UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
UNION

A Regional Palmetto College

FO Minutes
October 23, 2026 – 10:00 AM
Whitener Building, Community Room

In-person attendance:	**Online attendance:**
Sarah Carter	Gale Ashmore
Avery Fouts	Maggie Aziz
Sarah Heuss	Neil Hance
Andrew Kettler	Randy Ivey
Katie Klik	Randy Lowell
Steve Lowe	Christen Mayes
Steve Lownes	Reginald O'Dell
David Mitra	Sandy Phillips-Long
Cortney Pinnell	Megan Rabanal
Andrew Pisano	Caroline Wilson
Emily Schafer	
Tracy Stapleton	

Future FO meetings:

December 4, 9:30 am.

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 am.

A call to approve the September 11 minutes was made and passed.

Dean's Report: Dr. Randy Lowell

Dr. Lowell gave his report. The report is attached to these minutes.

Dr. Lownes asked how our budget is holding up. Dr. Lowell responded that a report will be made for the next FO.

Academic Dean's Report: Dr. Maggie Aziz

Dr. Aziz gave her report. The report is attached to these minutes.

Of note:

- Advising has started; an orientation for advising is being set up online; please direct questions regarding advisement to Dr. Aziz.
- First Gen Week starts November 9th.
- A celebration for our outstanding metrics is planned.

Dr. Klik asked Dr. Aziz how the role of data aggregator for campus teaching evaluations would be handled. Dr. Klik suggested we could possibly handle it in house. Dr. Kettler suggested the topic should be raised in R&R. Dr. Aziz related that we won't have a plan by Nov. 1 and needs permission from faculty regarding sharing their evaluation results.

Report from Dr. Kettler

Dr. Kettler gave his report. The report is attached to these minutes.

Of note: An online presentation on preventing sexual assault and violence will be given Dec. 4. Faculty should plan on attending the presentation. The FO start time scheduled for Dec. 4 was pushed to 9:30 am to accommodate this.

Dr. Klik asked if USCU has plans to raise awareness of our academic programs in social media. Dr. Pisano noted there is little information on academics on our webpage and emphasized the importance of showcasing our academic accomplishments there. Dr. Fouts mentioned this would help impress parents and influence their decision to send their children here. Dr. Lowell mentioned that faculty should email Travis to add information to their profile page. He also stated he will consider how to better represent academics in our website.

Dr. Klik raised the issue of the conflict of athletic practice schedules with class schedules. After some discussion it was decided to create an ad hoc committee to consider the matter.

Dr. Kettler suggested we create a committee to discuss student issues concerning alcohol abuse.

Committee Reports

- Dr. Lowe: PC Rights and Responsibilities Committee.

  Dr. Lowe reported that there is no process at the moment for appointing administrative positions below the campus dean and that we need to codify how we go about searching

for academic dean and chairs. He suggested that the results of this should be placed in the faculty manual. Dr. Klik suggested we send the matter to Steve's committee for review and called for an FAC meeting.
Dr Aziz asked the faculty to consider whether division chairs can serve on T&P committee.

Other Business

- Voting on Division Chairs.

It was noted that the division chair positions would have a stipend of 13k and a 2-2 teaching load. Information on the position will be sent out by Dr. Klik.
Dr. Lownes asked if adjuncts could vote on division chairs. It was decided that anyone with access to the voting link, which includes adjuncts, can vote. An email will be sent to all faculty containing the voting link.

Voting was held for the positions. Dr. Klik and Dr. Lowe were voted into the department chair positions.

Announcements

- Dr. Carter announced that AOE invited Dr. Stephen Criswell to our campus. He will give a talk on indigenous heritage on Nov. 11.
- Dr. Klik announced that the faculty lunches on Wednesdays will continue. They may be held on different weekdays. Flyers will be sent out.
- Dr. Kettler announced he is building another conference in the Spring: a Research Committee at Pathways for all of PC. It will be held online. Please let Dr. Kettler know if you'd like to serve on a panel or present.
- Dr. Schaffer encouraged everyone to use EcoGPt, an AI application that will plant trees every time one makes a search with it.
- Dr. Carter announced the International Club movie night.
- Prof. Stapleton encouraged all to come to the Day of the Dead event.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

The meeting adjourned at 11:41 am.

Attachments: Dr. Kettler's report, Academic Dean's report, Dean's Report

Prepared by: David Mitra, FO Secretary

Dr. Kettler's report:

1) Early Alert System
Please continue submitting Early Alerts and Progress Reports when concerns arise regarding student attendance, performance, or well-being. Timely referrals remain one of our most effective tools for supporting student success, retention, and intervention.

2) AI Bot Champion
Our AI Bot Champion team continues to include Ashley Rabanal, Sarah Heuss, Brad Greer, and Robert Overton. Over the next month, we will begin rolling out a larger number of customized campaigns and targeted outreach initiatives using the AI system. If you have questions, please reach out to Andrew Kettler.

3) Vector Training Progress
We are making excellent progress on Vector Training. Approximately half of all students have now completed their required modules for the semester. Reminder messages will continue to be distributed through the Vector system, and we appreciate everyone's assistance in encouraging student participation as we work toward full completion, especially Bobby Holcombe. If you have questions, please reach out to Andrew Kettler.

4) Digital ADA and Ally Scores
There are no major updates regarding Digital ADA implementation. Faculty should continue monitoring Ally scores and making incremental improvements to course accessibility materials as we await additional guidance concerning implementation timelines and compliance expectations. At present, the anticipated implementation deadline remains August 2027. If you have questions regarding Ally scores or accessibility improvements, please reach out to Andrew Kettler.

5) Blackboard Updates
There are no significant Blackboard updates to report beyond the additions and adjustments implemented earlier this semester. If you have questions regarding Passback, Ally scores, or other Blackboard matters, please contact Andrew Kettler for campus support.

6) Blackboard Course Retention Reminder
Please remember that older Blackboard courses remain subject to archival and deletion schedules. If there are legacy courses that you wish to preserve, notify Andrew Kettler so arrangements can be made before archiving occurs.

7) Dawkins Archive, Free Library, and Student Study Area
The Library and Student Study Area in the History Suite continues to expand. We are actively growing the Dawkins Archive as a research collection, student workspace, and archival center connected to

the ongoing Dawkins House project. Students continue to utilize the space for studying, printing, collaborative work, and research activities. The lending library continues to grow, and we remain grateful for the generosity of faculty and community members who have donated books and materials.

8) Donations for Students and the Dawkins Archive
We continue to welcome donations of books, archival materials, magazines, coffee supplies, school supplies, furniture, and related items. Donations have already had a meaningful impact on student use of the space, and additional contributions are always appreciated.

9) Dawkins House and Preservation South Carolina Projects
Work continues with Preservation South Carolina on the reconstruction, interpretation, and archival development of the Dawkins House project. Our campus grant team recently met to discuss expansion of the project through a proposed $800,000 grant initiative being developed in partnership with Preservation South Carolina and regional stakeholders. Andrew Kettler is serving as lead writer for the proposal and will be the primary principal investigator representing USC Union. The project continues to provide opportunities for student research, public history engagement, community partnerships, and grant-supported preservation work, including recent submissions of Magellan and Mini-Grants by students and mentors. The project is being followed in local media, state media, and on a specific external blog dedicated to the project.

10) Athlete Workshop Series - November 16-19
Please continue encouraging students to attend the annual Athlete Workshop Series, which remains open to all students, faculty, and staff. Workshops will be held each afternoon from 3:30-5:00 PM in the Main Building Auditorium from November 16-19.
Monday, November 16:
Jamie Chrisman and LeTanya Williams (Favor Piedmont) will present on Addiction and Recovery.
Tuesday, November 17:
Peter Habib (USC Columbia) will present on Stress Management and Confidence Building.
Wednesday, November 18:
Kat Bien and a local athlete from the GTC Center for Collegiate Recovery will discuss Student-Athletes and Substance Use.
Thursday, November 19:
Jenna Anderson (USC Columbia) will present on Gambling Addiction, followed by Nikki Prude (USC Columbia) presenting on Addiction, Alcohol Abuse, and Violence Prevention. Narcan distribution and training resources will also be available.

11) P3 Program Reminder
Our partnership with P3 remains one of the strongest opportunities available for students interested in medical careers. The annual P3 Open House is expected in early February, and any interested students should contact Andrew Kettler if they would like to attend.

12) Faculty Presentations and Research Sharing
This semester's Research Club schedule includes:

- Peter Habib, presenting on his work concerning mental health and student well-being.
- Jennifer Taylor and undergraduate student researchers, presenting on the history, sociology, and biology of mushrooms and fungal studies.

Faculty interested in presenting research, scholarship, creative activity, or pedagogical innovations are encouraged to contact Andrew Kettler regarding future presentation opportunities.

13) Faculty Research Conference Success and Future Possibilities
The recent Faculty Research Conference was successful. Participation was excellent, and the event highlighted the breadth of scholarship occurring across Palmetto College. Looking ahead, would there be interest in a virtual Faculty Research Conference during Spring 2027? One possibility would be a series of online presentations in which faculty members across the Palmetto College campuses could share research projects, works in progress, teaching innovations, and pedagogical approaches through shared PowerPoint sessions.

14) Continued Participation in First Gen Network
Our involvement with the First Generation Network continues to expand, and meetings begin in October. Thank you to Lynn Edwards for joining that team. Faculty and staff should also note upcoming First-Generation College Student Celebration Week programming surrounding National First-Generation College Celebration Day on November 9, with additional campus activities and outreach efforts planned throughout that week.

15) Continued Participation in the South Carolina Network
USC Union remains actively involved in the South Carolina Network collaborative meetings coordinated through USC Columbia. Recent meetings have focused heavily on student engagement strategies, programming budgets, retention initiatives, and student support planning.

16) Congratulations to Robert Overton
Congratulations to Robert Overton for another successful Job Fair and for his outstanding leadership in organizing Mental Health Day. Both events were well attended and provided meaningful opportunities for students to connect with employers, campus resources, and wellness initiatives.

17) Upcoming SAVIP Presentation - December 4
As a reminder, SAVIP will be visiting campus virtually on December 4 after FO to provide programming related to sexual assault awareness, violence prevention, and student safety. We encourage faculty and staff to attend this important educational event.

18) General Reminders and Questions
As we move toward the end of the semester, please continue encouraging completion of Vector Training, support Early Alert referrals when appropriate, monitor Ally accessibility scores in Blackboard, promote athlete workshops and P3 opportunities, and help publicize First Generation and SAVIP programming.

Academic Dean's Report – Faculty Organization
Oct 2026

SCCHE Data Highlights

I'm excited to share newly released data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (SCCHE) that highlights the outstanding progress we've made at USC Union.

- **Retention rate** (Fall 2024 to Fall 2025): **60.2%**, ranking 1st among the four Palmetto College campuses and 6th when compared with the 16 technical colleges.
- **Success rate** (Fall 2022 cohort): **74.8%**, ranking 1st among the four Palmetto College campuses and the 16 technical colleges.
- **Graduation rate** (Fall 2022 cohort): **57.9%**, ranking 1st among the four Palmetto College campuses and the 16 technical colleges.
- **LIFE Scholarship freshman retention** (Fall 2024 to Fall 2025): **48.8%**, ranking 1st among the four Palmetto College campuses and the 16 technical colleges.
- **Scholarship retention for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors** (Fall 2024 to Fall 2025): **36.0%**, ranking 1st among the four Palmetto College campuses and the 16 technical colleges.

These results are a direct reflection of the hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff. Your ongoing support and commitment to our students have been instrumental in driving these outcomes and setting us on a path for continued success. Thank you!

Academic Affairs Updates

- **Programs:** I am working on a prospectus and program modification to offer the full degree at Oakbrook Preparatory School beginning Fall 2027. I am also developing an early college program at Gray Collegiate Academy so our students there can earn the full AA/AS degree beginning Summer 2027. In addition, I am developing a transfer pathway in Geological Sciences with the School of the Earth, Ocean and Environment at USC Columbia.

Faculty News

- **Professional development:** I am working on an online advisor training and professional development opportunity. More details to come.
- **Tenure and promotion:** I am working out how to compile teaching evaluation data for tenure and promotion files. I will keep faculty posted.

Spring 2027 Advising

Advising for Spring 2027 began on Monday, October 26, 2026. You can view the Spring 2027 schedule on Self Service, as it contains the official and most up-to-date course schedule. If you need help navigating the schedule on Self Service, please let me know.

General Advising Reminders

- Review student transcripts before advising and again after Fall 2026 grades are posted to confirm degree progress and prerequisite completion.
- Check course enrollments in Self Service to ensure seat availability prior to student registration.
- Complete the Advisement Form (white copy to student, pink retained by advisor, yellow submitted to me). Forms are available in Student Services. If you advise a student by phone or email, please email the schedule to the student and copy me on the email.
- Lift advisement holds after each student's advising session (in Self Service on the student profile page) and encourage students to register for their courses while you are still with them so you can ensure they successfully enroll in the courses you recommended. If you are unable to be with them during registration, remind students to register themselves in Self Service Carolina as soon as possible after advising, or have them come to Student Services for help.
- If a student has any hold on their account, they will not be able to register for classes. Please look for the hold on the student profile in Self Service and inform the student.
- Ask new students if they have any previous college work. If those courses are not showing on their USC transcript already, remind them they will need to have the official transcript sent from the college or university so that they can be evaluated and added to their USC transcript.
- Carolina Core Transfer Reference
- Verify that students meet all course prerequisite requirements before enrollment. You can check prerequisites in the course search.
- For a full list of Carolina Core classes, visit the Carolina Core courses page.
- If a student is close to graduation, you can ask Blake Wilson or Dr. Aziz to perform an informal degree audit to ensure the courses you are advising them for will fulfill the requirements for degree completion.
- 720 sections are for courses held at the Laurens location. If students enroll in a 720 section, they will be expected to attend the course at the Laurens location.

