Three-Year Academic Priorities

Sifting through the goals and strategies of the Strategic Plan, the Priorities and Planning Committee established the academic priorities for the College in the coming three years. (The Priorities and Planning Committee advises the provost on annual budgets, and it is composed of associate provosts, academic deans, academic vice presidents, members of the Senate’s budget committee, chair of the Academic Planning committee, and the Speaker of the Faculty.)

We put these items into “tiers,” but those categories are somewhat flexible. For example, we are not recommending that everything in the first tier be fully funded and accomplished before turning to the second tier. We will pursue these goals simultaneously. Interim Provost Diamond presented these academic priorities to President Benson and his senior leadership team in December, and they will inform budget discussions in the coming months. Ultimately, those budget discussions will advise our new provost, Dr. George Hynd, as he prepares the Academic Affairs budget for submission to the President.

Top tier:
- scholarships, financial aid, abatements, assistantships
- 30 new faculty lines (long-term: 100 new lines) to enhance “personalized education”
- internationalization

Second tier:
- faculty and staff welfare (e.g., compensation, childcare)
- diversity
- graduate education
- civic engagement
- student research

Third tier:
- center for peer education
- writing literacy
- technology infrastructure
- scientific literacy

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New Provost

At the start of the Spring semester, Professor George Hynd, our new provost, will be in Randolph Hall. I had a couple of meetings with Dr. Hynd last Fall during the interview process, and I’m eager to see his energy, expertise in administration, and enthusiasm for what we’re doing here at the College to get work on our campus. Please join me in making him welcome.

I’d like to thank Interim Provost Beverly Diamond for the fantastic job she has done since Elise Jorgens retired. Dr. Diamond will provide continuity for Academic Affairs: she’s going back to her role as Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs.
Commentary on the Strategic Plan

Faculty who were here for President Higdon’s “Fourth-Century Initiative” will see that this new Strategic Plan adjusts the College’s focus. More than anything else, the Fourth-Century Initiative promoted undergraduate education, trying to turn the College into a nationally-preeminent liberal arts and sciences institution. For example, Mr. Higdon’s Initiative instituted the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Program, which has a budget of about $250,000 per year, while it added no funding for graduate student research. Our beefed-up student orientations, the First Year Experience programs, even the Office for the Academic Experience itself, which oversees many of these undergraduate programs, was the fruit of President Higdon’s vision for the College.

The new Strategic Plan is far more ambitious than the Fourth-Century Initiative. We plan to continue to “enhance the core,” which is, largely, the undergraduate, liberal arts and sciences mission that President Higdon favored. We’ve got to make sure that we don’t lose focus on that goal. The small-college relationship between undergraduates and faculty is our greatest asset: time and again students and faculty both have identified this personalized educational atmosphere as the defining characteristic of the College of Charleston. It can only be maintained and improved if many of the 100 new faculty lines go to existing programs—programs that have suffered a reduction of 15 faculty lines and an increase in students in the last year.

The Planning and Priorities committee recognizes this need, and so part of its justification for adding 30 lines in the next three years is to support General Education, the Honors College, capstone experiences in the majors, to decrease our dependency on contingent faculty, and the like.

The challenge in the coming years will be to continue to enhance the core while turning the College in exciting new directions. For example, the Strategic Plan commits the College to seizing local opportunities we’ve long neglected, whether they’re at the undergraduate or graduate level. To take just one instance, the College has long been well-situated to develop a top-level program in African American studies.

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Third-Year Academic Priorities (continued from page 1)

The details are not yet settled. For example, the Committee has identified some possible curricular programs that might account for many of the new faculty lines, but the provost will make those decisions after budget discussions in the coming years. The same goes for each of these bullet points.

The Committee also recommended that the following building projects be funded before any others:

- Renovation/buildout of:
  - Old Science building
  - New Science building
  - Simons Center
  - Robert Scott Small

After these projects are completed, the Committee recommends that we renovate Maybank and the Education Center before we add any more classroom buildings. The highest priority for new construction: a Wellness Center (including weight rooms, aerobic equipment, etc.).

Spring Elections

Lots of changes are coming this Spring. Terry Bowers, faculty secretary, is in his last year of eligibility for that office, and I am in my last year as Speaker of the Faculty. Steve Jaumé, chair of the Nominations and Elections committee, will be soliciting nominees for these positions soon.

Also, pending approval by the Board of Trustees, we will have a new scheme for electing and apportioning Senators for the 2010-2011 academic year. Each department will elect one Senator, and the Schools will elect at-large Senators, the number of which depends upon each School’s proportion of the whole faculty. Altogether, the Senate will consist of 50 members.

