2014 CofC Faculty Survey: Executive Summary
Ad Hoc Committee of Chairs of Faculty Standing Committees

In early January 2014, CofC faculty were surveyed about their agreement with statements on three broad topics: the current mission of the College, potential changes to that mission, and future leadership. Over 400 faculty responded to the survey (response rate approximately 80%). This level of participation shows that faculty are engaged enthusiastically in thinking about the future of the College and want to participate fully in ongoing discussions about the potential for constructive change. This summary highlights responses to select questions that are central to faculty views of the College and its evolving mission. The 268 comments submitted as part of the survey also helped to inform this summary.

SECTION 1: Potential changes to the mission of the College and value of the current mission (Survey Parts I & II)

Many questions in the survey asked for faculty opinions regarding a shift in vision and mission from a liberal arts model to a more comprehensive research university model, as well as the value of the current model to faculty and students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I support the College of Charleston merging with MUSC.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I support the College of Charleston moving toward becoming a research university.</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. It would be worth changing the mission and academic culture of the College if that allowed it to take advantage of synergies that would come from a merger with MUSC.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Funding from the state government and business interests would likely be sufficient to build a high-quality research university.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>-9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I support the institution expanding significantly beyond its current number of enrolled students.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I came to the College of Charleston because of its focus on offering a high-quality undergraduate liberal arts education.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Students choose the College of Charleston because of its focus on providing a high-quality undergraduate liberal arts education.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. With its focus on critical thinking, communication skills, and creativity, a liberal arts education is the best preparation for students to enter the modern workforce.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>+9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1) **Agree** = Strongly Agree or Agree; **Disagree** = Strongly Disagree or Disagree
(2) **Index** = +Agree/Disagree when Agree > Disagree or −Disagree/Agree when Disagree > Agree
(3) Percentages do not sum to 100 because the categories “Neutral” and “Do not know” were excluded

**Responses:** A majority of the faculty disagree with a major shift in mission. The faculty disfavor benefits of a merger with MUSC if it threatens the current mission, disfavor over-prioritizing the research mission, disfavor growth of the student body, and by a factor of 10 do not believe that funding would be adequate to support a research institution of high quality. Other responses revealed strong sentiments about the central importance of liberal arts education to CofC: strong faculty identity, desirability to students, and demonstrated value in preparing students for diverse future goals.

**Comments:** While an institution must adapt to remain competitive, the general consensus of comments was that movement away from the liberal arts model undermines our strengths and makes us less competitive and less responsive to the needs of the local community, the state, and the nation. The successful merger of a historically liberal arts institution with a medical university has no precedent. A core belief in the value of a liberal arts education resonates with most faculty even as the campus has added strengths in other areas; smart, deliberate, and limited growth that maintains the importance of the liberal arts model as our core strength is viewed as the best path forward.

SECTION 2: Comparison of models (Survey Parts I & II)

Identical questions asked about two models of the College allow for a comparison of faculty views of alternative futures. These models are described in the following preface statements, with responses to select questions listed in the table:

**Model 1:** Maintaining the College of Charleston as a **liberal arts institution** with some limited expansion of graduate programs, as outlined in the College’s current strategic plan, would...

**Model 2:** The incorporation of the College of Charleston into a **research university** would...
Survey Question | Agree | Disagree | Index
--- | --- | --- | ---
a. ...allow the institution to maintain a student-centered focus on undergraduate education | 84% | 7% | +12.6
b. ...provide a likely path for the College to achieve "greatness" | 55% | 18% | +3.1
c. ...make me more likely to seek job opportunities elsewhere | 7% | 73% | -10.8
d. ...lead to an increase in faculty salaries | 9% | 50% | -5.8
f. ...improve the financial situation of the College | 18% | 35% | -1.9
g. ...benefit the economic development of Charleston | 42% | 17% | +2.4

Responses: These comparisons reveal stark differences in views of the two models. A strong majority views the research university model (#2) as undermining student-centered education, which it overwhelmingly views as being supported by the liberal arts model (#1). Model 1 is viewed as a likely path to “greatness” for the College, whereas Model 2 is viewed as working against that goal. Model 1 is viewed as more likely to benefit the economic development of Charleston, possibly based on views of the value of liberal arts education as preparation for entering the workforce (survey question 21) and of the likelihood of inadequate funding for building a research university (survey question 17). Neither model is viewed by the majority as likely to improve faculty salaries or the financial state of the College.

Comments: Many comments reflect an overall conviction that building a third high-quality research institution is “clearly beyond the reach of South Carolina,” and that merging with MUSC would create “a Frankenstein monster consisting of an underfunded liberal arts college merged with a med school in the red,” “which means all this will be done on the backs of the faculty.” Others argued that “[O]ur competitive advantage in the marketplace is to remain a strong undergraduate focused institution” and that “students deserve a public option that offers a liberal arts model,” lamenting a move from “a distinctive, high quality institution” to “another mediocre, regional PhD-granting university.” On the other hand, a smaller number of comments embraced the changes possible with a shift in mission, noting that “Our past, wonderful though it is, should not prevent us from acting responsibly as employees of a public university.”

SECTION 3: Future leadership of the College (Survey Part III)

At this critical moment, CofC faculty express strong convictions about our future. They convey that the success of any path forward must involve leadership and inclusive teamwork that understands and considers faculty aspirations. Of all the survey questions, the three that directly addressed future leadership show the most consistent agreement:

Survey Question | Agree | Disagree | Index
--- | --- | --- | ---
33. For the institution to succeed, it is critical that the new President and administrative team take into account the aspirations of the current faculty. | 95% | 2% | +61.3
34. It is important that the new President of the College of Charleston have extensive knowledge of and experience with challenges facing higher education. | 93% | 3% | +36.3
35. It is important that the new President of the College of Charleston have a distinguished record of service in higher education. | 79% | 8% | +9.5

Comments: The comments reveal concerns about transparency and inclusiveness in the Presidential search process. Many faculty view senior administration and the Board of Trustees as too focused on politics and outside voices and not in touch with faculty achievements and aspirations. Any proposal to change our long-standing mission and priorities will require leadership that is more willing to engage in transparent and sober dialogue about realistic risks and costs in addition to opportunities. Some faculty are open to leaders from outside of academia but all strongly oppose any choice that would not appear to be the best-qualified candidate. They envision someone with the experience necessary to understand current challenges to higher education, to secure the resources necessary to address long-standing issues before committing to new directions, to recognize and build on our strengths, and to show commitment to inclusion and diversity. The comments affirm that without sufficient “buy-in” from current faculty, “rolling the dice this way would be a disaster.” “Dysfunction” seems to capture the current mood of faculty in feeling alienated from the goals of shared governance, from a common and well-defined mission, and from the process of selecting a future leader.