



February 23, 2024

Dr. Michael Amiridis  
President  
University of South Carolina - Columbia  
206 Osborne Administration Building  
Columbia, SC 29208

Dear Dr. Amiridis:

Thank you for submitting the following substantive change:

Substantive change:

**New Program-Approval  
Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Health for Athletic Trainers (BHAT)**

Submission date:

**6/16/2023**

Intended Implementation date:

**8/1/2024**

Case ID:

**SC022499**

The University of South Carolina (USC) Columbia requests approval to offer the Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Health for Athletic Trainers (BHAT).

The request was deferred for the following additional information on August 14, 2023.

1. Did not provide evidence of legal authority for the change.
2. Did not demonstrate compliance with Standard 10.7 (policies for awarding credit) of the *Principles of Accreditation*.
3. Did not provide documentation of faculty involvement in the planning and approval of the change.
4. Did not describe how students enrolled in a new program, at an off-campus instructional site, or in a distance education program can access discipline-specific library and learning/information resources.
5. Did not describe how students are made aware of library and learning/information resources available to them, how they can learn how to access the resources, and are instructed in the use of online resources, as well as on-site library resources.
6. Did not demonstrate the scholarship and research capability of faculty members teaching in the program.

The response to the deferral was received on February 9, 2024.

The delivery will include synchronous and asynchronous online learning, peer-to-peer collaboration, and an in-person institute in the final week of each term. The in-person institute





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will be in the Blatt PE Center. Students will be accepted into the program each summer after the program's inaugural year. The target population for this certificate program is specific to athletic trainers who are certified by the Board of Certification; and individuals who would like to expand their clinical practice by specializing in Behavioral Health. The target audience is practicing athletic trainers who are credentialed and seeking advanced knowledge, skills, and training. Specifically, USC Columbia will be recruiting athletic trainers locally and nationally with an interest in behavioral healthcare. The initial projected enrollment is ten students with an enrollment between 10 to 20 over five years.

The graduate certificate will focus on the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) approved specialty areas of behavioral health; and will focus on integrating best practices in behavioral health recognition and referral for optimal patient outcomes. The ideal candidate will be concurrently practicing/providing patient care, but it is not required for the program. This is commonly referred to as post-professional education in athletic training. Individuals must have an undergraduate degree (Bachelor's in Athletic Training or a Master's in Athletic Training through a CAATE-approved program).

Athletic Trainers are needed in the approved specialty areas of behavioral health. Athletic Trainers are expected to promote a healthy lifestyle and environment to all patients. A holistic approach includes the promotion of physical, social, intellectual, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness. Additionally, Athletic Trainers must recognize associated risks and morbidity factors to provide correct and effective interventions or referrals to higher specialized care specifically in behavioral and mental health. Students will learn how to demonstrate advanced patient-care knowledge and skills including mental & behavioral health such as identifying, referring, and giving support to patients with behavioral health conditions. In addition, the learners will advance their understanding of how to work with other healthcare professionals to monitor these patients' treatment, compliance, progress, and readiness to participate. These behavioral health conditions include (but are not limited to) suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, psychosis, mania, and feeding & eating disorders.

USC Columbia reports with its resources (ex: residency, fellowship, certificate) and recognized history of excellence to support post-professional pathways in athletic training, the institution is well-prepared to offer the new graduate certificate program. In addition, the University is the flagship institution in South Carolina and the only institution that currently offers a post-professional pathway in athletic training, and is one of three programs that offer a CAATE-approved professional program (master's in athletic training).

The addition of this certificate program in graduate studies upholds the university's mission to the state and society by providing current athletic trainers across the state an opportunity to pursue a specialization in Behavioral Health for their clinical practice. Students will have the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, abilities, and potential earnings. This specialization will fill the need for additional behavioral health support within secondary schools, colleges and





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universities, and emerging settings such as orthopedic clinics, health and wellness centers, and industrial settings.

