale social gatherings. These events are open and easy for students to attend, making them a key part of how students feel included and involved on campus. By offering a wide range of formats and topics, Gamecock Entertainment helps students build relationships and feel part of the campus community.



## FIRST NIGHT CAROLINA

For many students, First Night Carolina is more than just an event, it's the moment their journey at the University of South Carolina truly begins. As the first major gathering of the incoming class, this high-energy tradition offers a powerful introduction to Gamecock spirit, campus pride and community.

Before classes officially kick off, First Night Carolina sets the tone for what's ahead. Students flood the Historic Horseshoe and iconic Greene Street, surrounded by music, lights, cheers and the undeniable excitement of new beginnings. It's their first taste of life as a Gamecock, an unforgettable celebration that transforms a large university into a place that feels like home.

More than a kickoff, First Night Carolina becomes a shared memory that bonds students together. Years later, alumni often reflect on that night with nostalgia, remembering the joy, anticipation and connection they felt standing shoulder to shoulder with their peers under the lights.

## COCKSTOCK

Cockstock stands as a defining moment in campus life — an electrifying concert experience that brings thousands of students to campus for a night they won't forget. What began as a bold student-led initiative to bring artist Rae Sremmurd to campus has grown into a marquee event, showcasing major artists across genres and drawing capacity crowds.

With past performers including Grammy-winning and nominated names like Quavo, 21 Savage, Daya and T-Pain, Cockstock is a testament to what student leadership and vision can achieve. The concert reflects the university's commitment to offering large-scale, high-impact events that resonate with the student body.

Bringing nationally recognized artists to USC not only amplifies school spirit and puts the student experience on par with the biggest stages in the country.

## FLICK ON THE FIELD

There's something unforgettable about watching a movie beneath the stars, surrounded by friends, in the heart of a stadium that holds so many college memories.

Flick on the Field transforms Williams-Brice Stadium into more than just a football field. It becomes a stage for shared moments and lasting connections. For many students, it's a bittersweet farewell, their final event with friends before graduation. For others, it's a first taste of campus tradition.

This cherished event brings the Carolina community together for movie nights under the lights, blending entertainment with belonging. Paired with student organizations, food trucks and prize giveaways, Flick on the Field offers more than a movie, it offers a moment to relax, to laugh, to connect and to experience the excitement of college life in one of its most iconic settings.

## DANCE MARATHON WITH PRISMA HEALTH

Dance Marathon isn't just the university's largest student-run fundraiser, it's a powerful demonstration of what students can achieve when driven by purpose and compassion. Supporting Prisma Health Children's Hospital in the Midlands, this year alone the program raised over \$650,000 to fund child life services that support patients and their families through long and often difficult hospital stays for children and their families.

More than a single event, Dance Marathon is a year-round movement led entirely by students — organizing campus-wide programming, coordinating outreach efforts and culminating in a high-energy celebration that brings together thousands. Its scale is massive, but so is its heart.

Through their involvement, students gain real-world experience in leadership, teamwork and service, while making a tangible impact far beyond campus.

# WELLNESS IN EVERY STEP

## STUDENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



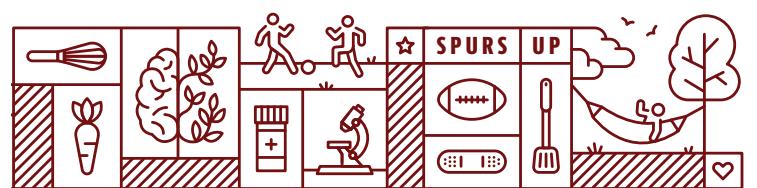
**41,231**

*Total appointments*

**24,500+**



*Unique Campus Rec users*



**600+ 417+**

Student attendance at  
2024–25 Study Dayz exam  
prep sessions

Student attendance at  
Fall 2024 Welcome to  
Well-Being Event



**157**

*Trained in Mental  
Health First Aid*



## INCREASED WORKFORCE SUPPORTING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

*Doctoral Interns*

**3**

*Temporary Staff*

**17**

*Full-Time Employees*

**22**

# CAMPUS REC NIRSA STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Campus Recreation offers programs and facilities that promote health, wellness and personal growth through intramural sports, fitness and outdoor activities. In this setting, students like Kallsen Wright find interests that reach beyond academic work, helping them become well-rounded leaders. Kallsen, a rising senior in Accounting and Finance with a Spanish minor, discovered his interest in basketball officiating through Campus Recreation, which has taken him to national events.

