

# USC Spartanburg: The Making of a Metropolitan University to Serve a Changing Region

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## Abstract

*Eight years of progress to accomplish metropolitan mission-related goals are summarized in this article. To illustrate the transition from a “regional” to a “metropolitan” university, the article describes the stages of development that have characterized the emergence of the institution’s highly internationalized and diversified urban region, Greenville/Spartanburg, S.C. Those stages are identified as strategic framework, early accomplishment, tension and realignment, and goal achievement. Reviews of three institutional goals illustrate the transition: campus community development, academic development, and master plan development.*

The concept of a “metropolitan university” in South Carolina sounded strange eight years ago. It may sound so today to those unfamiliar with the many changes that have taken place in our state.

South Carolina has a distinctive three-part regional character. The so-called “Low Country” affirms most notions of vintage South Carolina: historic Charleston, the coastal plain, wetlands, golf courses, the old south. The “Midlands,” dominated by Columbia, is host to the University of South Carolina and the seat of state government, with growing regional investment in the context of rural surroundings.

The “Upstate” is defined by the Interstate-85 corridor, a 250-mile, six-lane ribbon from Atlanta to Charlotte, two of the fastest growing urban centers in the U.S. Departing Atlanta, one drives through the foothills of the Appalachians, with their forests, lakes, and rolling countryside. Rising abruptly in the middle are the merging twin cities of Spartanburg and Greenville, intersected by I-26 angling southeast toward Charleston’s harbor, the second busiest on the eastern seaboard.

Historically, Spartanburg was known as “Hub City” for its intersecting railroads serving travel and trade from the Northeast to Atlanta and the South, together with its dominant position in the textile industry. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both Greenville and Spartanburg had grown steadily, first one larger, then the other. The post-war years—with urbanization, out-migration and interstates replacing railroads—were not kind. Growth stalled and the Upstate appeared destined to share in the economic infirmities of the Appalachians.

## **Upstate South Carolina: A Metropolitan Corridor**

In the 1960s, a handful of visionaries led by Roger Milliken—whose company won the Malcolm Baldrige Award in 1989, the second year in the history of the award—built an infrastructure for the future that was to turn the Upstate around: namely, the Greenville/Spartanburg Airport (GSP). It was over-designed for its era, but the 1960s was not the era for which it was envisioned. It was meant for a new era of growth, particularly international investment.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mr. Milliken, together with the executive director of the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce and other visionaries spent considerable energy recruiting international investment well before the rest of the nation caught on. Initially, those investments were manufacturers of high-end textile processing technologies from Switzerland and Germany. Those investments, however, were only the beginning.

The visionaries of the 1950s and 1960s created a strategic framework for international investment that led to a period of early accomplishment during the 1970s and early 1980s. Internationalization, diversification of manufacturing base, and commercial traffic among the Upstate, the northeast, the upper Midwest, Europe, and Asia was to create a new kind of “Hub City.”

In 1995, Harvard economist Rosabeth Moss Kanter published her best seller, *World Class*. She employed case studies of three locations to illustrate the possibilities implicit in her sub-title, *Thriving Locally in the Global Economy: Boston, Miami, and Spartanburg/Greenville*. In that year, she also published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* fully focused on the international economy of Spartanburg/Greenville (Kanter 1995). Kanter described the visionary leadership, the international economic strategy, and the hospitable business climate that, taken together, positioned Upstate South Carolina as a player in the global economy. She also noted, however, that these were not sufficient to sustain international investment; neither were low wages nor tax incentives. Kanter observed that the Upstate’s commitment to education, technical training, and the development of workforce competency enabled it to thrive in the global economy.

In the wake of early accomplishments in internationalization and economic development, the Upstate realigned tactics, focusing directly on workforce competency through improved training and education. Today, the Upstate is achieving its goals. The Greenville/Spartanburg MSA is home to a million people and to over 275 international companies, nearly one hundred of which have their North American headquarters in the MSA.

“The history of the region’s economic development,” Kanter concluded, “is a lesson for business and community leaders seeking to understand what is required to achieve world-class status and bring local residents into the world economy” (1995).

Four stages of development are apparent in the emergence of the Upstate:

- a strategic framework,
- early accomplishments,
- tactical realignments, and
- goal achievement.