The University utilizes an academic program proposal system (APPS), a web-based submission and approval system that assists with the facilitation and documentation of academic program changes. Faculty are involved in the planning and approval of this change including approval of the program, student learning outcomes, and participation on the Graduate Council Committee. Approval by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) was received on February 7, 2024. The letter of approval is included in the plan.

Admission to the program requires candidates to demonstrate proficiency in English. Candidates must have achieved a minimum 3.0 GPA (on a 4.0 scale) for all degrees earned. Candidates will have earned a bachelor's degree or higher in athletic training from a regionally accredited institution. Applicants to the certificate program must demonstrate Board of Certification (BOC) certification as an athletic trainer before matriculating. To graduate from the program, students must have completed all required coursework with a passing grade of C or better with a cumulative 3.0 GPA.

USC Columbia identified four student learning outcomes (SLOs). The University included the assessment method and criteria for completion.

The Post-Professional Graduate Director will oversee all the administrative aspects of the certificate program (recruitment, graduate applications, and admissions, academic advising, and assessment/evaluation). Faculty within the Department of Exercise Science Athletic Training Programs will participate in admission evaluations and other responsibilities on an as-needed basis. The department chair provides general administrative oversight to ensure compliance with departmental, college, and graduate school policies and regulations. The Post-Professional Graduate Director will also serve as a liaison between the graduate school and the program to assist in the admission process and to ensure that all students are fulfilling certificate completion requirements in alignment with the program, department, and graduate school expectations. At the college level, the Associate Dean for Academic and Faculty Affairs will oversee the program.

The University of South Carolina, Columbia has an assessment protocol in place for all programs within academic units. The program assessment process occurs on a two-year schedule in which programs report their assessment data as a means to analyze student performance, evaluate program efficiency, and utilize results to influence program and/or assessment revisions. The program will be assessed through the standard University of South Carolina assessment software system, Assessment Plan Composer, which is used to report results on all program goals and objectives and within, or outside of, specific course assessments. Assessment data will be reviewed each year by the program director, program faculty, and department chair to determine if changes need to be made to individual courses and/or the program.





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The University demonstrates compliance with Standard 10.7 of the *Principles of Accreditation*. The University adheres to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) definition of a credit hour as a unit of measure representing the equivalent of an hour (50 minutes) of instruction per week over the entire term. Therefore, each single course credit requires a minimum of 700 minutes of continuous and ongoing instructional time. A minimum of one calendar week of instruction with a cumulative total of at least 700 minutes is required for each credit offered. All courses offered at the University of South Carolina Columbia are recorded in terms of semester hours. In addition, credit hours are determined by the faculty through the faculty governance process (approval by the Graduate Council).

The University provided the curriculum program of study, course descriptions, and a projected schedule of course offerings. Qualifications for six full-time and one part-time faculty were provided. The University also provided a list of six full-time faculty that teach and support both the current Master of Science (MS) in Advanced Athletic Training Program (Post-Professional Athletic Training Program) and MS in Athletic Training Program (Professional Athletic Training Program). The current MS in Advanced Athletic Training Program is a 36-credit program and is taught by four existing athletic training faculty. The current MS in Advanced Athletic Training Post-Professional Athletic Training (PPAT) program is estimated to be terminated at the end of Spring 2026. Therefore, faculty will transition their teaching responsibilities to the BH certificate program (new PPAT Certificate). In addition, the University submitted information to show the scholarship and research capabilities of the faculty members teaching the Certificate in Behavioral Health for Athletic Trainers (BHAT) including six faculty with a combined total of 457 research publications showcasing their research experience. Keep in mind that the ultimate determination of faculty qualifications is the responsibility of the peer review team who will assess the program as part of the institution's next SACSCOC reaffirmation review.