His journey began as an intramural basketball official. That commitment led to an invitation to attend the National Campus Recreation Association (NIRSA) conferences. He is the first USC student to represent the university at these events, showing how campus recreation supports development and creates larger opportunities. NIRSA, a leading group for collegiate recreation, hosts events for club and intramural teams and provides instruction for student officials. These conferences bring together campus recreation staff and college and professional officials focused on improving officiating.

"I was told by my coordinator that there's a basketball tournament at Georgia Tech in February and I should apply," Wright remembers. After being accepted, he met other student officials. "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, there are so many great student officials out there who are doing the same thing I'm doing, taking classes but officiating and working high school and college ball. This is amazing.'" Wanting to grow further, he applied to the NIRSA National Tournament in Madison, Wisconsin, where he received advanced instruction and heard speakers who shared insights on basketball and leadership.

"It was definitely a great experience and made several friends in those two events this past semester," he says, pointing to the connections and personal growth made possible through Campus Recreation. His academic focus may be numbers and languages, but his dedication to officiating is clear. He currently officiates high school basketball across greater Columbia, committing six days a week during the peak season.

After graduation, Wright plans to continue officiating and hopes for opportunities in college or professional games. His story reflects the university's focus on helping students develop fully, with Campus Recreation playing a key role. His participation in NIRSA was possible because of university staff who provided physical and financial support.



**Kallsen Wright**

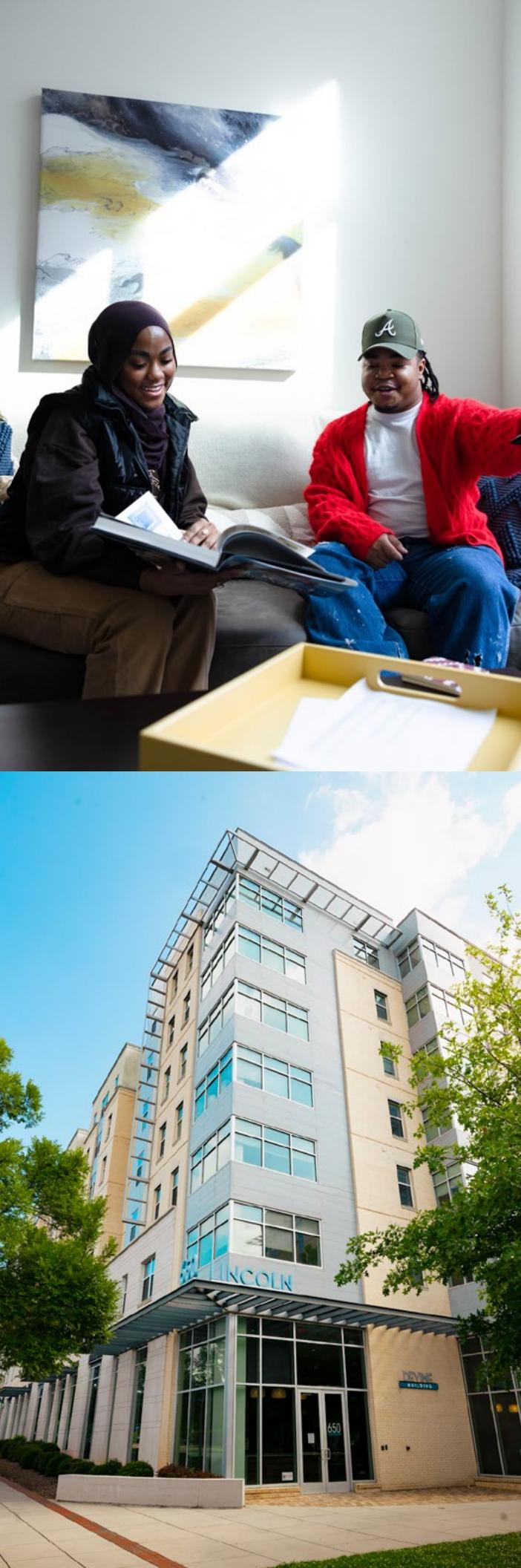


I'm very appreciative of the school for providing opportunities and for supporting me, both like physically and financially, to get to NIRSA, because I definitely couldn't have done it by myself.

# LIVING YOUR EXPERIENCE

## LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITIES

	# OF RESIDENTS
CAPSTONE (ACADEMIC)	409
FIRST-GEN	137
GALEN HEALTH FELLOWS	303
GLOBAL FELLOWS	137
IMPACT, DESIGN, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, ARTS	87
LEAF (SUSTAINABILITY)	136
PRESTON RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE FOR (LEADERSHIP)	197
RHODOS FELLOWS (INNOVATION)	41
ENGINEERING AND COMPUTING COMMUNITY	150
HONORS	877
MUSIC	62
Q-SPHERE	23
ROTC	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,576</b>



## WHERE YOU BELONG

### *Creating community through identity, housing and involvement*

At the University of South Carolina, living on campus is more than just a place to stay — it's where the college experience truly comes to life. Residence halls serve as vibrant, supportive communities where students build friendships, discover passions and lay the groundwork for academic and personal success.

