

The President's Perspective
Fourth Century Initiative

January 19, 2002

Dear College of Charleston Families,

Though I have met some of you at various events, this is only my second opportunity in an intense four months to communicate with you by letter. Who knew that life with 10,000 students would keep me so busy?

No doubt you are aware of how impressed I have been from the beginning 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. Today, I am even more persuaded that this truly remarkable place has the potential to compete with top-tier institutions. The Board clearly set us all on this path when they adopted the vision and directed me to strengthen the quality of the academic programs at an already fine college.

I have spent the first months on campus not only getting to know the College and my new home, but working with my colleagues to formulate a plan that accomplishes this vision. Because the goal and the means by which we will achieve it will directly impact your student, I am taking 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: The finest liberal arts and sciences education takes place when talented students representing diverse backgrounds come together in a vibrant learning environment. 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. We believe this decision will have a beneficial impact on the quality of life for both our students and the surrounding neighborhoods.

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. The more favorable the ratio, the smaller the class size, and the greater the faculty-student interaction. In order to improve opportunities for students to work with faculty, over the next four years the College will add fifty full-time professors who share our passion for student-centered learning.

Staff: We will add fifty more support staff whose primary mission will be to improve and augment academic and student life services in such areas as tutoring, advising, students affairs and wellness. Even after this increase, we will still have one of the smallest ratio of staff to students of any major university.

Programs: The 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 curriculum development and research that will keep our faculty on the cutting edge of their

disciplines. This fund will also improve our existing programs by assuring that our curriculum always remains practical and relevant to the times. 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. Living and working on a beautiful and 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 benefits to your student 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 your student.

- 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 significantly improve. As a result, the College will take its place among a highly select group of universities in the country.

Of course, changes of the kind I have outlined will require substantial incremental 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. While we know at the present time that there will be a tuition increase to fund this program, I want to make the process by which tuition and fees are set absolutely clear so you will understand why we are not providing you with exact costs at this point but with approximate numbers that can be used for financial planning instead.

It is at the April meeting that 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, before deciding on the amount of the tuition increase. I can say at this time that if we were to fund the total cost of this initiative now, it would increase tuition for in-state students by approximately \$735 per year and for out-of-state students by approximately \$1660 per year. Rest assured, we will inform you of the specifics regarding tuition and fees 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 make an already highly respected college degree even stronger.

We are dedicated to making this the exceptional institution we know it can be. We are grateful to families like yours for your commitment to your student and to the concept of excellence in education, and we look forward to your continued support of the College of Charleston.

Sincerely,

Lee Higdon
President