Steve Jaumé has been working hard with Academic Affairs and IT to iron out the difficulties in this new, more complex system of elections.
More Africans entered America through Charleston than through any other city; the College boasts the Avery Research Center; opportunities for original, archival and archeological research abound; we’re in the midst of the Gullah-Geechee corridor; and we’ve already got a talented cadre of teachers and researchers in the field—a solid foundation on which to build. This has been a neglected opportunity. If the Plan is successful, ten years from now we’ll have a nationally-recognized presence in African American studies—at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

The themes guiding these developments are the local, the international, and the interdisciplinary. As I said, it’s pretty ambitious to expect the College to expand in these three directions while still “enhancing the core.” It’s going to take a careful dispersing of money. The finances of such an ambitious plan demand greater responsibility from the faculty. Vague and inaccurate budgeting has been the hallmark of new proposals coming to the Senate in the past. No single person was at fault. The problem has been cultural and systemic, and as a consequence, the Budget Committee and the Senate have not really taken much responsibility for the costs of new (and existing) programs.

We have the opportunity, as a faculty, to change this culture. We need to identify programs that cost far more than the revenue they generate, and we’ve got to decide if their mission is important enough to the College to continue. When we approve any new program—graduate, undergraduate, or continuing ed—we have to know how much it is really going to cost the College, how much revenue it will bring in, etc. We need to have the resolve to end programs that, after a reasonable time, prove too costly or peripheral to the College’s mission.

The Strategic Plan is designed to help guide the process, but people make the decisions about money, and more than ever before we the faculty will be among those people.

Part of my hope for the reform of the Senate is that we will reduce its commitment to issues that are of a more tactical nature so it can devote more time to these strategic issues. The most obvious manifestation of this role will be the Academic Affairs budgeting process, which will now involve representatives from the Budget and Academic Planning committee, and which will also include the President’s annual budget review (and our questions) in the Senate. It will be the responsibility of every Senator to make sure the College stays the course.

The new Strategic Plan will also strengthen our commitment to the local community, making the College a part of the lives of everyone in the area, not just of the traditional, 18-22 year old undergraduate. Our stewardship of McLeod Plantation might be one such outreach responsibility that the College assumes. Another will be to serve non-traditional, local students. The Plan calls for the College to dramatically expand its non-degree programs—what are sometimes lumped under the term “continuing education.” Ten years from now, many of our students will be older folks from the Low Country, people looking to earn a certificate, take a course or two, enroll in an executive program, etc. Probably, some of these programs will respond to a local need, as part of the College’s social obligation to the region.

But the justification for pursuing most of these programs is financial: they should make enough money to entirely support themselves and contribute significant funds to the core mission of the College. The Strategic Plan calls for an explosion of these programs, and more than any other change, this one makes me nervous. The potential for sapping our energy and attention from the “core” mission of the College seems fairly large. Nevertheless, I’ve been told that the potential for increasing revenues is also large, certainly large enough to tempt us into this expansion. The challenge, then, will be to tightly monitor the finances: to make sure that such programs do indeed generate revenue that is directed to the College’s essential units. Ultimately, this job devolves upon the Senate, faculty committees, and you and me. It is our Strategic Plan.

Of course, everything depends on Dr. Benson’s ability to develop a new financial model for the College, one that not only makes up for the recent losses in state revenue but generates new funds for a dramatically-expanded faculty, and the staff and physical plant needed to support that faculty.

I’m excited about the opportunities. The Strategic Plan calls for the College to play a much higher-profile role in the city, a leadership role that should improve the quality of life of all people living in the area. We will invite far more Charlestonians to our campus, and we’ll go out into the community even more than we do now. At the same time, we’re continuing on the upward trajectory we’ve been following for years—becoming a premier undergraduate college, giving South Carolinians a local choice for a public school that rivals Davidson, William and Mary, and others.
Remembering Michael Finefrock

On Tuesday, December 8, Professor Michael Finefrock of the History Department died at his home in Charleston. Michael came to the College of Charleston in 1974, and he would become a full Professor of History with a special emphasis in Middle and Near Eastern History. He earned his A.B. degree in International Relations from Brown University, a diploma as Interpreter-Translator of Modern Turkish from the Navy Language School, and a Joint Ph.D. in European History and Near Eastern History from Princeton University. He published several papers in various publications, mostly dealing with Turkish history or computer applications in the humanities. He was Speaker of the Faculty from 1986 to 1987, and for many years he served on evaluation panels for the Fulbright-Hays program (of which he was a Fellow) and the U.S. Department of Education.

Upcoming Senate Business

In the coming semester the Senate will discuss, among other things,

- a new MBA program
- a new MFA in Creative Writing
- a new undergraduate major in Dance
- changes to the by-laws descriptions of many Senate and faculty committees