In a recent survey, students reported feeling more connected, supported and safe — a reflection of the intentional environment created by dedicated residence life staff. This past year, residential students shared that their halls felt welcoming and secure, with noticeable increases in satisfaction around staff availability, fairness and overall support. As one student put it: "It's easier to make friends when you feel like someone's always looking out for you."

But the impact goes far beyond comfort, it reaches academics too. Students consistently say that living on campus helps them engage more

deeply in their courses, apply knowledge in real-world ways and make meaningful connections with classmates and faculty. In fact, students in residence halls reported a significant rise in their ability to connect with professors outside of class — something that can be critical to academic growth and career exploration.

The numbers tell a clear story: 92% of first-time, full-time freshmen who lived on campus in fall 2023 returned for their second year, compared to 84% of those who lived off campus. On-campus students also earned higher GPAs across their first two semesters, showing how deeply residential life contributes to long-term academic success.

Living on campus at Carolina means being part of a dynamic community where students are supported, inspired and set up to thrive. It's a foundation not just for college, but for everything that comes after.

# 28

Residence Halls

# 300+

Resident Assistants

# 8,681

Average Fall and Spring On-Campus Residents

# 13

Living-Learning Communities

# SUPPORT & SUCCESS AT CAROLINA

## SUPPORT WHERE IT MATTERS

The Student Care and Outreach Team continued its mission in 2024–2025 of providing responsive, personalized support to students navigating academic, personal and basic needs challenges. Through one-on-one meetings, phone calls and proactive follow-ups, the team served as a vital connector across the university — helping students access resources, build action plans and regain a sense of stability.

This year, the Care Team responded to student referrals with urgency, maintaining an average contact time of just over one day after a report was submitted. Nearly all referred students were contacted and connected to critical services such as mental health support, academic accommodations and emergency financial assistance.

## 12,000+

*Students Served*

To further strengthen outreach, two major initiatives were launched. The Carolina Cares Folder, distributed to faculty and staff, was modeled after national best practices and designed to help identify and refer students in distress. The Carolina Cares Fund, developed in partnership with the Dean of Students Office, offers financial support for unforeseen emergencies. More than 30 students applied for support in the fund's first semester alone.

Support capacity expanded this year with the addition of a new Assistant Director for Basic Needs and a dedicated Master of Social Work intern to manage temporary condition and withdrawal cases. These additions improved case management consistency and reduced turnaround times — averaging just under four days for withdrawals and six days for temporary condition requests.

Manged by the Care Team, the Gamecock CommUnity Shop experienced major growth, serving over 12,000 students and collecting more than 90,000 donations.

## 90,000+

*Donations*

Enhanced by donor support and new partnerships, the shop secured a dedicated cargo van and reestablished its collaboration with Harvest Hope Food Bank. A grant from Food Lion Feeds allowed for shelving and signage upgrades, making the space more accessible and welcoming. The CommUnity Shop now serves as a hub for both perishable and non-perishable food items, clothing, and hygiene products, helping students meet a wide range of basic needs. It has also expanded its hours of operation and introduced volunteer opportunities for students and staff to directly contribute to fighting food insecurity on campus.

Additionally, the launch of Garnet Bites, a campus food recovery notification program, already boasts over 1,000 subscribers since its debut in the spring. Garnet Bites connects students with leftover food from events and programs, preventing waste while promoting sustainability and access to free meals.

The Care Team's move into the Russell House significantly increased visibility and accessibility for students. New signage and website updates made it easier for students and faculty to locate and navigate services. Planning also began for a steering committee focused on addressing long-term structural needs in basic needs services, including food safety, inventory management, and creating sustainable partnerships with local and regional food providers.

Beyond direct services, the team continued to support student interns, present at national conferences and collaborate across departments to enhance the student experience. Through these efforts, the Student Care and Outreach Team remains deeply committed to ensuring every student at the University of South Carolina feels supported, connected and equipped to thrive.

## EXPANDING ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: THE SOUTH CAROLINA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (SCIP)

The South Carolina Internship Program (SCIP) has become a strong source of support for USC students looking to gain experience while staying in state. Launched in 2023 with funding from the South Carolina General Assembly, SCIP makes it easier for students to complete internships or cooperative education experiences in high-demand fields without the burden of unpaid work. Through this program, eligible students can apply for a \$3,000 award to help offset the costs of transportation, housing or lost wages. The goal is to make these opportunities more accessible to students who might otherwise be forced to turn them down.

