

Fostering a sense of belonging at a large institution through Anthology Engage

Data-driven decision-making has enabled such high student engagement at the University of South Carolina that it has been recognized as the top first-year student experience in the United States.



An institution at the heart of South Carolina for over 200 years, the University of South Carolina has a long history of preparing students to be tomorrow's leaders.

Across eight campuses and 20 total locations, USC serves over 52,000 learners, including 27,000 undergraduates on their flagship campus in Columbia. Their prized academic and research excellence is tightly woven into how highly USC values a welcoming campus experience.

ABOUT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

INSTITUTION TYPE:
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

LOCATION:
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION: 35,000

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:

 **Blackboard LEARN**

 **Anthology Engage**

“I think it’s important for people to know that this is a wonderful tool. This is helpful. It is intuitive. It is just a way that people, staff, students, faculty can collaborate and connect. And I love it.”

-Megan Colascione, Assessment Director, Department of Student Life, University of South Carolina



The Challenges

The average high school in the United States educates around 850 total students. So, for many, the thought of attending a large university can be intimidating. Then there’s the University of South Carolina, a massive educational institution bustling with tens of thousands of learners, 350 different degree programs, and sprawling across a nearly 500-acre campus in a major city.

One can see how, amid all the other stressors of attending college for the first time, such a large institution can be downright daunting to a first-year student. That’s why USC has gone to great lengths to prevent learners from feeling overwhelmed and disconnected.



“The University of South Carolina has a really wonderful way of making a large institution feel very small. A sense of belonging is essential for our student body to connect, to be able to find their place, their home.”

-Megan Colascione, Assessment Director,
Department of Student Life, University of
South Carolina



The Solutions

“Engage is truly our central hub for student organizations. It is where student organizations live. It’s really their home; it’s where they come together, where they hold their documents, where they tell everyone when their meetings are, what events are happening on campus.”

-Megan Colascione
*Assessment Director
Department of Student Life
University of South Carolina*

Led by the Student Life team, USC implemented the Anthology® Engage platform in 2015 to build and foster their student engagement experience. They wanted to better understand learner interests, preferences, and trends through a rich data analysis environment in an easily accessible online platform.

Initially focused on student organizations, USC soon expanded access to Engage to all of Student Life programming through the Garnet Gate portal. Student Life's success caught the attention of other departments across campus. The Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support implemented Engage to manage student housing events. Most recently, the Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning introduced Engage for learners to document their reflections on learning experiences like internships and conferences.

Engage is now a central hub for students at USC, making the large institution feel like home. Simultaneously, USC streamlined how staff manage student groups, activities, and event participation. They crafted more efficient event workflows, and, through powerful APIs and data integration, created a comprehensive understanding of student involvement for staff.

This learner-centric approach has resulted in USC's #1 ranking in first-year undergraduate experience by U.S. News & World Report.

USC has implemented other products from Anthology alongside its use of Engage, including Blackboard® Learn, Anthology's learning management system (LMS).

USC's Student Life Assessment Director, Megan Colascione, cited that integration as pivotal in how her team connects to other departments. “It’s really been enhancing how we collaborate with one another as staff, and showing how we can communicate more openly,” she said.

92%

of undergrads
connected

“We’ve been able to get 92% of our undergraduate students connected to at least one program within the Department of Student Life. And that was all tracked through Engage.”

-Megan Colascione, *Assessment Director, Department of Student Life,
University of South Carolina*



Insights Delivered

“As a staff member, it’s been really pivotal to have evidence that students are connecting.”

-Megan Colascione
Assessment Director
Department of Student Life
University of South Carolina

36% increase in unique learner involvement in campus programming **in the first year alone.**

Two years into using Engage, USC had **increased student engagement on campus by 79%.**

Engage is consistently in the **top three ways** that USC students learn about campus activities.

Building a data-driven student experience:

As the assessment director, Colascione was quick to confirm, “The numbers are everything.” She cites greater turnout, increased memberships within student organizations, improved attendance at programming events, and more efficient day-to-day administration for the staff. But it was the reporting capabilities allowing her team to learn from the data that were of paramount importance for her.

When it comes to events, programs, and everything else USC now manages through the platform, they are able to pull the data and examine who’s getting involved, which learners are connecting on campus and which are not, and use that data strategically to make decisions for the future.

Colascione explained, “We always tell our events staff that students won’t go where they don’t want to go. Students don’t want to be connected if it doesn’t make sense to them.”

The proof is in the growth: Every year since implementation, USC has seen a continuous increase in unique users in the Engage platform. “That shows us, too, that students have bought into this platform; they see the importance of it,” Colascione stated.

The Engage platform is specifically designed to be intuitive to learners. USC concurs, pointing out that it shows through their continually growing usage statistics and the unique involvement they’ve seen from many stakeholder groups across campus.

Colascione remarked, “Usage increases with our students, our faculty, and our staff. And we’ve seen immense growth with who wants to now jump into this platform. It’s become how we navigate the university.”

A catalyst for collaboration: While not initially the intent of the system implementation, using Engage has become an easy way for USC staff to communicate and collaborate across campus. “And it’s all because our tools as different departments are all hubbed under the Anthology umbrella,” Colascione added.

She boasted about her team at USC, “We have a whole team of Anthology experts behind us to support the tool. It’s been really neat to see how we navigate, and how we used to work in silos, and now how we’ve been able to come back together as an institution.”



Words of Wisdom

We asked Colascione what advice she would give to a colleague at another institution that was considering implementing Engage:

“Remember that you can shape Engage to fit your students’ needs.

“If you’re looking into the Engage platform, try it and see how it can mold into your community. Every community is so different at every university.

“When you see something consistent, or we see a trend, pass that on.

Collaboration in getting feedback from the institutions is so important. The Anthology team has been phenomenal in being collaborators and innovators. Honestly, they’re cheerleaders for our community and its success.



Hear more from Megan Colascione at anthology.com/university-of-south-carolina

Products highlighted in this success story:

 **Blackboard LEARN**

 **Anthology Engage**

Learn more at anthology.com.



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