These developmental stages characterize the more recent emergence of USC Spartanburg as a metropolitan university.

## **USCS: A Metropolitan University**

USCS had its beginnings in the 1960s. Although the University played a role in the Upstate's emergence, it did so as a growing provider of baccalaureate education. Given its youth in the 1960s and 1970s, it had little capacity for partnership with the visionaries who were leading growth in the larger arena. Its measures of accomplishment in those early years were enrollment growth, four-year status, an expanding campus, and an increasingly strong faculty and staff.

However, with the early 1990s and the Upstate's flourishing international environment, faculty and administration were increasingly certain that far more specific accomplishments were required if the University was to be taken seriously by Upstate leadership. A general "regional" mission was not enough to assure significance in an MSA gaining more and more attention from journalists, scholars, demographers, and investors around the nation and the world.

With this recognition, USC Spartanburg entered the "strategic framework" phase of a four-phase mission change that, in its way, paralleled the emergence of the Upstate. The University had some catching up to do.

***Strategic framework.*** In August 1994, following intense consultations during initial weeks in office, a new chancellor delivered a speech to faculty and staff calling for institutional realignment as a "metropolitan" university. The speech articulated an ambition that is central to all great metropolitan universities: to be at the hub of the metropolitan agenda...focused on the needs of the region...focused on partnerships.

With a seriousness of purpose impelled by Upstate accomplishment, the University has, since 1994, developed its metropolitan mission and pursued its vision to be a leading partner in the Upstate, and to be known as a leading metropolitan university in the southeast—not the biggest, but among the best in fitness to the challenges and opportunities of its MSA.

As the airport had done with great success beginning thirty-five years earlier, USCS began the long process of positioning itself as a significant partner within the growing international metropolitan arena.

The strategic goals of the University's metropolitan mission included the development of new curricula addressing the needs of the region, articulation with its technical college counterparts, attention to continuous quality improvement in organizational and human resource development, a robust information technology infrastructure, capital improvements benchmarked against Upstate corporate properties, demographics reflecting the diversity of the region, cross-campus internationalization, partnerships and more partnerships.

***Early accomplishment.*** Over the next three years, the University moved with notable speed to implement mission and goal-driven objectives. The engine was a strategic planning committee, chaired by the chancellor, that functioned by charging research groups to investigate options in short turn-around times, returning findings to the committee. Findings were transformed into administrative action plans and channeled, as appropriate, to faculty governance for consideration or to administrators for implementation.

Within the first year, action plans were implemented for numerous objectives: enrollment management, accreditations, restructuring, service improvements, image enhancement, summer sessions, retention, technology and scholarship programs. New maps were created for nearly every aspect of operations.

***Tension and realignment.*** Four years into the mission adaptation, USCS began to feel the tension of transition. It was a tension created by four years of institutional overdrive, coupled with reductions in state funding that have now become endemic nationwide. In fall 1998, a chancellor's speech entitled "University as Tightwire," addressed the "tension and realignment" matter, quoting – with an attempt at humor – the famous wirewalker Carl Wallenda, who said: "Walking the tightwire is living; everything else is waiting." No one was amused. The tightwire quality of life was painfully clear. The tension was palpable. The mission change was taking its toll.

However, it was also clear that the tightwire was the University's means of getting from one point to another with little time to spare; and, the campus recognized that, while the tightwire was constrained by tension from multiple directions, it also was sustained by those same tensions. High expectations of the metropolitan mission, inside and outside the institution, were both burdensome and motivational.

Over the next year or so, planning focused on strengthening those structures that sustain the tightwire. Budgeting was aligned with planning. So, too, was assessment. Customer-focused admissions and enrollment management operations were fine-tuned, as were scheduling, advising, registration, financial aid and other services. Information technology infrastructure was enhanced, and process improvements were accomplished in support operations. A master plan was launched. Classrooms and labs were upgraded. All professional schools gained accreditations. Image and reputation were continually improving.

**Goal achievement.** Eight years later, the “metropolitan university” is a reality. The mission is clear. The vision remains a continuing challenge though, as progress toward the achievement of goals certifies, the vision is attainable. The University is the fastest growing in the state with enrollments escalating from 3,200 to 4,300 over the past five years, with substantial continuing growth in its future. And, for the past five years, USCS has been ranked among *U.S. News and World Report’s* “top five public liberal arts colleges in the South.”