Since its launch, the program has supported students from every USC campus and has built strong partnerships with employers across South Carolina. Many of these organizations now encourage their interns to apply for funding through SCIP, helping expand access to talent and deepen connections between higher education and the state workforce. Participating industries include health care, engineering, information technology and education, among others.

With over 330 companies now part of the network, the program has helped students explore career paths while staying close to home.

SCIP is more than just a funding source. At the end of each experience, students complete a self-assessment and receive feedback from their supervisors, which focuses on core skills like communication, teamwork and critical thinking. These evaluations give students a chance to reflect on their growth while offering data on how the experience is helping them prepare for life after graduation. This type of accountability has made the program more than transactional. It has become part of the university's broader strategy for career readiness and workforce development.

Since its creation, SCIP has awarded over \$4.6 million to USC students placed with companies and organizations across South Carolina. It continues to play a growing role in the university's commitment to helping students prepare for meaningful careers while supporting the state's future workforce.

## 3,131

*Total Applications*

## 1,140

*Approved Accepted Applications who are SC Residents*

“

The SCIP Program offered security on the financial side of my internship. This program allowed me to pursue a new career path at a higher pay, giving me freedom and safety in payments such as rent and groceries.

-Shannon Depratter

## 1,537

*Approved Accepted Applications*

## \$4.6M+

*Total Amount Awarded to Date*



## STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

The Student Success Center advanced the division's priorities by supporting students academically and personally throughout the year. The SSC served as the hub for tutoring, supplemental instruction, writing assistance, success consultations and financial guidance. These services were more than immediate course support. They equipped students with tools to manage time, sharpen study strategies and

make better decisions about their learning. Staff worked closely with students to set goals and strengthen their confidence in handling demanding classes. Collaboration with faculty carried this work into the classroom and created consistent pathways of support. The approach reflected the unit's values of aligning services with institutional priorities, reducing barriers and using insights to improve outcomes.

## CAROLINA EXPERIENCE

Carolina Experience advanced the unit's vision of supporting students beyond the first year. Programs centered on connection, leadership and balance, giving students ways to build relationships and learn outside the classroom. Events and initiatives were coordinated with academic goals so that involvement contributed directly to student success. Experiential learning opportunities allowed students to apply

their studies in meaningful contexts and mentorship programs offered guidance from peers and professionals. Leadership training prepared students to take on roles that strengthened the campus community. This work reflected the unit's framework of collaboration without duplication and its aim to create a premier experience that supports graduation and lifelong success.

## STUDENT ADVOCACY

Student Advocacy expanded its role as a connector between students and the resources that help them stay enrolled and succeed. Case management allowed staff to work directly with students facing academic or personal challenges and ensured they had someone to call on during difficult times. By coordinating with faculty, staff and campus partners the advocacy team built consistent support systems.



Case increase from the 2023-24 academic year

# 12,000+

Cases opened to help students navigate course difficulties during the 2024-25 academic year

# 60,500+

Academic support touchpoints and interventions were conducted, including tutoring, supplemental instruction, writing support, success consultations and alerts



# 700 +

Graduate student engagements including individualized academic support, accountability groups, financial consultations and career development presentations

# 43,000 +

Career student engagements, including over 5,000 one-on-one coaching appointments



Students reported satisfaction with programs, services, instruction and support, underscoring the unit's impact on the student experience



First-year students are served by the Student Success Unit, contributing to increased retention, sense of belonging and academic success



“

The South Carolina Internship Program impacted my internship tremendously. Though I am beyond grateful for the experience I gained this past summer, it wasn't a paid position. This was a sacrifice that I was willing to make in order to get a high-quality experience to enhance my future career in medicine.  
— Keyan Kennedy

”

# USC MENTORSHIP HUB

The Career Mentoring Program is a key initiative designed to provide students with meaningful, long-term mentoring relationships that support their professional growth and career development. Hosted through the USC Mentorship Hub, an online platform managed in partnership with the USC Career Center — the program connects students with alumni and industry professionals who offer guidance, insight and real-world experience.

In Spring 2025, the program featured a unique partnership with Amazon, where 13 Amazon employees served as mentors to 20 University of South Carolina students. Over the course of the semester, participants engaged in structured mentoring experiences, including regular one-on-one meetings, career planning sessions and skill-building conversations tailored to each student's goals and interests.

