

Presentation by College of Charleston President P. George Benson
Commission on Higher Education
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1. Opening

Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to tell you a little about the College of Charleston. But first, I want to amplify the comments of President Ray Greenberg, who proceeded me today: Charleston is a college town. The College of Charleston, the Medical University of South Carolina, The Citadel, and Trident Technical College account for a total of nearly 50,000 students, faculty and staff. That's the equivalent of a University of Georgia or a University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Our four institutions collaborate in a variety of ways. The College and The Citadel offer joint master's degree programs in English, history, computer and information sciences, and teaching in middle grades. Trident Technical College is a major feeder school for the College. And, in turn, the College is a key supplier of applicants to MUSC's graduate and medical programs. In fact, as many as 20 percent of the students in certain MUSC programs are graduates of the College.

Regarding Ray Greenberg's comments about MUSC's economic development efforts, I'd like to note that the College of Charleston is also involved in economic development. In fact, we will be making an announcement in the next couple of weeks about a new

economic development program focused on strengthening existing South Carolina companies.

OK, back to the script. I want to start by thanking you, the CHE, for all that you do to advocate for and advance public higher education in South Carolina. In particular, I want to commend Garry Walters and the CHE staff as well as Chairman Ken Wingate and the entire board for your efforts to help secure regulatory relief legislation in the General Assembly this year.

The passage of this legislation will enable all of our colleges and universities to operate somewhat more efficiently and effectively. It is a good start, but more regulatory relief is needed.

South Carolina must continue to move toward a regulatory and funding model that unlocks the potential of our colleges and universities. Multiple layers of bureaucracy cost us money, don't necessarily guarantee accountability, and constrain our ability to react quickly to changes in the marketplace.

We must continue to seek reductions in the number of state approvals required for various types of projects, and we must be given more flexibility in the area of human resources.

Fortunately, there are existing opportunities to pursue these reforms. One is the regulatory relief task force that was formed as part of our work with Governor Haley on performance-based funding for higher education. In addition, the regulatory relief legislation that just passed calls for the establishment of a committee to study possible reforms in human resources. These opportunities should be the highest priorities for CHE and our entire higher education system.

All over the country, state governments are reevaluating the way they regulate and fund public higher education. For example, this week, the Chancellor of Ohio's Board of Regents is proposing a plan to give the state's 14 public universities more autonomy in financial and administrative matters while at the same time reducing state mandates and regulations. In return, the universities would be required to meet performance benchmarks in areas such as graduation rates, affordability, and endowment levels.

In some states, public universities are privatizing individual schools. In other words, making them completely self-sufficient. For example, the law and business schools at the University of Virginia no longer receive state funding. UCLA is about to forgo state funding for its business school. The University of Minnesota is looking to privatize the funding of its law and business schools. And Arizona State has proposed a plan that would wean its law school from state funding over a period of several years.

South Carolina should join the list of states that are adopting and experimenting with reforms that would untie the hands of our public universities and allow us to better meet the educational, economic, and social needs of our state.

All of the efforts I cited around the country are a direct result of drastic cuts to higher education budgets. But the situation is considerably worse in South Carolina. Our university budgets were already underfunded before the Great Recession relative to universities in our competitor states. Since 2008, the College of Charleston has lost nearly half of its state funding. Our state appropriation now accounts for just 8 percent of our total operating budget. From a revenue perspective, we are almost a private institution.

2. The College

For the benefit of the Commission's new members, I'd like to share a few key facts and anecdotes about the College.

With roughly 11,800 undergraduate and graduate students, the College of Charleston is the 3rd largest university in South Carolina. We graduate approximately 2,000 undergraduates each year.

The 2011-2012 academic year, which begins on our campus on August 23rd, will mark the 241st year since the College's founding in 1770.

The College consistently places well in national college rankings for quality and affordability. Just this month, the College was cited by The Princeton Review as one of the best universities in the country. That publication also singled out our Accounting and Communication majors as among the nation's best.

