

2010-11 Performance Blueprint Year-End Report
University of South Carolina Visitor Center
May 26, 2011

The primary mission of the University of South Carolina Visitor Center, through partnerships with campus, community, and state constituents, is to serve the informational needs of all visitors to the Columbia campus. In addition to supporting the mission of the University and the Division of Student Affairs & Academic Support, we carry out our mission through the selection and development of a diverse staff and a cohort of exceptional Ambassadors who strives to exceed visitor needs and expectations.

Vision Statement

The USC Visitor Center collaborates with a variety of campus and community partners to create an environment that provides exceptional customer service to all visitors of the Columbia campus; supports the recruitment of college-bound students and provides a network for families involved in the college search and matriculation process; educates the University community about their role in meeting the information needs of all campus visitors, including prospective students and parents; develop a rich learning environment for all students involved in the delivery of visitor services; and focuses on continuous improvement in visitor services through assessment, innovation, and the establishment of best practices.

Unit Overview

Staff Descriptions

The Visitor Center is comprised of seven full-time staff members and a part-time graduate student, one volunteer graduate student, and 79 volunteer undergraduate students. A copy of the unit organizational chart and a listing of the full-time staff are included in the appendix.

Unit Funding

The Visitor Center is primarily support by “A” funds and 5,304 volunteer hours contributed by the 79 member University Ambassador team of undergraduate and graduate students. The Center also have small endowments in the USC Educational/Development Foundation.

Unit History

The concept of a Visitor Center at USC was created in 1991 as part of a class project taught by Dr. Jim Rex, the vice-president for advancement. The department was created to serve as the “front door” of the university and to help promote the university to a wide range of constituents. Staff was hired in 1993, and the Center opened in the now demolished Carolina Plaza on April 19, 1994. The center moved from the division of advancement when this unit was dissolved in

1996 and moved under the division of student affairs, reporting through the director of enrollment management. To help meet the growing demand for campus visits from college-bound students, the Visitor Center began to administer the campus visitor program in January of 1999. To support the president and the Office of Special Events, the Visitor Center developed and staffed a Presidential Ambassador Program to serve the needs of a variety of other guests to the University in the fall of 2002. Due to the impending demolition of the Carolina Plaza to make way for the Arnold Research Center, the Visitor Center moved into McKissick on the historic Horseshoe in May of 2004. To meet new NCAA regulations, the Visitor Center developed a program to support the recruitment of prospective athletes in October of this same year. Over the last six years, the campus visit program for college-bound students has grown by nearly 300% which has resulted in an equal increase in the number of brochure requests, the needed website applications and enhancements, the email correspondence, and the phone calls about any number of USC events, issues, programs, and opportunities.

Analysis of Mission Fulfillment

One hundred percent (100%) of the unit goals for 2010-11 were met, most were exceeded. Consistently the Visitor Center has exceeded expectations for the last 5+ years despite the significant growth in visit traffic over this time. From July 1, 2010 to April 30, 2011, the Visitor Center served nearly 1 million visitors, in addition to managing over 79,000 visit events for prospective students and parents, including special events for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions (4,634), group (3,317) and special (432) visit participants, and prospective student athletes (1,180). Through the Presidential Ambassador Program, the Visitor Center assisted in serving 5,480 special guests of President & Mrs. Pastides. The increased focus on undergraduate recruitment, as well as requests for special tours from a host of campus partners, has greatly added to the workload of the Visitor Center as well as the demand placed on students who volunteer at the Visitor Center and give campus tours. During the 2010-11 academic year, the University Ambassadors volunteered 5,304 hours and if paid at the national average, saved the University more than \$53,000.

The challenge of managing the continuing growth in prospective student and special visitor traffic is significant, as is the effective management of a larger University Ambassador team to help support this growth while at the same time delivering exceptional customer service. The Ambassador Program increased by just over 10% in the last year and maintaining a sense of purpose, community and motivation requires greater oversight from the full-time staff. Significant staff involvement has been dedicated throughout the recruitment, selection, and training process to insure that the University's recruitment goals are met and that a rich learning environment is supported for all University Ambassadors.