Library and learning resources appear to be adequate to support the new certificate program. The Thomas Cooper Library collection of current journals, e-journals, and textbooks related to the medical field is quite comprehensive. The library offers resources in terms of databases, journal searches, and online access to streaming video and audio. These may be helpful search tools when completing evidence-based assignments. Discipline-specific resources for the post-professional athletic training BH Certificate include but are not limited to the Journal of Athletic Training, the Medicine and Science in Sport and Exercise, the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, and the Psychology of Sport and Exercise, the Athletic Training Education Journal, and the College Athletics and Law.

Students can access the library's online collections via the electronic resources database and find print materials held by the library through the online catalog. The Interlibrary Loan Department will scan and electronically deliver journal articles and book chapters from print journals and books held by Columbia campus libraries through the Scan and Deliver service. The Circulation Department, via the distance education on book delivery service (Appendix H),





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will mail books from the circulating collection to students who live outside of the two local counties (Richland County and Lexington County).

Research assistance is available through the online reference service, online tutorials, online courses, subject guides, and the ask-a-librarian service to ensure that students at a distance are using the library resources appropriately. The Ask-a-Librarian service includes phone, email, chat, and Instant Message responses to inquiries from students, faculty, staff, and the general public.

Students are made aware of library and learning/information on resources available to them during several orientation sessions (in presentation and distributed digital information), course syllabi, and individual course orientation. Students can learn how to access and use resources through library instruction sessions, as well as through library tutorials and online guides.

Physical resources appear to be adequate to support the new certificate program. Facility space is available in the Arnold School of Public Health. Currently, the program has 2 lecture spaces, 2 lab spaces, and 1 functional athletic training clinical within the Blatt PE Center dedicated to the athletic training programs. In addition, there is a private research lab that can support ongoing meetings and recordings for content creation. There is a private office space for the delivery of online learning and adequate software such as Zoom and Qualtrics to deliver the program.

The current in-person Master of Science in Athletic Training program at USC has adequate resources to deliver advanced-level training in behavioral health. These resources will remain shared resources for both the Master of Science in Athletic Training and the BH Certificate Program. These include high-fidelity simulators, part-task trainers, medical equipment, and simulation capture equipment. However, additional equipment for online learning will need to be secured. This includes high-definition webcams and pedagogy training/certificate in online teaching delivery.

The University provides student support resources to support graduate students including professional development, a graduate student resources hub, and scholarly initiatives.

Financial resources appear to be adequate to support the new certificate program. The University affirms the relocation of existing funds from the MS in Advanced AT program will move over to the new BH Certificate Program. The University provided a three-year budget plan. The tuition funding represents enrollment projections which were calculated with an estimated 10 students in the first year, 15 in the second year, and possibly up to 20 by 2026-2027. Sources of financing for the program by year and estimated costs associated with implementing the program by year were provided with the plan. The budget provided shows revenues exceeding expenditures.



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The current MS in Advanced Athletic Training Program is a 36-credit program and is taught with existing athletic training faculty and is being terminated at the end of Spring 2026. Therefore, faculty will transition their teaching responsibilities to the BH certificate program. Most resources for the Certificate for Behavioral Health for Athletic Training program build off the existing infrastructure that is already in place at the University. If enrollment numbers decline, the University states it will propose and implement a teach-out plan if needed.

**The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Health for Athletic Trainers (BHAT). It was the decision of the Board to approve the program and include it in the scope of accreditation.**

Enclosed is an invoice for \$500 to help defray the cost of reviewing the prospectus.

Should you need assistance, please contact Dr. Kelli V. Randall at 404-994-6545 or via email at [krandall@sacscoc.org](mailto:krandall@sacscoc.org).

Please include the Case ID number above in all submissions or correspondence about this substantive change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belle S. Wheelan".

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.  
President

BSW:DDG:rez

Enclosure (invoice with liaison's copy only)

cc: Mr. Donald Miles, Executive Director Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics,  
University of South Carolina - Columbia  
Dr. Kelli V. Randall, Vice President, SACSCOC