ACAP
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DISCUSSION DRAFT

South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

Graduate/ Professional Initiative

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Introduction

As the knowledge economy takes hold, graduate/ professional education is becoming increasingly important. In a growing number of fields a graduate/ professional degree is essential to entry; in many more, employees are expected to acquire additional education early in their careers. Finally, there is accelerating demand for specialized graduate/ professional certificates, especially in scientific and technical fields.

South Carolina can sharply benefit its economy and quality of life by being a leader in all aspects of graduate/ professional education including:

- Providing high quality, highly accessible degrees to more of its citizens;
- Attracting outstanding individuals from other states and nations to South Carolina for graduate/ professional degrees and subsequent employment; and
- Providing advanced credentials, normally graduate certificates, that strengthen the knowledge of working professionals and help keep them in state.

Making progress in graduate/ professional education is especially challenging for two reasons. The first is that because costs are significantly higher than in undergraduate education, initial investments require especially careful scrutiny. The second major concern in graduate/ professional education is maintenance of quality. Because effectiveness is dependent on staying on the leading edge of knowledge, quality is comparatively more difficult—and more expensive--to maintain in the graduate/ professional domain.

South Carolina's university leaders, especially in recent years, have strengthened and increased quality by making tough decisions about program priority, choosing to allocate additional resources only to those areas of greatest importance and competitiveness. The university role has been reinforced by that of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), whose careful and thorough review process ensures that new programs meet strict standards of need and effectiveness. As a result of these two factors, South Carolina has relatively little of the graduate/ professional duplication that plagues many other states; external review processes, such as that employed by the Research Centers of Economic Excellence, confirm that overall quality in our state is very good and improving—not least with the addition of a great many endowed chairs.

Despite South Carolina's success in graduate/ professional education, maintaining the *status quo* is not sufficient. South Carolina needs to be assertive in an area that is essential to creating

and sustaining the knowledge economy. A passive strategy can never ensure competitiveness, while a bold approach, by contrast, can draw attention to the state as a world leader while also providing immediate services to residents.

Moving Forward

If we accept that South Carolina needs an active strategy to compete more successfully in graduate/ professional education, and we take as a given that the universities and CHE will continue to be vigilant about quality, the core challenges for the state could be described in the following five categories:

1. Expand the statewide accessibility of graduate/ professional programs;
2. Provide statewide access to specialized graduate credentials (certificates);
3. Create synergies of scale that allow graduate/ professional programs to operate at levels of efficiency much higher than existing norms; and
4. Attract and retain more holders of graduate/ professional degrees from out of state.

Challenge 1: Expanding Accessibility
Challenge 2: Increasing Availability of Specialized Credentials
Challenge 3: Creating Synergies of Scale to Improve Quality and Efficiency

The first three challenges--expanding accessibility, increasing availability of specialized credentials, and creating synergies of scale to improve quality and efficiency—will be met by leaders at the universities. The Commission on Higher Education will organize the creation of the South Carolina Graduate Professional Alliance (SC-GPA). The SC-GPA will have eleven members, as follows:

- Provost (or Vice President for Academic Affairs) *and* Graduate Dean of the three research universities (6);
- Provost (or Vice President for Academic Affairs) from three of the comprehensive universities not in the University of South Carolina system (3);
- The Deputy Director for Academic Affairs from the Commission on Higher Education (1); and
- The senior academic officer of the Technical College System.

The chair of the group will normally be one of the research university representatives; the Commission on Higher Education will provide staffing.

The SC-GPA, which would start work immediately, would be asked to provide status reports to the Commission on Higher Education every three months, with a comprehensive plan to achieve the three core objectives due no later than one year after the group begins its work.