Probably the greatest challenge of the year, which has been present for over 3 years, has been the decreasing support from various academic units. Data from research conducted at USC and also on the national level, continues to affirm the importance of faculty and other campus administrators in the college search process, especially in the final stages of making a decision. The Visitor Center widely shared this information with campus partners and academic units early in the year and their importance was reaffirmed by the Division of Student Affairs & Academic Support through an edition of *causerie* <http://www.sa.sc.edu/about/files/2011/03/causerie-spring->

[2011.pdf](#). Support however, continues to decline. Some academic departments refuse to respond to requests from the Visitor Center to meet with prospective students, others, are not able to dedicate consistent staff to this experience, or the ever changing nature of their availability makes it nearly impossible for a prospective student to visit with a departmental representative.

Despite challenges, the year was marked by a number of significant accomplishments:

- Visitor satisfaction with the campus visit program continues to be very high
- Acquisition of two new full-time positions
- Successful recruitment, training, and evaluation of the largest cohort of University Ambassadors in the history of the Visitor Center
- Reorganization of the full-time staff to reduce duplication of effort and to more efficiently support the mission of the Visitor Center
- Completion of a research project and 20 page manuscript for consideration for publication in the Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
- University Ambassadors continue to report significantly higher levels of learning than other peer leaders at USC on a number of outcomes measured on the Peer Leader Survey

Areas for improvement include:

- Willingness of more academic units to consistently meet with prospective students and support the college visit process
- Restroom facilities are wholly inadequate for growing visitor traffic and in need of renovation
- Furnishings in the Visitor Center, dating to when the Center opened in 1994, need to be replaced and seating needs to be expanded to handle growing visitor traffic
- Development of an Android app to compliment the Smartphone app
- Expand use of feedback from campus visit participants to enhance Ambassador learning and the experience of campus visit participants
- Maintain funding to support all full-time staff positions
- Most majority of the Ambassador cohort is extremely new in their role and will require significant oversight in the next year

Contextual Statement

The core function of the Visitor Center is to meet the information needs of all visitors to the USC campus and to support the undergraduate recruitment goals of the University. To date, the Center has served nearly 1 million general visitors to the campus and planned over 79,000 visit events for 12,745 prospective students and 18,534 family members involved in the college search process. The general visitor population includes prospective donors, faculty, and staff in addition to alumni and friends of the University. The USC Visitor Center also supports a large number of visitors who want to know more about the city and state. The events planned by the Visitor Center for college-bound students involve principally high school juniors and seniors as well as their family member's however younger students are entering the college search process

much earlier than ever before. Today, it is not uncommon for students as young as the 8th grade to be involved in a campus visit at USC. Visitors ranging from elementary school to prospective graduate students and beyond require the staff to be highly trained and prepared to support the information needs of a extremely varied audience.

The main focus of the Visitor Center is to support the University's recruitment of undergraduate students. For the first time, the Visitor Center and the Office of Undergraduate Admissions have been able to more fully share some information about the prospective students who visited the campus in order to more fully support all recruitment efforts. In looking more closely at the high school junior and senior prospects during the past year, the Visitor Center provided a variety of individual visit experiences to:

- 944 in-state high school juniors (plus their family members)
- 2,985 out-of-state high school juniors (plus their family members)
- 3,944 in-state high school seniors (plus their family members)
- 7,924 out-of-state high school seniors (plus their family members)
- 461 transfer students (both in and out-of-state)

The Visitor Center is now able to more accurately track the demographics of prospective students who visit the campus and will be able to provide similar information in future years.

In looking at specifically the high school seniors admitted for the fall of 2012, 2,372 of the students who submitted a deposit by May 1st, participated in an individual visit sponsored by the Visitor Center which represents approximately one-half of the roughly 4800 students who deposited for the fall 2012 semester. It is important to note that the Visitor Center supports a variety of other visit experiences for high school seniors and their family members however the impact of this involvement is not measured by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

The school year calendar has a significant impact on the functioning of the Visitor Center. Student holidays for all South Carolina high schools as well as each of the states where significant recruitment efforts are in place are tracked and used to inform the campus visit schedule. The date of Easter in particular affects staffing and campus visits needs. For the first time in the history of the Visitor Center, Easter, which typically kicks off the busiest week of the year, fell two days before the start of final exams, a less than optimal time for prospective students to visit. Good communication from the Visitor Center encouraged prospective students, especially high school seniors in the final stage of their college choice, to visit the week prior to Easter. To accommodate this major scheduling challenge, additional staff was recruited and systems were employed that allowed the Visitor Center to offer 141 tours for 1,611 high school students and 2,626 family members from April 15 – April 25. During this time, 258 prospective students and 270 family members *without reservations for a tour* were also accommodated.