Last August, Parade Magazine named us one of the top 7 small state universities in the country.

But even as our national reputation continues to grow, we continue to accept all qualified South Carolina students who apply to the College. And nearly 70 percent of all South Carolinians who apply do qualify and are accepted. Those who do not qualify can be accepted if they attend a technical college for one or two years and perform well.

The upshot of this is that out-of-state students do not displace South Carolina students at the College of Charleston. If they qualify, they are accepted, period.

As for affordability, the College ranks 7th for in-state tuition among our state's four-year public colleges and universities. That is, six universities charge more than the College of Charleston.

Further, virtually every in-state freshman at the College receives some type of state aid. Last year, the average in-state freshman at the College received \$5,063 in state aid.

When federal and institutional financial aid are included, that average in-state student receives a total of \$7,542 in financial aid. Which means his or her out-of-pocket tuition cost was a remarkably affordable \$2,424 for an entire academic year!

A top priority in the College's Strategic Plan is to significantly increase institutional scholarships and financial aid. We have made progress on this front, but still have a long way to go to become competitive with the discount rates offered by institutions we compete with for students.

By the way, based on cross-applications, our top four competitors among public universities are: USC, Clemson, UGA, and UNC Chapel-Hill. Our top four private competitors are: Elon, Davidson, Tulane, and Boston College.

3. Strategic Plan

I discussed the College's Strategic Plan the last time I appeared before you, so I won't cover it in detail today. But for the benefit of the Commission's new members, I would like to mention the heart and soul of the plan: the College's three core values. Our core values are what we believe in. They are a small set of timeless, guiding principles that are as relevant today as 100 years from now. Knowing just these three values, you could practically write the rest of the plan yourself.

The first value is Academic Excellence. Although you are likely to find this in the plans of nearly all universities, it's not a term we take for granted.

To us, Academic Excellence means providing our students with a highly personalized and experiential learning experience rooted in the liberal arts. And it means offering our students the international and interdisciplinary perspectives they will need to be successful in today's global society.

The second value is Student-focused Community. Notice I did not say "faculty-centered" or "faculty-focused." This is what sets us apart from most universities in this country. Our faculty have developed a nurturing environment that is second to none.

For example, our students are taught by professors, not teaching assistants.

The third and most unique value is the History, Traditions, Culture and Environment of Charleston and the Lowcountry, and the opportunities they afford our students for learning and our faculty for scholarship.

That last value, which can be summarized as "the power of place," will serve as a prioritization mechanism, helping us to decide which academic programs to support. It will help us focus our energy and resources on the assets of Charleston and help us to differentiate the College from other universities in the state and nation.

It will ensure that the College is adequately invested in and supportive of academic programs that align with Charleston. It also calls for us to nurture and support Charleston's assets.

Assets like the Port, Historic preservation, the Arts community (e.g., Spoleto), the natural environment of the Lowcountry, the Tourism industry, Urban planning, African American history, and Southern Jewish history.

It is the academic programs that align with these assets that we will develop, grow, and improve. This includes programs like historic preservation, marine biology, African American studies, environmental sciences and environmental policy, hospitality and tourism management, the arts, arts management, global logistics and transportation, urban planning, and Southern Jewish Studies.

While the current economic crisis has forced us to slow down the implementation of our Strategic Plan, we remain focused on and excited about the future that the plan envisions for the College.

4. New Degree Programs

This weekend, the inaugural class of our new MBA program will graduate. As part of this 13-month program, our 23 MBA students spent two weeks over the summer studying and learning in China. By the way, ours is the first full-time MBA program in Charleston.

Like the MBA degree, many of the College's graduate and undergraduate programs are infused with a global perspective that helps prepare students to become world citizens.

This fall, for example, the College will launch an International Master's degree, which includes overseas service in the Peace Corps. Focusing on environmental and natural resources, the new degree is part of our Master of Science in Environmental Studies Program.

By the way, the College consistently ranks among the Top 25 "Peace Corps Volunteer Producing Colleges and Universities." Currently, 36 of our alumni are representing the United States abroad by serving in the Peace Corps.

Another way that the College is emphasizing internationalization is through our foreign language offerings. This fall, we will begin offering a course on Vietnamese language and culture.

In all, the College offers courses in 14 different languages, more than any other university in South Carolina.

We are always striving to diversify our academic portfolio with new and cutting-edge majors that reflect both the unique needs of today's employers and the interdisciplinary interests

of today's students. An example of this is our new Computing in the Arts degree, which is being offered for the first time this fall.

This major combines the creativity of the arts with the tools and conceptual modeling systems of computing. Students will explore contemporary music, art and theatre production, animation and digital media, visual and audio systems, and Internet applications. True to its interdisciplinary focus, the major is supported by faculty from our School of Sciences and Mathematics and our School of the Arts.

We appreciate the guidance and support of the CHE in reviewing and approving all of these important new programs. And we look forward to working with the CHE in the months ahead as we move forward with proposals for new academic majors in Public Health, Exercise Science, and Dance.

5. Budget/Financial

Given the painfully slow pace of our state's economic recovery, the College is not requesting any new funding in the 2012-2013 budget. We would, however, ask that CHE continue to push for a Bond Bill. It's now been a full decade since the last one.

On a positive note, we appreciate the funding that the General Assembly allocated for deferred maintenance from the Capital Reserve Fund this year. The College's allotment was \$1.7 million.

In addition, we appreciate the state's continued disbursement of State Lottery funds to support PASCAL, the academic library partnership between our public and private colleges and universities.

While every dollar of state funding helps, our higher education institutions must embrace greater self-sufficiency. To that end, the College continues to seek out alternative sources of funding such as corporate and foundation grants, private funding, and partnerships that support our academic, research, and facilities needs. I will share two recent examples.

In July, the College of Charleston Foundation received a \$1 million grant from the Spaulding-Paolozzi Foundation in support of two field research stations at Dixie Plantation. Dixie Plantation is an historic 881-acre property located along the Stono River, about 17 miles from our downtown campus. It was bequeathed to the College of Charleston Foundation in 1995 by the late conservationist, ornithologist, and artist John Henry Dick.

In addition to walkways and other enhancements that have been made at Dixie over the past couple of years, the field research stations will support environmental science research and instruction for students and faculty in our Environmental Sciences, Biology, and Archeology programs.

Another recent announcement that we are very excited about is a new partnership with Michelin North America, headquartered in Greenville. Michelin has selected our School of Business to deliver online global logistics and transportation professional development programs for Michelin employees and the company's affiliates.

The program will be developed and evaluated over two years with the long-term goal of developing a comprehensive logistics professional development online program for business, education, and government entities operating or seeking to operate in South Carolina or use the Port of Charleston for importing and exporting goods.

6. Closing

That's a brief overview of some of the plans and activities at the College of Charleston.

In closing, I would like to reiterate how important I believe it is that we continue to push for reforms that will lead to a more equitable and predictable funding model for all of our public colleges and universities.

Working cooperatively with the governor, I'm hopeful that we can establish a new, more sustainable funding model for higher education. By working together, and, most importantly, with our business community, we can ensure that our higher education system becomes more competitive with the states around us.

I continue to be amazed at how little attention higher education receives from the people of South Carolina. In Charleston, for example, people are often outspoken about public policy and quality of life issues such as the impact of cruise ships and the extension of Interstate 526. But where is the same level of concern for our underfunded higher education system? That has to be as important to our citizens as the debate over cruise ships.

Our universities are the solution, not the problem. They are the linchpin for economic development, high-tech innovation, scientific research, job creation, an improved K-12 system, and a high quality of life. We can't afford to let higher education slip backward.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.