Three goals were of central importance to the realization of the USCS mission and vision:

1. Campus community development that reflects and supports the demography and international character of the Upstate;
2. academic program development that supports Upstate needs in collaboration with regional institutions; and,
3. master plan development benchmarked against the best of the Upstate’s corporate and institutional physical plants.

## **Campus Community Development**

In the early years of transformation, “diversity” and “internationalization” were singled out as top priorities of campus community development.

**Strategic framework** The University needed a comprehensive strategy to guide its campus community development efforts. A task force was charged to prepare a campus-wide framework for the enterprise, concentrating on ethnic and international diversity.

**Peer institutions were studied and benchmarked** The diversity environment of Upstate South Carolina was assessed to assure that the University’s planning, if accomplished, would be acknowledged and modeled across the MSA.

The group undertook its research, framed the diversity vision and outlined sixty-eight objectives assembled into an action plan with one to five year completion schedules.

**Early accomplishment** The first three years witnessed enormous accomplishment. Diversity related courses were established. Cognates in ethnic and women’s studies were developed. The Women’s Studies Center was established together with the Center for International Studies, so crucial in the international arena of the Upstate. An annual multicultural conference for pre-service teachers was launched. Awards recognized extraordinary diversity achievements by faculty and staff. A multicultural concert series was established featuring nationally and internationally renowned artists.

**Tension and realignment** By year four, tension created by intense activity with insufficient infrastructure, began to take its toll. The diversity task force, whose membership had invented and overseen the plan, found its continued management

beyond its capacity.

Over the next year, the University focused on realigning diversity support structures. The chief student affairs officer was named “vice chancellor for student and diversity affairs.” Support staffing was added including the Equal Opportunity Office. Administrative staffing in the International Studies Office was provided. Other structural measures were taken to realign and sustain the greatly expanding commitment.

**Goal achievement** The University is becoming the metropolitan model of community it had anticipated eight years earlier.

Minority faculty representation has climbed from 8% to 14%, minority staff to 18%. All University processes have been revised to reflect a diversity emphasis. Scholarships support minority and non-traditional students. Published and online training modules address diversity issues.

The University has excellent working relationships with the NAACP, the Urban League, international and Hispanic communities, political and religious leadership, civic organizations and school districts.

The Spartanburg Business and Professional Women’s Association has honored the University for extraordinary support and advancement of female employees. The NAACP and Human Relations Commission have recognized USCS for its accomplishments. The chancellor served as founding chair of the Spartanburg Urban League Board and, on behalf of the University, accepted recognition as the Urban League Humanitarian of the Year (2002). The University recently hosted the Southern Association for College Student Affairs Diversity conference. In 2002, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked USCS among the top southeastern universities for its diversity achievement.

Aided by aggressive international partnerships, the University’s International Studies Center is a significant and influential entity among the Upstate’s large and sophisticated international community. Its director works with an advisory committee representing most of the region’s larger international employers. At a recent reception honoring international students attending the University, students from seventy-one nations were represented in the campus community.

The University is achieving its vision to be recognized in the metropolitan Upstate as the organizational leader in the diversity and international arenas.

## **Academic Development**

In the beginning, the faculty was quick to accept the metropolitan mission. After all, USCS began in the 1960’s as a two-year college to educate nurses. It took a period of years, however, for the concept to be reflected fully in academic affairs.

**Strategic framework.** With the mission change, a quiet revolution began to take place, including current faculty and, more intentionally, those newly hired.

**Early accomplishment.** Faculty began to perceive that the academic essence of a metropolitan university was the use of the community as a classroom and laboratory. New courses focused on the region. One faculty member developed “Understanding Poverty,” with students working in soup kitchens and delivering meals to Upstate residents. Another developed a project for criminal justice students to tutor inmates in preparing for the GED examination. Experiential learning opportunities were developed in nearly all majors.

Community grant funding increased: child-care and health assessments for a new housing project, genetic counseling education for practicing nurses, water ecology programs to public school students, language instruction for nurses and doctors serving a growing Hispanic population.