Significant collaboration with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions is ongoing but in particular this year resulted in a special visit program for prospective transfer students. Collaboration with a number of academic units also occurred during the year and a full report of their involvement in the campus visit program is included as an attachment. The Visitor Center also provides customized tours and meeting space for a variety of campus partners, use of the

Rooster Roadsters for everything from football and baseball game day traffic to events sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, as well as a variety of campus and community brochures to hundreds of campus partners throughout the year. The Visitor Center also promotes any interested campus and community partner through the app in iTunes.

In looking to the 2011-12 academic year, permanent funding must be found for the 2 full-time staff members who are funded on a temporary basis. Their work is critical to the management of the continuing growth in visitor traffic and meeting the goals of the Visitor Center.

Goal Statement

Goal: Provide a welcoming environment which offers exceptional customer service to all visitors of the Columbia campus.

KPI-95% of visit participants will report that their first impression upon walking into the Visitor Center either met or exceeded expectations.

Goal exceeded with 99.6% of prospective students and parents reporting that their first impression upon walking into the Visitor Center was either met or exceeded.

KPI-95% of visit participants will report that planning their visit to USC was convenient.

Goal exceeded with 99.2% reporting that planning their visit to USC was convenient, and this goal has been exceeded for the last 5 years. Visitors find the custom written online campus visit reservation system to be easy to navigate and plan a visit to USC. This system is due in part to the significant support of UTS and can be found at www.sc.edu/visitorcenter

KPI-95% of visit participants will report that the overall campus visit either met or exceeded expectations.

Goal exceeded with 99.7% reporting that their overall campus visit either met or exceeded their expectations, and this goal has been exceeded for the last 5 years. Significant personal attention is provided to each family before and during their visit by the Visitor Center as well as a host of campus partners who support the campus visit program. Part of this personal attention which has been highly regarded by prospective families involves a hand written postcard that is sent to each prospective student following their visit.

Goal: Support learning among prospective students of the University as well as their parents by providing a wide array of campus visit options that support informed decision making on college choice.

KPI-90% of visit participants will report that the tour guide effectively answered their questions.

Goal exceeded with 99.5% of campus visit respondents stating that their campus tour guide communicated information in a meaningful way, and 99.6% responding that their tour guide effectively answered their questions. The USC Visitor Center strives to recruit “graduates” of the University and therefore intentionally develops visit experiences and work processes that supports informed college decision-making. This year, in addition to the special tours already offered to prospective graduate students, special tours and information sessions for transfer students were developed to meet the specific needs of this increasing population of prospective students to USC. While strategic goals were not developed for the transfer visit experience, the results indicate that **97.7%** of campus visit participants felt that their campus tour guide communicated information in a meaningful way and **98.8%** indicated that their tour guide effectively answered their questions.

KPI-75% of prospective student visit participants will report that they are more likely to apply to or attend USC after taking a campus visit coordinated by the Visitor Center.

Goal exceeded and has been for the last 5 years. 81.6% of campus visit participants stated that they are more likely to apply to USC as a result of their visit coordinated by the Visitor Center. Additionally, **98.4%** of prospective transfer students stated that they were more likely to apply to or attend USC.

KPI-90% of visit participants will report that the overall knowledge of Visitor Center staff either met or exceeded their expectations.

Goal exceeded and has been for the last 5 years. 99.8% of campus visit participants report that knowledge of Visitor Center staff either met or exceeded their expectations. To help meet the need to provide information through a variety of technologies that appeal to college bound students, in October of 2010, the Visitor Center launched an iPhone application and launched one of the first college iPad applications through iTunes. These applications are averaging approximately 470 downloads per week, and early results from raters indicate a 4+ star rating out of 5 possible.

KPI - 50% of prospective students who participated in an information session hosted by an academic department will report that the quality of the information received during this session either met or exceeded their expectations.