The USC Mentorship Hub supports both short-term match programs and longer-term mentorships, making it a flexible and accessible resource for students at any stage of their career journey. In addition to one-on-one guidance, the platform offers curated career resources, goal-tracking tools and communication features that help mentors and mentees stay engaged and aligned throughout the process.

By fostering connections between students and successful professionals, the Career Mentoring Program helps bridge the gap between college and the workforce, building confidence, expanding networks and empowering students to take the next steps on their career paths with clarity and support.

**161,873**  
*Jobs Posted*

## CAREER FAIRS

**5 | 5**  
*Fall | Spring*

**36,605**

*Employers on Handshake*

**7,318**

*Students attending job fairs*

**42,758**

*Career Center Student Engagement total*

**10%**

*Increase from 2023*

## ALUMNI/EMPLOYER MENTORS IN CAREER CENTER MENTORING PROGRAM

**203**  
*Total*

**97**  
*Fall*

**106**  
*Spring*

## MENTEES IN CAREER CENTER MENTORING PROGRAM

**305**  
*Total*

**154**  
*Fall*

**151**  
*Spring*

## MONEY RECEIVED IN EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP FUNDING

**\$55,000**  
*7 Partners*

**\$16,000**  
*16 Sponsors*



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our work does not end at the campus border. It reaches into communities, industries and institutions across the country. Whether through grant-funded research, conference presentations, cross-campus partnerships or national leadership roles, our teams have contributed to the conversations shaping student affairs today.

This year, we also expanded our efforts to document, assess and share our practices to ensure that what we learn at Carolina can inform and inspire others.

You will also see how our partnerships with families, community organizations and employers have helped us grow both opportunity and access for students. These relationships bring resources to our campus and open doors for students as they prepare for what comes next.

*Contributed to economic impact  
during MLK Day of Service*

**\$20,000**

**\$12,000**

*Donated to Special Olympics  
for the State of South Carolina*

**\$25,048.71**

*Walk-A-Thon proceeds donated to The Jed Foundation, which focuses  
on protecting emotional health and preventing suicide  
among teens and young adults*

# PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

*Engaging families, employers and the broader community*

## USC JOINS WHITE HOUSE TO END HUNGER

In February, the University of South Carolina was selected to join the White House Challenge to End Hunger and Build Healthy Communities. As one of 140 participating institutions nationwide, USC is taking steps to improve access to nutritious food and essential resources by 2030.

College students are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. In response, the university has pledged to strengthen its support systems for students through the following efforts:

- Expanding staff capacity within the coordinated care network
- Launching new software to streamline operations of the Gamecock CommUnity Shop
- Partnering with Harvest Hope Food Bank to increase the flow of donated goods
- Renovating the CommUnity Shop to create a more welcoming, accessible space

These efforts reflect the university's broader commitment to student well-being and community care.



## GAMECOCK POLAR PLUNGE RAISES OVER \$12,000 FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS

On January 28, Campus Recreation, in collaboration with USC Law Enforcement and the Law Enforcement Torch Run, hosted the 2025 Gamecock Polar Plunge at the Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center's outdoor pool. The event brought together students, faculty, staff and community members in support of Special Olympics South Carolina.

Twenty-seven teams raised more than \$12,000, surpassing the fundraising goal. All proceeds went directly to Special Olympics programs across South Carolina, helping provide inclusive athletic opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities—at no cost to the athletes or their families.

This year marked the first time the Polar Plunge was hosted on campus, creating more accessibility and increased participation from student organizations and campus partners. Phi Kappa Sigma led all teams in donations, raising over \$1,600. Other key contributors included USC Police, Unified Gamecocks, USC Safely Engaging in Expression Delegates, Russell House University Union and various schools and community organizations.

Mike Sill, Law Enforcement Torch Run Liaison, praised the event's success and impact, calling it "well organized, well attended, and aligned with the mission to raise awareness and funds for thousands of athletes."

Quashon Johnson, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator with Campus Recreation, added, "This event reflects the heart of Student Affairs—building community and creating meaningful opportunities to serve. We're proud to bring it back to campus and look forward to continuing this tradition."



## HONORING REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. THROUGH SERVICE AND CELEBRATION

Nearly 200 students and community members participated in the University of South Carolina's annual MLK Day of Service on January 18, 2025. Coordinated by the Leadership and Service Center through the Service Saturday program, volunteers supported eight service sites across the Columbia area, contributing an estimated \$20,000 in economic impact.

On campus, students took part in a peanut butter and jelly making contest, resulting in over 2,000 sandwiches donated to The Arc of South Carolina. Volunteers in the Russell House also created handwritten cards for children receiving care at Prisma Health Children's Hospital. At the Sustainable Carolina Garden, participants worked to clear debris, add compost and mulch and plant new seedlings to support the campus sustainability initiative.

