

Retreat Objectives and Approach

The University of South Carolina convened an in-person student retreat for approximately 200 undergraduates in the Columbia Convention Center on Sunday, September 11, 2022. The retreat presented an opportune moment to hear directly from students about their experiences at the institution and to invite meaningful feedback in four key areas: (1) academics and the classroom experience, (2) student life and the extracurricular experience, (3) career and post-graduate readiness, and (4) campus climate.

President Amiridis commenced the retreat with a brief introduction and overview of the retreat objectives. Following the opening remarks, the Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support J. Rex Tolliver and Huron facilitated a virtual polling exercise and table discussion to identify broad strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the student experience. Participants were encouraged to discuss their polling submissions at their tables. During this exercise, participants also utilized a function in the polling tool that allowed them to submit questions, which helped to provide additional context to the poll results. Following lunch, all students were assigned to breakout rooms in groups of 15-25 students. Huron facilitators rotated through the breakout rooms to guide discussions using Sli.do polls to initiate conversations around the four assigned topics. In each room, a USC notetaker captured high-level themes and takeaways using a standard template. Since the retreat was designed to provide a platform for students to share their experiences openly and freely, President Amiridis and other leaders initially elected not to sit in on the breakouts. In response to student feedback in the first session, President Amiridis and Vice President Tolliver listened in on the remaining breakout discussions. Following the breakouts, Vice President Tolliver and Student Body President Reedy Newton closed the retreat with a recap of the objectives and next steps.

Plenary Discussion: Overall Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

Mental health was a common concern identified throughout the plenary discussion, as were racism and discrimination, on-campus parking, Wi-Fi connectivity, and COVID requirements and resources, as evidenced by the Word cloud results on the following pages.

Many of the Q&A responses submitted through Sli.do mirror those in the breakout discussions. Students also raised concerns about recent tragedies on campus, the rising cost of tuition, and the names of University buildings.

Plenary Sli.do Poll #1: What words would you use to describe the University of South Carolina today?



The results of the first virtual poll (to the left) highlight the differences in experiences among USC students. Some of the more frequent (larger) words such as “diverse” and “white” or “traditional” and “change” convey divergent feelings about the current state of the University. However, it is clear that the University has strengths, with such words as “community,” “home,” “fun,” and “passionate” as some of the most common submissions.

Plenary Sli.do Poll #2: What do you consider to be the key strengths of the undergraduate student experience?

The second poll of the opening plenary further validated some of the above sentiments, with strengths such as community and a fun environment, as well as additional strengths, including support from various levels of the University (faculty and academic support), as well as strong consensus that the University provides diverse opportunities to students.



Plenary Sli.do Poll #3: What do you consider to be weaknesses or gaps in the undergraduate student experience?



As revealed in the Q&A submissions, many students found mental health resources, parking, Wi-Fi connectivity, and diversity at USC to be lacking. Accessibility and cost of education also appeared as areas for improvement in this discussion.

Plenary Sli.do Poll #4: What is the one thing that would make the biggest difference in enhancing the student experience at USC?

The final poll prompted a diverse set of suggestions for enhancements to the student experience. Ranging from free parking to the cost of attendance, and better mental health resources and academic and career advisors – students offered a plethora of opportunities that they believed would greatly impact the overall student experience at USC.