**Tension and realignment.** Individual faculty initiatives were of crucial importance, and their continuation has been encouraged and rewarded. However, individual efforts were insufficient for the achievement of academic objectives. Structural changes were required: comprehensive faculty development, deep curricular engagement in academic partnerships, and innovation in interdisciplinary and career-oriented majors. These structures have been put into place.

**Goal achievement.** Orientation of new faculty now goes beyond the institution to include the metro Upstate: bus tours of the I-85 corridor, experience in locations where students grow up and are educated, mill villages, rural towns, city centers. They tour North American headquarters of international enterprises such as BMW and Michelin, visit Chambers of Commerce for briefings by those on the front lines of economic development, and envision possibilities for partnerships. Expectations of new faculty are thoroughly grounded in the mission.

Greenville is home to the University Center of Greenville, a consortium of seven institutions serving the city. USCS made an early strategic decision to increase enrollment at the Center. Three years ago, the University realigned its tactics to offer degree programs rather than isolated courses. Enrollment in USCS programs at the Greenville Center has grown by forty, fifty, even sixty percent in each successive semester. USCS is now a larger undergraduate provider than all six consortia partners combined.

Recently, the state’s Technical College System was granted an associate degree mission in addition to their technical programs. USCS has chosen to collaborate rather than compete with the technical colleges, negotiating articulation agreements serving the metropolitan Upstate. Faculties meet to arrange and manage course transfer agreements. University-bound students in numerous technical college degree program sign joint admission agreements.

New degree articulations responding specifically to Upstate employment needs have been developed. Greenville Technical College and USCS faculty developed a collaborative Graphic Design major, the first in the state. University students may register at Greenville Tech, with Tech's students enrolling in art courses at USCS, all with no exchange of tuition. The program is available at lower cost to the state and students. Faculty teach at each other's campuses. The graphic design program is one of the fastest growing on either campus.

The South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind located in Spartanburg, nationally known for its special mission, approached the University for assistance in alleviating the shortage of teachers for the visually impaired. There was no such degree program in South Carolina and few in the south and east. Teachers with appropriate certification were in short supply.

Supported by a statewide Partnership for Vision Education – including the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Governor's Office and the National Federation of the Blind – a new master's degree program was launched. Both institutions' faculties share teaching loads. Students enroll in practica at the School. The School's faculty members enroll in University professional development courses. The first faculty member hired holds a joint appointment at both institutions. Given the School's reputation and given the vast marketplace for teachers of the visually impaired, this partnership will attract graduate students from across the state and beyond.

Private colleges offer venues for partnerships. Faculty in music at Spartanburg's Converse College, a college for women with historically strong music programs, met with faculty at USCS to develop a collaboration providing University students with ensemble and coursework opportunities at Converse, and the same for Converse students in the University's notably strong jazz program. Converse graduate students assist in introductory music courses at USCS. To accomplish these public/private collaborations, significant barriers in calendars, cost and attitudes had to be overcome. In overcoming them, the University shares in the reputation and support historically enjoyed by the Upstate's many private colleges.

Comprehensive faculty development and deep institutional engagement in academic partnerships have been essential. So, too, has been the development of innovative and career-oriented majors. These are, in many instances, the first of their kind in the state or beyond. For example, a center has been established to support an interdisciplinary degree in Information Management and Systems, preparing data and systems professionals in business, education, nursing and communication. In its first two years, enrollment has grown to 200 majors. An R.N. to B.S.N. has been developed and is offered online to practicing nurses across the region and the state. The interdisciplinary degree program in Nonprofit Administration enables students to blend business administration with other coursework in the social sciences and communication, and is the only such program in the state that prepares graduates for leadership in the growing metropolitan non-profit marketplace.

# Master Plan Development

As with campus community and academic development, the University's master plan has emerged in four phases since commitment to the metropolitan mission eight years ago.

**Strategic framework.** In 1995, the Board of Trustees approved a \$75 million plan for campus capital projects. Of course, that approval did not provide funding, a far greater challenge given the state's increasing reluctance to enter into bonded indebtedness. Nevertheless, the master plan aggressively called for a new highway infrastructure surrounding the campus, a \$25 million information resources complex, a new quadrangle expanding into unused acreage, and new outdoor athletic venues.