Off-campus projects included work with the Alala Cancer Society and Game Changers, where volunteers assisted with organizing and beautifying community spaces.

The university's annual MLK Commemorative Breakfast was held on January 17 and featured remarks from bestselling author Dr. Clint Smith and USC President Michael Amiridis. The event included a performance of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by Touch of Faith, USC's Student Gospel Ensemble and the presentation of the 2025 Social Justice Awards. Honorees included Althea Counts, Norah Dixon, Christina Plakas and Dr. Devin Randolph, along with recognitions for USC's Unsung Heroes, Distinguished Alumni and Community Partner.

## GAMECOCK FAMILY WEEKEND

Family Weekend 2024 took place September 11 through 13 and welcomed hundreds of Gamecock families back to campus for a three-day celebration of connection, tradition and Carolina pride. Hosted by the Office of Parent and Family Programs, the weekend featured signature events that brought students and their families together while showcasing the energy of campus life.

Highlights included Rock the Roost, a Friday evening event with live music by the Reggie Sullivan Band, dancing and local food favorites. Families gathered under the lights to relax, reconnect and enjoy an upbeat start to the weekend.

The schedule also featured a meet and greet with President Michael Amiridis and First Lady Ero Aggelopoulos-Amiridis

on the historic Horseshoe. Families had the opportunity to speak with university leaders, faculty and student ambassadors in a welcoming and informal setting.

Saturday's Family Tailgate Party brought Gamecock spirit to life with music, food and special appearances by Cocky, the cheerleaders and members of the Carolina Band. Families then made their way to Williams-Brice Stadium to cheer on the Gamecocks and experience the energy of game day in Columbia.

Throughout the weekend, campus partners hosted open houses, tours and drop-in sessions to highlight academic support, student involvement and wellness resources. Family Weekend remains a signature part of the fall semester and helps families feel connected to the Carolina experience.



## WALK-A-THON

The Walk-a-Thon served as the centerpiece fundraiser for this important cause, drawing strong participation from students, faculty, staff and local supporters. The event promoted awareness, encouraged connection and raised funds to support The Jed Foundation which focuses on protecting emotional health and preventing suicide among teens and young adults. Proceeds from the Walk-a-Thon went directly

to the foundation's national efforts. USC is one of more than 500 campuses designated as a JED Campus, a program that helps colleges and universities strengthen mental health support systems. Through this partnership, the university receives structured guidance to evaluate and improve programs, policies and resources tied to mental health, substance use and suicide prevention.



# FROM CAMPUS TO CONFERENCE

## NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER: THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina continued its efforts to support student success during the 2024–2025 academic year. Through conferences, research, publications and professional development opportunities, the Center offered resources for educators and institutions focused on helping students move through college with confidence.

During the year, the Center led two national conferences. The 44th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience took place in New Orleans, and the 31st National Conference on Students in Transition was held virtually. Both events drew strong participation and positive feedback. The First-Year Experience Conference welcomed over 2,000 attendees and nearly 500 proposals. The Students in Transition Conference generated its highest revenue to date for a virtual event.

Professional development opportunities remained a key part of the Center's work. The First-Year Seminar Institute returned in person at the Pastides Alumni Center, and nearly 500 individuals

registered for the new "lunch and learn" webinar series, which offered timely content in a short format.

The Center also adjusted its publishing efforts to meet changing needs. It combined two newsletters into one, discontinued the print version of its journal and launched a new publication titled Insights for College Transitions. In addition, reports on peer leadership and transfer student experiences were released during the year.

Research activity increased through new staff contributions, collaborative projects and grant submissions. Seven research products were completed, and the Center raised the award amount for its annual Fidler Grant. A proposal was submitted to the National Science Foundation to support a study focused on STEM student belonging. Work funded by NASPA and the Gates Foundation continued through the HBCU student success initiative.

The Center also expanded digital engagement, improved access for USC faculty and staff and worked with national partners to support student transitions across higher education.

## NO. 1 FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

U.S. News & World Report ranks USC Columbia first among public institutions for first-year student experience, reflecting the success of programs like University 101



## ASPIRE AND ADVANCE CONFERENCE

The inaugural Aspire and Advance Conference was held on August 1-2, 2024, at the University Conference Center on College Street. Created for staff and graduate assistants in Student Affairs and Academic Support, the event brought professionals together from across the division for a day of reflection, learning and connection.