The Commission on Higher Education would emphasize to the members of the SC-GPA that this new group is not expected to merely codify or extend existing practices. Rather, bold, energetic actions are needed to make the state a leader in ensuring that its citizens have access to innovative, high-quality graduate/ professional education. To this end, the Commission on Higher Education would provide the SC-GPA with an Idea Paper that outlines possibilities. Brief descriptions of some of these are:

- The development of collaborative statewide graduate programs, for example, a Masters of Arts in Teaching, with specialties such as math/science education, that would be separate from existing campus programs. The new statewide programs would emphasize flexible learning, including extensive online coursework, and would likely be superior in every way to similar offerings from national proprietary institutions. South Carolina needs to be very sure that its citizens are not forced into expensive, for-profit, and often minimum-standards programs, simply because universities in the state have not organized effectively to serve the same market.
- The development of statewide graduate certificate programs in critical areas, for example, computer/ computational science. This is a field where rapid changes in technology, notably the need for software systems to accommodate multi-core/ parallel processor hardware, leave businesses and practicing professionals grasping for assistance. Although the market may not be large enough for one university in one area, a statewide program could leverage the scale needed to be efficient as well as effective. This is also an area—and there may be many others--in which the Technical College system could develop training, certificates or even associate degrees that would articulate with the university level efforts (and is a principal reason why representation of this sector in the SC-GPA is desirable).
- Existing successful collaborative efforts such as the Low Country Graduate Center in Charleston or the Greenville University Center could be evaluated as models for replication in other regions or statewide.
- In the case of existing graduate/ professional programs at the three research universities, increased quality and efficiency might be achieved through exchange of specialized coursework using advanced video technology (especially once the South Carolina Light Rail is in operation).
- Existing graduate programs in science and technology could also be enhanced through the use of shared resources, including high performance computing and leading edge tools such as transmission electron microscopy.

Challenge 4: Attract and Retain More Holders of Graduate/ Professional Degrees from Out of State

The Commission on Higher Education would take the lead, in close collaboration with the SC-GPA, in meeting the fifth and final challenge, attracting and retaining more holders of graduate/ professional degrees from out of state. Among the ideas that could be considered:

- An Innovation Scholars program would provide enhanced stipends (in addition to normal) of $10,000 per year to exceptional graduate and professional students (including medical residents) who state their intention to seek employment in the state after graduation. Initially, there would be twenty slots per year for a total cost of $200,000 per year and students could hold them for up to four years.

    - To prevent the new monies from simply substituting for existing stipends, Innovation Scholars would need to be truly exceptional, the type of students who would otherwise choose a university of the caliber of Stanford or MIT. Depending on the discipline, this could mean: graduating from a top-ranked program with a high GPA and outstanding recommendations, top-level GRE scores, honors graduate from a distinguished program, and the like. A statewide panel would meet via videoconference to affirm offers. Slots would not be used if candidates of sufficient quality could not be found.
- The state could start a program of tax abatements that would provide five thousand dollars a year over ten years to distinguished graduates of designated critical needs programs who stay and remain employed in the state.

Staff support

Supporting the Graduate/Professional Initiative will require extensive staff support from Commission on Higher Education's Academic Affairs area. CHE has established standards and procedures in this area that are among the handful of best practices in the U.S. Such strong program quality standards are very important to the citizens of the state—individuals who invest vast amounts of time and money deserve to know that their investment is appropriate. The Commission on Higher Education believes, however, that some focusing of effort can free up staff time to support the Graduate/ Professional Initiative (and other new efforts).

Financial support

Organizing and defining the Graduate/ Professional Initiative effort should be feasible with existing resources; some activities may be achieved through reorganization, and others may be developed with external grant funding. Ultimately, however, full implementation in meeting the needs of the state will require additional state financial support. The Commission on Higher Education and the partnering colleges and universities will make sure that any requests for new funding are carefully defined and explicitly demonstrate the value of the results for South Carolina.

Conclusion

The knowledge economy is a reality. States that are not moving to compete on knowledge are condemning themselves to third-world status—a low standard of living and a low quality of life. As the threshold of knowledge required for success in the flat world rises, South Carolina must move not just to catch up but to lead. Aiming low is not aiming at all. Our state has excellent institutions of higher education that have demonstrated the ability to work together effectively. These existing collaborative relationships, together with additional efforts in the same vein, will give us the potential to acquire the scale and quality to compete with the biggest and most comprehensive research institutions. Similarly, the close-knit and creative leadership of the state will afford us the opportunity to implement innovative approaches to graduate and

professional education that will most effectively serve our citizens as well as establish South Carolina as a place where new ideas flourish.