Goal exceeded. This is the first year this data has been collected and **95%** of prospective students reported that the departmental representative they met with effectively answered their questions and **96%** stated that the departmental overall knowledge either met or exceeded their expectations. Furthermore, **70%** stated that they were more likely to apply or to attend USC as a result of meeting with an academic department while visiting USC. Further analysis of this data is being conducted to evaluate the impact of a more favorable experience with an academic department on deposit and enrollment yields. A list of best practices from those departments who enroll larger numbers of students will be developed and shared later this summer.

KPI - Following a group visit from underserved areas, the lead chaperone will report that the student participants will have a better understanding of the benefits of attending college and what they need to do to prepare for college.

Goal met: This is the first year this data has been collected and **91%** of group visit chaperone's from underserved areas reported that their students had a better understanding of the benefits of attending college and what they need to do to prepare for college.

Goal: Support student learning by offering a rich and rewarding work environment.

KPI -University Ambassadors will report that as a result of their Ambassador experience that they have a greater sense of belonging at the University.

Goal met - 96.6% of Ambassadors surveyed reported that serving as a University Ambassador enhanced their sense of belonging on campus. Furthermore, University Ambassadors report statistically higher perceptions of learning than other peer leaders on campus on 11 learning outcomes measured on the 2011 Peer Leader Survey. Ambassadors have reported statistically higher perceptions of learning than other peer leaders on campus for the last 4 years and was, in part, the topic of a research project that was submitted for consideration for publication in the Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. This goal is assessed through the Peer Leader Survey which is conducted each year by the Office of Student Engagement.

- Following University Ambassador training, **97.8%** University Ambassadors were able to articulate the Visitor Center's customer service philosophy and demonstrate how it applies to their work in the Visitor Center.

- Following University Ambassador training, **95.7%** of University Ambassadors were able to explain professional work behavior and expressed how demonstrating such behavior was important to their work in the Visitor Center and supporting the University's recruitment efforts.

-Following Fall 2010 training, **100%** University Ambassadors effectively demonstrated mastery of Visitor Center policies and procedures and University programs, services, and resources and confidence in their ability to deliver this information to a variety of publics in both written and oral modes of communication.

- Through the fall 2010 semester, **93.6%** of University Ambassadors expressed that they are challenged and satisfied in their role.

**2010-11 USC Visitor Center Blueprint
Appendix**

USC Visitor Center Staff

Name: Denise Wellman

Job Title: Director

Degree(s): Ph.D. Philosophy Educational Administration
M. Ed. Higher Education/Student Personnel Services

Length of time in Visitor Center: Since established in 1993

Job Purpose: The Director of the Visitor Center plans and directs all aspects of the University visitor services program to include the administration of the Visitor Center, the campus visit program, the University Ambassador Program, the Presidential Ambassador Program, Move-in Day activities, the USC Calendar of Events, the Athletic Recruiting Program and other special visitor services programs. The director assists in the development and implementation of the University's enrollment management initiatives. The director reports to the Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Director of Admissions in the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support.

Name: Janie Kerzan

Job Title: Assistant Director for Professional Development & Training

Degree(s): B.A. Anthropology

Length of time in VC: August 2007

Job Purpose: This position covers the broad nature of visitor services functioning, including the campus visit program, the athletic recruiting program, and all aspects of carrying out the mission of the USC Visitor Center and meeting the University's recruitment goals through the management of a comprehensive training and professional development program for all Visitor Center staff, both volunteer and full-time professionals. The assistant director for training and development represents USC to prospective students and their families as well as all campus constituents as they interact with the University either in person, in writing, through email and telephone call, and/or through presentations and activities during special open houses and other recruitment programs. The assistant director also manages significant responsibility for staff training and management of risks associated with visitor activities.

Name: Karla Harper

Job Title: Assistant Director for Special Programs

Degree(s): M. S. Educational Administration
B.S. Business Administration

Length of time in VC: October 2010

Job Purpose: The Assistant Director for Special Programs covers a broad nature of visitor services functioning, and all aspects of carrying out the mission of the USC Visitor Center

and meeting the University's recruitment goals through the management of the Group Visit, Athletic Visits, and special visit programs as well as the Presidential Ambassador program. This individual will also be required to work effectively as a member of a team in carrying out the mission of the Visitor Center.