The conference opened with a keynote from Vice President J. Rex Tolliver, who spoke about the power of purpose-driven teams and the shared mission that grounds the division's work. His message set the tone for a day focused on growth and collective impact.

Participants attended two breakout sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each session was offered twice, giving

staff the flexibility to choose topics most relevant to them. The lineup included sessions like "Resetting the Room: Intentional Conversations at Work," "What's Next? From Procrastination to Productivity" and "Your Work Has Worth." Other sessions explored leadership development, inclusive practices, student employment equity and strengths-based tools.

In addition to the sessions, the conference offered time for staff to network during breaks, enjoy lunch together and reflect with their teams. Aspire and Advance provided a meaningful pause to reconnect with colleagues, revisit personal goals and move into the year with renewed purpose.

## NEW PROFESSIONALS INSTITUTE

For the second year in a row, the University of South Carolina's Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support hosted the New Professionals Institute (NPI) for NASPA Region III and the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA). Attendance reached a record high, with 93 participants from 47 institutions across the region.

The five-day institute was held on USC's Columbia campus. Participants stayed in the Honors Residence Hall and attended sessions on student affairs topics including crisis response, professional boundaries and early career development. They also joined small group discussions to reflect on their experiences and build connections with peers.

USC staff played a central role. Dean of Students Marc Shook completed

his term as NPI Institute director, working alongside NPI Coordinator Kat Yoffie. Nine additional staff members from across the division contributed to the program and participated throughout the week.

Ahead of the institute, USC Associate Vice President for Residential Experience Dr. Kirsten Kennedy and Clemson University's Dr. Tony Cawthon led the Student Affairs 101 Pre-Institute Conference. The NPI faculty included higher education professionals from across the region, including incoming director Dr. Eric Bailey II and USC alumna Dr. Jackie Mullen.

USC's continued involvement with NPI reflects its strong support for professional learning and collaboration across student affairs.

## SOUTH CAROLINA HAZING PREVENTION SUMMIT: LEADING CHANGE ACROSS CAMPUSES

In May 2025, USC hosted the first-ever South Carolina Hazing Prevention Summit, welcoming more than 100 professionals from colleges and universities across the state. Held on the Columbia campus, the two-day event focused on strategies to reduce and prevent hazing in student organizations.

The summit was facilitated by national leaders from StopHazing and centered around the Hazing Prevention Framework, a research-based model that helps institutions create safer and more accountable communities. Sessions included keynotes, policy updates, workshops and a train-the-trainer experience that equipped participants to return to campus with new tools and action plans.

One of the most impactful moments came from a keynote address by Cindy Hipps, whose son Tucker died in a fraternity-related incident in 2014. Her remarks reinforced the urgency and personal impact of hazing prevention efforts. Attendees also explored how national and state policies including the Tucker Hipps Transparency Act and the Stop Campus Hazing Act are shaping prevention practices.

More than just a conference, the summit served as a launchpad for collective progress. Participants left with ready-to-use training resources, new connections and the motivation to build stronger and safer campus environments. By hosting this event, USC helped lead the conversation on hazing prevention in South Carolina and reaffirmed its commitment to student safety and well-being.

45

*Sessions held over two days  
at Aspire & Advance*

2,051

*First-Year Experience  
conference attendees*



# GIFTS THAT PROPEL STUDENTS

Financial support is essential to fulfilling the mission of the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support. Every gift makes a meaningful impact on the student experience through supporting programs that foster academic achievement, enhance services that promote well-being and create opportunities that prepare students for success beyond the classroom.

## \$2.5M

*Total raised for student support in FY 2025, marking the division's best fundraising year since FY 2016*

## GIVE4GARNET

In 2025, the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support celebrated its strongest fundraising year in nearly a decade. A key driver of the division's fundraising success is Give4Garnet, USC's annual day of giving that unites the Carolina community to make philanthropic gifts in support of the university. Donors designate gifts to causes and projects they're passionate about including scholarships, student experience and basic needs support.

The division's 2025 Give4Garnet's campaign raised a record breaking \$113,000 — the largest total in the division's campaign history. Building on the momentum of 2024, Student Affairs once again led the entire university in donor participation, with generous support from alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends.

Through the campaign, donors directed gifts towards initiatives with an immediate and tangible impact on students. Contributions to the Carolina Cares Fund provided critical emergency assistance for unexpected hardships, while additional support enhanced mental health services, expanded leadership development opportunities and advanced career readiness programs. Donors also invested in efforts addressing food security and housing stability, ensuring students have the resources they need to thrive.

Additionally, gifts to student organizations and sports clubs enriched campus life, strengthening the overall student experience inside and outside of the classroom. The campaign included engaging donor challenges and matching gift opportunities to incentivize giving.

