

CONVERSE

5880

EAST MAIN

For Friends of Converse College



Leading  
with  
**VOICE,**  
**VALUE**  
and  
**VISION**

### Converse Takes Bold Action on College Affordability

**A**s we celebrate the 125th anniversary of our founding, and resounding momentum and milestones on all fronts, Converse dedicates itself anew to providing affordable access to higher education for women.

We are proud to announce that Converse's **tuition price for our traditional undergraduate program will be lowered in fall 2014 to \$16,500**, a level that was last seen more than a decade ago.

The "reset" in tuition represents a 43% decrease from this year's published tuition of \$29,124. This decision culminates from more than a year of research and planning and is a proactive response to the nation's call for college education that makes good economic sense and delivers high-quality results.

Yes, this is a bold step. But it's also action that is in keeping with a College characterized by bolder voice, greater value, and clearer vision. [SEE PAGE 3](#)



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## News from Around Campus



### New Marsha H. Gibbs Field House

Construction is underway for the Marsha H. Gibbs Field House, set to open in spring 2014. Responding to explosive growth of the Valkyries athletics program, Spartanburg's Jimmy Gibbs and his wife, Converse Trustee Marsha Gibbs, made a \$2.5 million lead gift to help fund the 14,000 square-foot field house. Joining the Gibbs are 22 additional donors to the project.

### Celebrating 125 Years and Record Enrollment

Converse ushers in its 125th celebration year with a record-breaking number (264) of new undergraduate students this fall! Join us on campus for cultural and academic events throughout the year, culminating with the Spring Concert and a Reunion Weekend with ALL classes, April 25-26, 2014.

### Converse Students Win National Honors

Continuing Converse's trend for top recognitions including Fulbright and Goldwater honors, 2013 grad Ashley Blount was among 10% of applicants nationwide selected for the John Jay Institute Fellows program. The Institute prepares leaders for faith-informed public service. Incoming Converse II

student and Nisbet Honors Program participant Danielle Tate-Maccaroni is one of 73 community college students in the US, and the only from North Carolina, to receive the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship.

### The Heath Wins SC Design Award

Converse's LEED-certified apartment housing, The Heath, which opened in 2011, won the top design award from the South Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in May. Designed by architectural firm LS3P, The Heath garnered both the President's Award and a Merit Design Award. Converse's campus master plan continues to move forward with the renovation of Pell Hall during the 2013-14 academic year.

### Converse Offers Online MEd in Gifted Education

As South Carolina's only institution offering a Master's program in gifted education, Converse broadened its accessibility to teachers this past summer by launching an online MEd in gifted education. This is the third graduate degree program to be offered online by Converse since February 2012.

### Mentoring Program Inspires Careers in Science

Converse is gaining visibility for a unique science-based mentoring initiative. The



Science, Technology and Research Scholars (STARS) program nurtures interest in research careers by pairing outstanding high school students with Converse faculty for in-depth science projects. Participants learn to write proposals, design experiments, and report their findings regionally and nationally at the high school and college levels – often garnering top awards. The three-year-old program will expand into the humanities this year.

### Valkyries Make National Splash, Continue Growth

Converse made its mark on the national athletic scene last spring as swimmer Jenni Russell '13 earned her second All-American honor, lacrosse player Sam Green was named All-American Strength and Conditioning Athlete of the Year, and freshman golfer Alex Bruce was named All-American Scholar. This fall, the Valkyries welcome their inaugural Track and Field class of recruits, including two state champions and three All-State athletes.

### MFA Grad Lands Book Deal with HarperCollins

2012 MFA in creative and professional writing graduate Sonja Coppenbarger landed a debut-novel contract from one of the world's leading publishing houses, HarperCollins. Coppenbarger's novel, *Starter House*, will be available next spring.

### Washington Monthly Ranks Converse #5 in Nation

Again this year, *Washington Monthly* has ranked Converse as a leading Master's

University for research, service, and social mobility. The rankings, released this month, distinguish the country's institutions of higher learning based on their "contribution to the public good."



### The Johnson Collection Connects Alumnae

More than 30 Converse alumnae and friends gathered at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, GA this past spring for the first public glimpse of a new exhibition from The Johnson Collection. Established by Susu Phifer Johnson '65 and her husband, George Dean Johnson, Jr., The Johnson Collection's *Romantic Spirits* will travel throughout the South for the next two years. Lloyd Branson's *Still Life with Peaches* is one of the 35 masterworks included in the exhibition.



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A MESSAGE FROM  
THE PRESIDENT

Our celebration of Converse's 125th anniversary during the 2013-14 academic year is more thrilling than I might ever have imagined! At this juncture in our history we are taking a pioneering step, much like our founders in 1889, to ensure that a high-quality liberal arts education continues to be possible for aspiring young women who want to make a difference in the world. Even more so, the launch of this initiative positions Converse as a national leader in college quality, affordability, and value.

So many families today are concerned that rising tuition prices are putting a private college education out of their reach. Converse is answering their call for affordability. Our decision to push back against the trend of increasing costs comes on the heels of extensive research and the development of a more responsive and sustainable business model. Beginning fall 2014, we will *decrease* our tuition price for traditional undergraduates—substantially.

The cover article that continues in the following pages details exactly what we are doing and why. After reading it, I trust you will feel an immense sense of pride in the voice, value, and vision of Converse 125 years after her founding. The entire Board of Trustees and senior leadership team looks forward to sharing the excitement with you!

As we work to promote Converse's renewed commitment to providing affordable, high quality education, our communications will carry a new tagline that captures the essence of what distinguishes Converse: *Voice. Value. Vision.* **Just as we help activate the voice and vision of our students to advance their dreams, careers, and communities, we are raising our institutional voice to communicate our vision for providing great value and return on investment for our students.** Just as we challenge students to be change agents for good, we commit ourselves to starting a new conversation in higher education—one that focuses on real value in terms of both cost and quality of outcomes.

Fall 2013 marks the beginning of my ninth year serving as President of Converse. With each passing year, my pride in and passion for the vision and

value of this institution grows exponentially. At Commencement this May, my heart and face beamed as I shared news that 37% of the Class of 2013 were the first in their families to graduate from college, that 63% of them had employment or graduate school acceptances as they walked across the stage, and that 58% had served in a leadership capacity during their time at Converse. But the distinction of this institution goes far beyond numbers. It is about the powerful ambitions and aspirations ignited in and by Converse women. It is about the impact of substantive and empowering relationships that fuel potential and possibility. It is about risk-taking and the audacity of dreaming, thinking, and acting "outside the box."

In the wake of our significant news, and in celebration of the generations of students who have been emboldened to lead in big ways here on this small city block in Spartanburg, our new publication—*580 East Main* or 580, for short—will feature the kind of stories that have made a name for Converse. We hope that you relish this inaugural publication and will keep us abreast of other happenings and highlights for subsequent issues. We'll share more in the coming months about events and gatherings planned to commemorate the 125th anniversary. Please also follow Converse on the web at [www.converse.edu](http://www.converse.edu), on Facebook, and on Twitter @conversecollege.

*Betsy*  
Elizabeth A. Fleming, PhD  
President

# Leading with VOICE, VALUE and VISION



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## The College Affordability Dilemma

Everyone knows that the cost of earning a college degree has been rising. During a decade when average family income essentially remained stagnant, tuition at four-year public colleges and universities rose an average of 6.2% each year for the past five years. The pace was 4.4% each year at private colleges and universities, where today the average annual tuition and fees is \$27,067 and the average total cost of attendance is \$41,047 (IPEDS data). Just think, at that rate, in five more years the average tuition and fees will be \$33,569 at private colleges, with an average total cost of attendance of over \$50,000 absent any scholarship or need-based aid.

But what few people know (until someone in their family applies) is that the tuition cost at a private college or university is almost always significantly reduced with need-based and merit-based

financial aid from the institution to make the net cost more affordable.

So what's the problem? Think of it as "sticker shock." Sticker shock prevents untold numbers of families at all levels of income from even considering the idea that they can indeed financially access a high quality private education like the one Converse offers. In fact, a recent national Gallup Poll indicated only 26% of Americans think college is affordable for everyone who needs it.

An even more crucial problem than the tide of negative public opinion about the cost of college is the toll that rising tuition price takes on a college's ability to award adequate financial aid. The "high-price/high-discount" model under which Converse and most other private institutions have operated is simply becoming unsustainable given the projections of future cost increases.

## Converse Takes Bold Action

It is this unsustainable landscape of the higher education marketplace that provoked President Betsy Fleming and Converse's Board of Trustees to consider an audacious solution to the dilemma of private college affordability. Erica Lane '13, who as student government president at the time held an ex officio seat at the Board meeting, recalls how the deliberations proceeded.

"As we went through the nuances of affordability, it was a fascinating discussion to me personally, because coming to college was such a monetary struggle for my family—especially because I chose a small, private liberal arts college with (to my family) a very big sticker price," says Lane. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 5](#)

1 2 5 T H  
A N N I V E R S A R Y

# Then & Now

## Tuition Reset Another Historical Milestone

The same spirit of innovation that led to Converse's founding 125 years ago still drives today's mission of challenging women to activate their voices and realize that they can transform the world. This culture of creative, visionary thinking and doing—this environment that inspires voice, value, and vision—has positioned Converse to lead the nation on college affordability.

During recent years, Converse Trustees and the College leadership team have intentionally placed Converse in a position of strength through strategic planning, conservative revenue forecasting, and careful attention to expense management. Those efforts have spawned an energy and excitement rare in colleges across the country today.

Record enrollments, new buildings and capital improvements, innovative curricular and co-curricular developments, expanding online offerings, and a growing athletic program are all a part of the Converse momentum today. As a result, we have the capacity to boldly address families' concerns about sticker price by dramatically decreasing our tuition next fall, while still maintaining and improving the high quality and lasting value that a Converse degree holds.



..... 1889

Founded by  
Dexter Edgar  
Converse



..... 1905

Honor Code  
established



..... 1910

School of  
Music chartered



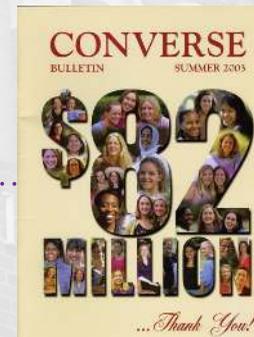
..... 1964

Graduate  
programs  
started



..... 1983

Converse II  
launched



..... 2003

Largest capital  
campaign  
completed, \$82M



..... 2012

Online programs  
launched

..... 2014

125th anniversary  
of Converse's  
founding



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

As the Board reviewed data about Converse's average net cost in relation to competitor institutions' sticker prices and net costs, it became apparent to Lane that there was "a way forward with pricing that would make more sense to families—pricing that could better reflect what most families are actually being charged on a net basis."

The proposal on the table was to move from a high-tuition/high-discount model to a dramatically reduced tuition price and an accompanying reduction in the discount, while still allowing almost all new and returning traditional undergraduates to experience a drop in their overall net tuition cost. The underlying assumption was that net revenue to the institution could remain virtually unchanged if the sticker price were lowered. And such affordability was also determined to result in more students choosing to enroll at Converse.

As potential downsides of reducing the tuition price were being considered, Board Chair Ben Wall observed that the "Chivas Regal effect" was brought up—the business concept whereby high price is often associated with high quality in the minds of consumers. "But if you look at research data from the higher education industry in particular," he notes, "only 10% of the public actually strongly believes that 'the higher the tuition at a college or university, the better the quality of the education'—and in fact, 45% actively *disagree* with that statement." To the general public and to college-bound students and their families, access to broad educational and leadership opportunities and successful graduate school and career outcomes of graduates are *stronger* indicators of high quality college education.

Toward the end of the board meeting, President Fleming asked Lane to share her opinion about how the shift to a low-tuition/low-discount model might be viewed outside the walls of Converse. Thinking about her younger sister's current college search (Angela ended up enrolling at Converse this fall) and what a difference it would make to remove the hardship of sorting through the complexities of a high sticker price, Lane provided her answer. "I said that if Converse is able to do this before other colleges are forced to do it, then we're going to be ahead of the game and appear as honest as we really are," she recalls. "We no longer have to fight in this game that higher education is playing."

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## Lasting Value of First Importance



Abby Brown '15 of Beaufort, SC, says she's already developed leadership skills at Converse that are far above those of her peers attending other colleges.

**F**or Abby Brown and her parents Abraham and Liz, finding the right college was about wanting the best their family could afford.

With Abraham serving in the military for many years, Abby spent much of her childhood abroad in Okinawa, Japan. No stranger to travel and with a broad view of her options, when it came time for her college search, she considered schools all across the nation. Abby was particularly interested in fine arts colleges in New York because she intended to expand her talents in music, art, and theatre.

But when the Browns returned stateside to South Carolina, they had a convenient opportunity to visit the Converse campus and were impressed with what they saw. Abby applied for admission, even though she had some trepidation about attending a college for women.

So what tipped the balance when it came to her final college choice? "Scholarships," Abby bluntly admits. Liz encouraged her to choose Converse because it offered the best financial aid package. "We're a typical middle-class family, so my scholarships made a big difference in our ability to afford a private college education," Abby explains.

As it turns out, by the end of her first year, Abby grew to deeply appreciate and value the academic environment at Converse. "In the long run, it really pays off because you're focused on getting your education and what's important for your future," she notes.

Majoring in vocal performance and politics, Abby has already had opportunities to tour in Europe with her Converse chamber ensemble, study and perform opera and modern pops, build transferrable skills as a college orientation leader and in other student life programs, and explore career options in both music and politics.

Still, when asked what at Converse is positioning her for success for the rest of her life, Abby pinpoints a surprising source: the honor code. "It sets a standard for everyone in the classroom, establishes a sense of community on campus, and along with activities outside of class, builds your character." She says the development of strong character and voice that accompanies the pursuit of a Converse degree is definitely part of what gives the experience lasting value.