Important Guidelines for Student-Athletes

- NJCAA student-athletes must enroll in a minimum of **9 credit hours of face-to-face classes** each semester to maintain eligibility.
- An audit will be conducted to verify compliance. Students who do not meet this requirement will not be eligible to play.
- NJCAA teams: Baseball, Golf, Men's Soccer, Women's Soccer, Softball, Volleyball.
- Any exceptions to the 9-credit-hour face-to-face requirement must receive prior approval from Dr. Aziz.

Upcoming Events

First-Generation College Celebration: We will celebrate First-Generation College Celebration Day the week of November 9, with events Monday through Thursday (November 9–12). We appreciate your presence and participation, and please encourage your students to attend.

Randy Lowell, USC Union
Dean's Report
October 23, 2026

- Overall headcount enrollment is down from 1,629 to 1,522 YTD, but FTE enrollment is only down from 922 to 917 YTD. These overall numbers include being up 2 in change of campus students, 13 in continuing students, 26 in new freshmen, 2 in nondegree, and 8 in transfer students; along with down 1 readmit/returning student, and down 157 dual enrollment students from last Fall. So, in terms of traditional student enrollment, after removing dual enrollment students, we are up a total of 50 traditional students from last Fall.

- We welcomed a new member onto our staff, new Assistant Bass Fishing Coach, Lane Clark. This will be a huge help to Coach Coone as that team continues to grow and rise in the national rankings, most recently ranked #19 in the country, as well as support those student-athletes in staying on top of their academics with the strong team GPA they have maintained in recent semesters. Academically, that also includes having had one of their graduates earn the top Academic All-American Award nationally among all college anglers last year, and another current angler, Sophomore Jacob Jerrell, making the first cut of the 12 finalists to be considered for that academic award for the current academic year.

- The new BetterMynd mental health platform has officially launched for students to begin using for free mental health sessions from licensed providers and 24/7 support. More details on how they can access this new resource, in addition to some flyers for the MyGroup SAP and Peter Habib, were emailed out earlier this week and have been pushed out directly to students and posted around campus. For BetterMynd, they need to be at least 18 years old to sign up for telehealth sessions. They start out with 5 session credits in their account when they register, but if they use all of those up and still would like to continue with those sessions, they can request to get more credits added as long as we still have more campus credits remaining in the bucket. If we run through all of those, then we will see about potentially restocking those at that point ahead of the new academic year.

- For the 2026-2027 academic year, we have been awarded $7,500 in funds for our students from SC Student Loan's Persistence Fund program.

- The representatives from the CUTI Division of INTUS Smartcities launched a synchronous online pilot course earlier this month centered around fiber-to-the-home deployment and management training, with one of our students volunteering to participate in this to provide them with feedback as they finalize what those continuing education offerings will look like in 2027. At the conclusion of this pilot course, they have agreed to pay the $300 fee for our student to sit for the CAPM certification exam.

- Research Club updates:
    - Dr. Triplett and student, Leah Baldwin, provided us with a great Lunch & Learn this past Monday centered on their mutual interest in fungi, including many interesting Halloween themed varieties that were fascinating to learn about.
    - We will have a Research Club Bake Sale on Wednesday, October 28, with tables set up in the Main and Central Building lobbies.

- We will have our next Research Club Planning Meeting on Monday, November 2, at noon in the Community Room.
- We will go on a Research Club Nature Walk on Wednesday, November 4. Dr. Triplett will be guiding us on this walk with the particular trail TBD, but we will plan on leaving together from campus in Union at around 1:00, followed by a post-walk gathering at Don Pancho's that afternoon.
- We will go on a Research Club outing to USC Lancaster's Native American Studies Center on Wednesday, November 18. We will plan on leaving from campus in Union at around noon, stop for some lunch at the Wagon Wheel on the way, and then tour the Center afterwards, likely returning to campus in Union at around 5:00pm.
- We will have a Research Club Lunch & Learn on Monday, November 30 at noon in the Community Room, featuring a presentation by Peter Habib.

- We have been contacted by a group who is interested in bringing a flu vaccine clinic to campus in the coming weeks. I have responded to them to see if they might be able to set that up during our First Generation College Student Celebration week and am awaiting their reply. If we are able to work that out with them, we'll get those details out to everyone as soon as we have them.

- Facilities Projects in Progress:
  - Art Studio building is getting is working through some final stages to be ready for use in time for the Spring semester.
  - Student Services Building is having its new ceiling grid/tiles installed, and will then be ready for cleaning and painting ahead of staff being able to move back into that space.
  - Next phases of baseball, soccer, and Clinton projects are preparing to kick off.