The University of South Carolina offers a variety of meaningful ways to give, including annual fund contributions, corporate and foundation support, major gift endowment and planned or estate giving.

The generosity of donors not only meets the urgent needs of today but also builds the long-term capacity of the division, ensuring future generations of students will continue to thrive.

## PURPOSEFUL GIVING

The Gamecock CommUnity Shop is a powerful example of how support directly impacts students' daily lives. By uniting the Gamecock Pantry, Gamecock School Supplies and the Carolina Closet, the Gamecock CommUnity Shop ensures that students have free access to food, clothing and essential items. Last year, the shop welcomed more than 12,000 visits, distributed over \$170,000 in goods and benefited from nearly 5,000 hours of volunteer service. This vital resource enables students to remain focused on their studies and campus involvement without the burden of choosing between necessities and their education.

One of the shop's strongest advocates is Carolyn Pearce of Florence, S.C. Pearce became involved after hearing First Lady Ero Aggelopoulos-Amiridis speak about the number of students struggling to afford food, clothing and supplies. Carolyn was struck by the realization that while academics and athletics often receive much of the spotlight, some students face the challenge of not having enough to eat, inspiring her to act.

Carolyn created the Gamecock 500 campaign to build steady support for the shop by asking individuals to donate \$500 annually in support of the Gamecock CommUnity Shop. The campaign quickly gained momentum and continues to expand its reach.

"There is more to giving than money," she said. "It is about time, talent and helping your fellow man."

Her words reflect both the purpose of the Gamecock CommUnity Shop and the vital role it plays in supporting students. The shop continues to thrive because people give in many meaningful ways. Some make financial contributions while others donate clothing, food, hangers or even laundry baskets.

Volunteers dedicate their time to sorting items and welcoming visitors. Every act of generosity helps keep the shelves stocked and the doors open. For students, the shop represents far more than access to supplies. It is a tangible reminder that their community stands beside them in their success and well-being and offers basic needs relief so students can focus on their education without having to worry about having access to these essentials.

The extraordinary success of Give4Garnet and the growth of initiatives like the Gamecock CommUnity Shop show what is possible when the Carolina family comes together with a shared purpose. Every gift, whether financial contributions, donated items or volunteer hours translates into real opportunities for students to thrive academically, personally and professionally.

This spirit of generosity not only meets urgent needs today but also strengthens the foundation for tomorrow, ensuring that future generations of Gamecocks will be supported, encouraged and provided with the necessary resources to succeed.

Together, we are building a legacy of care and commitment that defines what it means to be part of the University of South Carolina.



**“**  
The earlier we build a culture of giving, the sooner future generations will see how the Gamecock Nation supports them.  
- Jeffrey Smolka, Class of '88  
Founder, Smolka Scholarship for the Carolina Men's Club Rugby team  
**”**

Jeffrey Smolka, a 1988 alumnus and dedicated supporter of Give4Garnet, has established six endowed funds for the Carolina Men's Rugby Club. A former Carolina rugby player himself, Smolka launched a creative challenge to inspire others to give back to Student Affairs. He pledged \$25,000 if 700 donors contributed to the division during the campaign, motivating the others to rally behind the lasting impact of Give4Garnet.



## 20%

*Increase in donations from 2023 - 24 year*

## 12,000+

*Visits to the CommUnity Shop*

## \$170,000+

*In goods distributed*

## 5,000

*Hours of volunteer service*

# THE LOOK OF BELONGING

USC Columbia focused on improving the physical campus through strategic upgrades that enhance both function and atmosphere. Housing renovations continued under the USC Next plan, with new designs aimed at bringing more residential spaces closer to the academic core. These changes support student life and help build a stronger sense of place on campus.

The Center for Health and Well-Being introduced new artwork and calming visuals to create a more peaceful environment for students seeking care. Trooh digital boards were installed at the Blatt PE Center, Campus Village residence halls, Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center and the Center for Health and Well-Being, offering campus updates, event

announcements and mobile charging while keeping students connected. The Russell House began phase one of its renovation plan, adding murals, graphics and updated seating that reflect student creativity and campus spirit. The large USC letters on Greene Street, installed in front of the Russell House, have become a popular photo spot and landmark.

The university bookstore moved to the first floor of the Byrnes Building, while the retail store remains in the Russell House. Renovations at Gamecock Park also continued, with updates focused on layout, accessibility and the overall experience. These projects reflect USC Columbia's ongoing investment in a more student-centered, welcoming campus.





*Thank you*



**Student Affairs and  
Academic Support**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA