

## This We Believe...

During the past two months, 372 faculty have engaged one another in a conversation about the identity of the College of Charleston as a liberal arts and sciences institution. The conversation was framed around three questions<sup>1</sup> and the detailed responses from each of the 87 groups involved in the first round were made available, unedited and in their entirety, on a website<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, the results of the second round of discussions, designed to serve a synthesizing role, are available in their entirety and unedited on a website<sup>3</sup>. Rather than try to summarize the variety of insights and viewpoints, we have elected to draw on what we have learned from this experience to frame the obvious fourth question, “What happens next?”

There is a strong consensus among the faculty (85 percent) that we should continue to use “liberal arts and sciences” to describe the College of Charleston and that the advantages to doing so far outweigh the disadvantages. As expected, we do not agree on every detail of what it means to be a liberal arts and sciences institution. However, this conversation was never meant to settle the question of institutional identity; that will require a more integrated discussion among faculty, the administration, and other stakeholders. What this conversation has demonstrated is the depth of commitment the faculty has, individually and collectively, to maintaining our institutional culture devoted to liberal education. As a faculty we reaffirm our commitment to our identity as a public liberal arts and sciences university. In our context, this means:

- a primary focus on providing high quality undergraduate education, grounded in an extensive and common general education curriculum reflecting the value of intellectual inquiry across disciplines, and designed to support a diverse array of major programs ranging from Classics to Discovery Informatics.
- a faculty focus on teaching that at its core is defined by a close relationship with students whether nurtured in small classes, or through academic advising, research collaborations, supervised undergraduate research, and/or experiential learning opportunities. In this regard, scale is more important than size.
- a faculty that understands and embraces the teacher-scholar model of professional development and an administration that has supported high quality teaching and high quality scholarship through the Fourth Century Initiative by expanding the size of the faculty relative to the size of the student body, by enhancing support for sabbaticals, and by providing resources to support faculty research, undergraduate research, and innovation in teaching.
- an entrepreneurial faculty that remains intellectually vital by developing interdisciplinary teaching, research, and programmatic connections with colleagues from across the university and a faculty committed to translating the value of a liberal arts core to students in professional programs in business and education.
- a public university that develops and provides high quality graduate programs in service to community needs and that prepare graduates for responsible leadership grounded in the core values of the liberal arts.
- a firm commitment to shared decision-making and a belief that process is at the core of collegiality.

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<sup>1</sup> 1) What does it mean to call a college or university a “liberal arts and sciences institution?” 2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the expression “liberal arts and sciences” to describe the College of Charleston in internal and external documents? 3) Should the expression “liberal arts and sciences” continue to be used to describe the College of Charleston?

<sup>2</sup> <http://math.cofc.edu/kasman/responses.php>

<sup>3</sup> <http://math.cofc.edu/kasman/responses2.php>