Name: Cassandra Pope

Job Title: Assistant Director for Campus Visits

Degree(s): B.S. Business Administration

Length of time in VC: September 2009

Job Purpose: This position covers the broad nature of visitor services functioning, including the campus visit program, and all aspects of carrying out the mission of the USC Visitor Center and meeting the University's recruitment goals through the management of a comprehensive campus visit program. The Assistant Director for Campus Visits manages all aspects of the campus visit program to include prospective undergraduate and graduate students, parents of prospective students, and tour for various University departments including development, the Board of Trustees, and the central administration of the University. The Assistant Director also supervises the Coordinator for Campus Visits to insure a smooth delivery of services and appropriate record keeping is in place.

Name: Natalie Thomson

Job Title: Business Manager

Length of time in VC: August 2006

Job Purpose: The Administrative Coordinator for Visitor Center Operations provides general administrative support to the Visitor Center. Under the direction of the director, serves as primary contact for all staff on matters of travel, mail, purchasing, and human resources. Prepares and processes all business management paperwork for the Visitor Center and assists with the monitoring of budget and payroll. Will also provide support to Visitor Center operations including the USC Calendar of Events and recruitment special events as needed.

Name: Marjorie Duffie

Job Title: Front Desk Manager

Degree(s): B. S. Journalism

Length of time in VC: February 2011

Job Purpose: The Front Desk Manager is responsible for providing operation support to the overall functioning of the Visitor Center. Duties will principally revolve around visitor reception to include program development, record keeping, and assessment. As the primary receptionist for the Visitor Center, this individual will also be responsible for anticipating all resources needed to serve a diverse constituent base and for the daily scheduling of staff. Significant tracking of visitor activity and corresponding assessment and planning are also required. This individual will function as a member of a team, committed to promoting the image of the University to campus visitors.

Name: Laura Morehouse

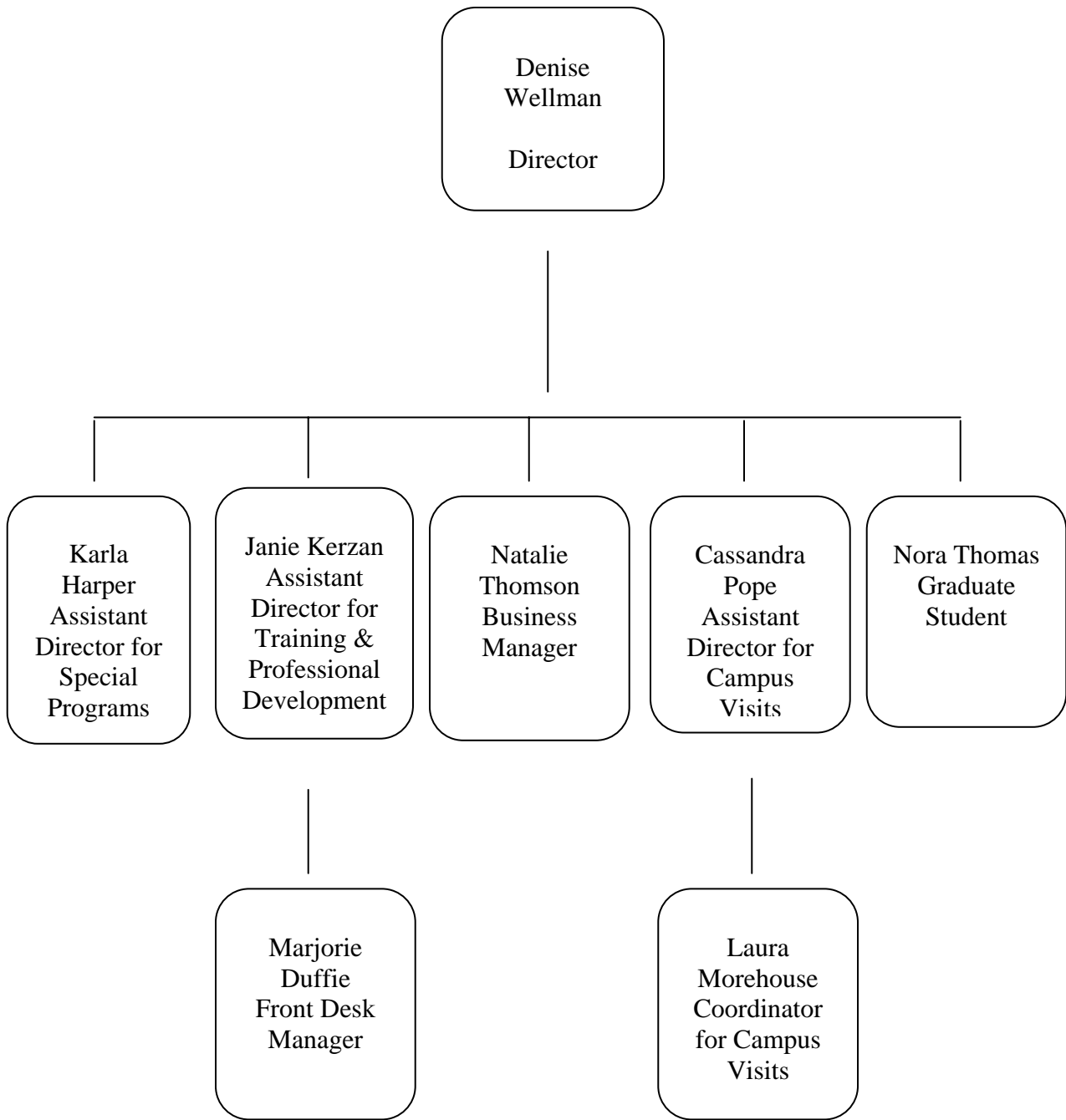
Job Title: Coordinator for Campus Visits

