



July 1, 2021

Colleagues,

Today marks the start of a new chapter for USC Upstate. My family and I are truly excited to be part of this exceptional university!

A few years ago, I purchased a small book in an airport, *212° The Extra Degree* by Sam Parker. “At 211 degrees, water is hot. At 212 degrees, it boils, and with boiling water, comes steam ... and with steam, you can power a train. One degree. Applying one extra degree of temperature to water means the difference between something that is simply very hot and something that generates enough force to power a machine.”

What an amazing metaphor. As I read this, I can’t help but reflect on what our journey together will be, leading an exceptional community of faculty, staff and students who have invested their time and talent to ensure our upward momentum. Since making the decision to join you, I’ve seen you giving that extra degree of effort that makes something powerful happen. It is that extra degree that turns aspiring students into well-prepared professionals who are transforming their communities.

I had an opportunity to visit campus a few times earlier this summer. Each time I visited, I was struck by its physical beauty and well-maintained physical plant. This is a stunning environment for teaching and learning! I am also struck by your passion for and dedication to the significant work we do every day in service to our students—that extra degree of effort you make. The groundwork has been laid, in every sense of the word, and I am inspired and grateful to enter these next years with you.

It will take some time to learn more about you, your programs and the opportunities we will have to foster collaboration in the community. I thank you in advance for your patience and grace as I come to understand all I need to know about life as a Spartan.

As we prepare for a new semester, the Cabinet and our deans will gather for a retreat later this month. We’ll discuss their aspirations for the institution and we will create a shared vision for advancing our work to impact you and the Upstate region of South Carolina.

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, I thank you for your diligence and resilience. We will continue to adhere to health and safety protocols as we welcome students and faculty back to the classroom. If you have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine, we strongly encourage you to do so to protect yourself, your colleagues, and our students.

One of the first opportunities we’ll leverage as we gather again on campus is to host a formal New Student Convocation. This special evening, scheduled for August 18, will provide a chance for faculty and staff to welcome all new students, and give our students a memorable, official start to their academic careers at USC Upstate. A Convocation ceremony can create a strong sense of community for both freshmen and those who may be transferring from other institutions. Fostering a sense of belonging for students, faculty, and staff will be particularly important as we all adjust to the “new normal” created by the pandemic. Please look for additional information about Convocation during the coming weeks.

As I stated during my interviews earlier this year, I am committed to helping USC Upstate achieve new levels of academic excellence, operational efficiency, and student and faculty morale, while enhancing resources, reputation, and brand recognition. The commonality in these goals is ... you. I can't wait to see what we'll accomplish together!

Warm regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris  
Chancellor

**University of South Carolina Upstate**

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***Up is where we live.***