

The President's Perspective
Fourth Century Initiative

January 25, 2002

Dear Staff,

I have had the opportunity over the past few months to meet with most of you, and I'd like to take this opportunity to communicate directly with all of you about an exciting new initiative that will be made public tomorrow.

I am pleased to announce the College of Charleston's Fourth Century Initiative, a four-year comprehensive academic enhancement program centered on student learning.

What initially attracted me to the College was the fact that, despite its size, it didn't have the feel of a large university. Instead, I would describe an atmosphere more similar to that of a small, first-rate liberal arts and sciences college. In order to become a school of national distinction we must not only maintain the faculty-student interaction that gives it that intimate feel, we must enhance it.

I came on board because I believed that the College had the potential to achieve the vision, articulated by the Board of Trustees, of becoming a preeminent public liberal arts institution. Now, after an intense four months, meeting with various on- and off-campus groups, I am completely convinced that this truly remarkable place has the potential to compete with top-tier institutions.

The Fourth Century Initiative will focus on improving several core areas critical to our goal of enhancing the student experience and taking us further along the path to excellence.

Fourth Century Initiative

Students: Our initiative will fund merit scholarships, significantly increase need-based grants and greatly expand on-campus student employment programs so that we will be better able to attract the best and brightest high school students. 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: The student/teacher ratio at the College of Charleston is higher than that of our peer institutions. Over the next four years we plan to add 50 full-time professors to our roster faculty.

Staff: We will add 50 more support staff whose primary mission will be to improve and augment academic and student life services in such areas as tutoring, advising, student 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: Students will broaden their intellectual development through the addition of curricular and co-curricular programs that connect the learning experiences outside the classroom to the learning taking 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.

Facilities: As you know, we are in the midst of a major facilities improvement program. In addition to the new library and student residence hall that are already well underway, we will renovate and expand the existing math and sciences building (the project will be partially funded by a recent congressional appropriation), the School of Business and Economics and the Simons Center/School of the Arts. We are also reviewing several other facilities, including the Stern Student Center.

Adding new faculty and staff and expanding student services will, of course, impact our campus even further. The Fourth Century Initiative will fund the acquisition and adaptation of buildings directly tied to the program.

Of course, changes of this scope and magnitude will require substantial financial resources. 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.

The Board of Trustees has enthusiastically endorsed all elements of the Fourth Century Initiative. In April they will decide on the amount of the tuition increase and we will inform all our constituents of the specifics as soon after the meeting as possible.

We are excited about the future of the College of Charleston and dedicated to making it the exceptional institution we know it can be. I'm sure we can count on your continued support of and commitment to the College as we develop into a nationally preeminent public liberal arts and sciences university.

Sincerely,

Lee Higdon
President