Degree(s): B.A. Spanish & International Studies

Length of time in VC: June 2009

Job Purpose: The Coordinator for Campus Visits is responsible for providing clerical and operational support to the overall functioning of the Visitor Center, especially in the management of the campus visit program. This individual will support visitor reception activities however is primarily responsible for assisting with all campus visit processing and all post-visit processing and record keeping to support University recruitment and assessment goals. This individual will function as a member of a team committed to promoting the image of the University.

Visitor Center Organizational Chart



Five-Year Comparison of Total	2006-	2007-	2008-	2009-	2010-
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Campus Tour Activity	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Individual Visits					
July	2198	2413	2984	3189	3691
August	1641	1890	2314	2331	2978
September	902	1044	1424	1488	1970
October	1768	2163	2403	2856	3289
November	1681	1940	2003	2274	2744
December	548	402	388	508	678
January	611	919	935	1204	1259
February	1598	1932	1891	2178	2730
March	2304	4854	2997	4421	4239
April	5065	3934	5519	6031	7701
May	404	604	618	677	0
June	586	1418	1428	1917	0
Total	19306	23513	24904	29074	30579

Special Event Tours					
Events for Undergraduate Admissions	2797	2382	2636	4240	4634
Other Special Events	0	0	278	669	432

Total Tours w/ Admissions			20898	22496	21,126
Total Other Visits	19306	23513	4006	4661	1908
Academic Info Sessions and Other Visit Requests	5298	13511	14283	13260	29220
Total Special Event Tours	2797	2382	2914	4909	5066
Total Group Tours	6144	8129	6748	5299	3317
Athletic Tours	1478	1418	1436	1981	1180
Grand Total of All Visit Activity	37820	51335	53199	52606	60,602

Total Visitor Traffic Information (to date) 2010 - 11

	Jul-10	Aug-10	Sep-10	Oct-10	Nov-10	Dec-10	Jul 10-Jun 11
Phone Calls	1,760	1375	1352	1648	1518	871	8,524
Walk-in Traffic *	2,694	3,564	4,594	2,607	1,634	983	16,076
Email	619	1,805	1,613	2,574	1,542	2,092	10,245
Conference Rooms	25	32	37	122	63	42	321
# of Cars Served by Courtesy Officer	2,566	2,936	2,539	2,523	2,455	909	13,928
Total VC* Web Pageviews	81,438	73,171	73403	65,624	47,480	34,882	375,998
Virtual Tour Web Hits	4883	5508	5719	6381	5461	4211	32,163
MP3 Player Web Hits	238	256	251	298	216	119	1,378
IPhone/iPad App Downloads	0	0	0	134	205	332	671
USCWelcome Website	1,217	0	0	0	0	0	1,217
Visitor Center	5,328	5,221	5,833	4,936	3,733	2,480	27,531
Calendar of Events Website	4,442	8,331	6,360	5,654	5,250	4,372	34,409
TOTAL VC CONTACT	105,210	102,199	101,701	92,501	69,557	51,293	522,461

*www.sc.edu/visitorcenter