

The President's Perspective
Fourth Century Initiative

January 19, 2002

Dear Alumni,

Though I have met some of you at various college functions, this is only the second opportunity I've had in an intense four months to communicate with all of you.

As you might expect, I spent the first months in office getting to know the College and my new home. From the beginning I was very impressed with the College of Charleston and its aspiration, enthusiastically endorsed by the Board of Trustees, to become a nationally preeminent public liberal arts and sciences university. The Board clearly set us all on this path when they articulated the vision and directed me to strengthen the quality of the academic programs at this fine college. Today I am even more persuaded that this truly remarkable place has the potential to compete with top-tier institutions. From the beginning I have been working with my colleagues to formulate a plan that accomplishes the vision, and I want to take this opportunity to share the details with you.

The College is distinctive, in large part, because of its strong commitment to student-centered learning. What struck me from the moment I first visited the College was that, despite its size, it didn't have the feel of a large university. After having spent time on campus and meeting with student groups, I would describe the atmosphere as more similar to that of a small, first-rate liberal arts and sciences college. In order for the College of Charleston to become a school of national distinction, it must not only maintain the faculty-student interaction that gives it that intimate feel, it must enhance it.

Following the course the Board of Trustees has set and working with faculty leadership, the provost, my senior staff and I have formulated the Fourth Century Initiative, a four-year comprehensive academic enhancement program which is centered entirely on student learning. This initiative, strongly endorsed by the Board, will focus on improving several core areas critical to our goal of enhancing student-faculty relationships.

Fourth Century Initiative: Core Areas

Students: We will improve on our ability to attract the best and brightest high school students through the strategic use of tuition assistance. Our initiative will fund merit scholarships, significantly increase need-based grants, and greatly expand the on-campus student employment program. In this way we will reward those most deserving of financial assistance and continue to guarantee access to those least able to afford a College of Charleston education. In addition, we will decrease student enrollment by 300 over the next four-year period.

Faculty: Our faculty has demonstrated its willingness to devote time and energy to the students. They also are known for their involvement in academic research - research that has an impact on their teaching, on student learning, and on the larger community. However, the student population at the College has grown tremendously during the last decade, and at this juncture the student/teacher ratio at our peer institutions is lower than at ours. Over the next four years we plan to add fifty full-time professors to our roster faculty.

Staff: We will add fifty more support staff whose primary mission will be to improve and augment academic and student life services.

Programs: Our Fourth Century Initiative will facilitate the intellectual and personal development of our students through curricular and co-curricular programs so that the learning experiences outside the classroom are more closely connected to the learning that takes place within our academic programs. We will create a student-faculty research fund that will enable us first to recruit the brightest students and then to provide them with the opportunity to collaborate with faculty on intellectually challenging projects. We will provide funds for faculty professional and curriculum development and faculty research opportunities that will keep them on the cutting edge of their disciplines and stimulate academic research. We will also improve on our existing programs. All of this is designed to help us build our academic reputation.

Facilities: Naturally, adding 100 new staff and faculty and expanding student services will have an impact on our campus. This initiative will fund the acquisition and adaptation of buildings directly tied to the program.

As many of you know, the College is in the midst of a major facilities improvement program. For example:

- The construction of the new Marlene and Nathan Addlestone Library and new student residence are underway.

- We are in the planning stages of the School of Sciences and Mathematics building renovation and expansion. This major project will be funded in part by a recently approved congressional appropriation.

- Having secured the necessary funding, we are in the early stages of planning for the School of Business and Economics expansion.

- The Simons Center, that houses the School of the Arts, will undergo major expansion as well. The designs that have been presented so far are both visually stunning and educationally sound.

- We are reviewing several other facilities, including the Stern Student Center. The architectural consultant hired for this project will be working closely with students and other members of the community to determine what they would want to see in a student life facility.

These are just some of the exciting projects that are in various stages of planning and construction. As you know, a historic campus is both a privilege and a responsibility. Because we take that responsibility seriously we are also looking at the best ways to preserve and maintain our historic structures.

The impact on the campus of what I've been describing will become apparent soon.

- Class size will decrease.
- Student/faculty ratio will improve.
- More full-time, highly trained roster faculty will be teaching the students.
- The variety and availability of course offerings will increase.
- There will be more challenging opportunities for students to work with faculty on research projects and internships.
- Expanded student services will become available.
- Financial aid opportunities will be enhanced.

- Student employment opportunities will be augmented.
- The campus will be enhanced.

The College of Charleston is confident that as these plans are implemented, the quality of education it provides will improve significantly, and the College will take its place among a highly select group of universities in the country.

Of course, changes of this scope and magnitude will require substantial resources. So far as funding is concerned, South Carolina, like most other states, has been forced to retreat from its previous level of support for higher education, and we do not know if or when this trend will be reversed or if funding will be restored to its previous levels. (Already this year we had to remit approximately 4% of our state appropriations.) We recently completed a successful capital campaign and will continue to pursue grants and gifts aggressively. We have had some considerable success this year in private fund raising. Based on the economic environment in which we must operate and the fact that we can no longer depend on student population growth to fund our goals, we realize that this excellence initiative must be funded in large part by tuition.

My senior staff and I have conducted exhaustive research into what will be needed to support the initiative. I presented our proposal to the Board of Trustees, along with the pertinent financial information, and they have enthusiastically endorsed all elements of the plan.

At the April meeting the Board will consider the cost of the initiative and take into account general education and other inflationary factors, as well as prospective state funding, and decide on the amount of the tuition increase. We will inform all our constituents of the specifics regarding this excellence initiative as soon after the April meeting as possible.

The College is poised - ready to move from its present position as a regionally esteemed university to that of a nationally preeminent public liberal arts and sciences institution. The Fourth Century Initiative will have such a significant impact on student learning at the College of Charleston that it will strengthen even more an already highly respected college degree.

All of us are dedicated to making this the exceptional institution we know it can be. We are grateful for your commitment to your alma mater and to the concept of excellence in education it represents. As we move ahead we look forward to your continued support of the College of Charleston.

Sincerely,

Lee Higdon
President