**Early accomplishment** Early accomplishments were few and far between: renovations, expansions, deferred maintenance. Though state bond funding had been approved to undertake design and site preparation for the top priority project (the Information Resources Complex) no construction money was available on the horizon.

**Tension and realignment** Meantime, demands for space were growing. The University's capacity for expansion appeared to be limited by capital infrastructure. Pressures were building for on-campus housing, presently limited to 10% of enrollment with interest exceeding 25%, and with enrollment growing at 5-6% per year.

Facilities challenges and resource opportunities began to merge, however, as the University came to realize more fully the power of its metropolitan mission.

**Goal achievement** A major breakthrough occurred in the wake of a major disappointment, as often happens when goals are realigned with missions. The University had been trying to create a stoplight-controlled intersection off a divided highway entering the city, an intersection designed to replace a set of awkwardly engineered and dangerous slip ramps and access ways. With approvals nearly in hand, the regional transportation policy committee and the Chamber of Commerce shut the project down. They did not want to interrupt the flow of traffic on a controlled-access highway entering the city.

Returning to the drawing table, this time in partnership with the policy committee, corporate neighbors and the Chamber, the University explored not only its transportation infrastructure needs, but also and more importantly the potential of its metropolitan mission for economic development. The end of the highway story was not the sought after \$2 million stop-light, but a \$45 million interstate-type access with a four-lane boundary boulevard surrounding the campus, creating opportunities for neighboring class-A corporate development in which both the University and the metropolitan corridor will have deep and abiding interests. With the project fully funded by Spartanburg County and the State Infrastructure Bank, with engineering

work completed, and with rights-of-way purchased, construction is scheduled to begin in Spring 2003.

The highway project has set both a standard and a strategy for a series of capital partnership successes.

The Information Resources Complex is now at the top of the state's bond bill priority, not only for its importance to the campus, but also for its economic potential as a magnet for neighboring corporate park investors.

In return for management responsibility, the County has built a five-field soccer complex for use by the County Recreation Department and the University, plus a million dollar soccer stadium for use by the University's nationally ranked soccer programs.

A high-tech signal corps unit of the S.C. National Guard located in the city had seven million dollars to build a new facility, but no property on which to locate. In need of a facility to support outdoor athletic venues, short of classrooms, and requiring room for the campus' growing special events agenda, a partnership was created and the University Readiness Center is a reality. As a component of the partnership, the Guard deeded its current property to the University's Foundation, which it sold for \$1.7 million to add University amenities to the new Center. Five days a week, the building is largely available for the University. Two weekends a month and a month in the summer, the Guard moves in. The partnership even includes an operating agreement assigning the University to manage the complex under the University's own special events policies, paying overhead costs and gaining net revenues as a consequence.

Phase one of a privately funded residential complex housing 350 students is under construction. Phase two will follow. A partnership has been struck with a neighboring apartment owner making it possible for students to pay semester rates, housing an additional 600 residents. Over eight years, USCS will have generated residential capacity for over 1,500 students through private partnerships.

Currently in the processes of architectural and program planning is a \$21 million health complex. When completed, this facility is designed to combine an expanded school of nursing with a wellness/fitness center, a child development center, and a campus health center in a health education partnership with the public schools and health care community. Most costs are projected to be covered by fee funded and operating capital, user-fees, grants and gifts, and underwritten by a bonding agency specializing in fast-track campus capital project construction.

The Health Education Center and the Information Resources Complex will anchor the north and south ends of a new quadrangle and arboretum, funded by a \$1 million gift from a graduate who believes deeply in the metropolitan mission and its future.

The ten-year \$75 million master plan approved by the USC Board of Trustees seven years ago is approaching a \$125 million reality with only minor portions funded by state capital bonds. It illustrates the power of the metropolitan mission and the strategic framework for partnerships it provides.

## **Conclusion**

Shortly after a recent groundbreaking, the chancellor received a letter from one of the Southeast's major property and corporate developers. The message expressed appreciation for the manner in which the University was leading the way in the development of public/private partnerships.

In planning language, that letter helped to confirm that the University's vision – to be a leading partner in the development of its metropolitan corridor and to emerge as one of the leading metropolitan universities in the southeast – is within its reach.

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