*Editor's note: Abby was interviewed for this article before she learned of the tuition decrease she will be able to take advantage of during her senior year.*



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

## The Details

Once the proposal was approved by the Board of Trustees and the College's leadership team worked out the specifics, it was determined that fall 2014 tuition for full-time traditional undergraduate students would be reset to approximately what it was more than a decade ago, to \$16,500.

That reduces the cost by 43% from the current tuition sticker price. The new price point will place Converse on a more level playing field with the sticker prices of chief competitor public institutions, as well as give Converse one of the lowest prices of all four-year private colleges and universities in the state and region. The overall result is that the value of the type of personal, rigorous, and engaging college education so many students want but cannot necessarily afford is enhanced even further.

The outcome for returning students is that their out-of-pocket cost will drop. Many students who do not receive need-based aid will experience a modest drop in their net cost. Those who do receive need-based aid will see it stretch further thanks to the lower sticker price.

Among prospective students, the reduced sticker shock is expected to result in more interest in Converse. A visit to the Converse campus is the lynchpin that has always enticed curious prospective students to apply and compelled accepted students to enroll. In the wake of the reset, we anticipate broader interest from students and families who want to learn more about the dynamic opportunities that Converse students are afforded. As they discover our

improved return on investment (a ratio, in our case, where quality remains high but price is lowered), we can reasonably forecast increased enrollment—allowing more ambitious women to benefit from the value of a Converse degree.

“At the end of the day,” says President Fleming, “our new pricing is meant to meet market demands *and* to continue to fulfill the Founder’s Ideal of providing access to a high-quality educational experience in order to ensure the well-being of our country.”

## A Renewal

“The 125th anniversary of the College is a fitting time to rededicate our efforts to making Converse accessible for talented, deserving young women,” says Fleming. “Converse has always been, and will continue to be, committed to our founders’ vision to prepare leaders who ‘see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly’ in order to effect positive change in the world.”

As a freshly-minted alumna now employed at a non-profit agency, Erica Lane can attest to that value: “No matter what you get your undergraduate degree in at Converse, you will leave as a strong, empowered woman who is able to take on anything she chooses. You will have the skills, the speaking ability, and the knowledge (*and* the know-how to find information that you don’t know) to get the job done—whatever it may be.”

“That’s really what the Converse degree does,” says Lane. “It has less to do with how much you paid for it—or how much you think you paid for it—and is more about the experience that you have when you’re there. It allows young women to grow into creative women who stand up, speak out, and push the envelope for whatever they’re passionate about.”

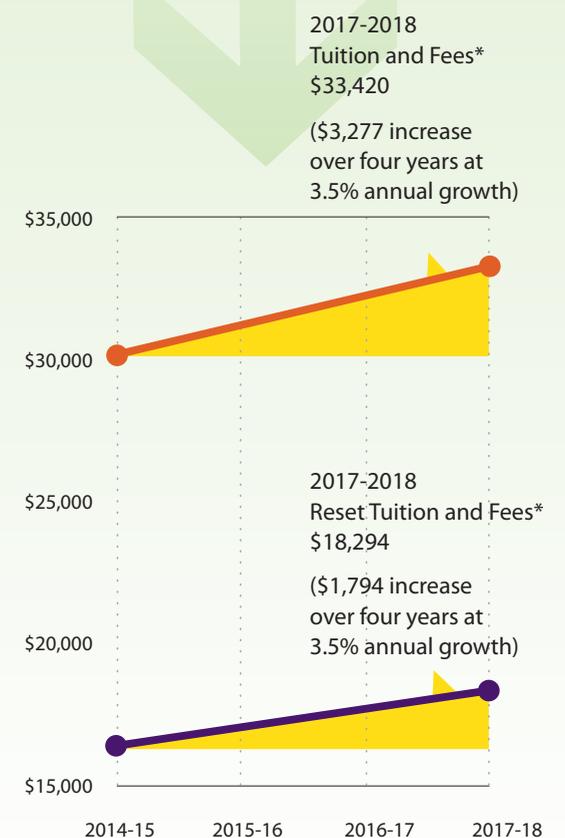


*“The expected outcome for returning students is that their out-of-pocket cost will drop.”*



## Tuition Savings Over Four Years

In fall 2014, current Converse students will save at least \$1,438 in comparison to 2014 costs under the previous tuition structure (which includes the typical 3.5% increase over 2013 tuition). For current and new students, real dollar savings come in two forms: the out-of-pocket cost to families as they pay tuition each year, and longer-term savings as students repay significantly lower loans in the years following graduation.





## In a League of Their Own

As Converse rises to national prominence for its willingness to transform the higher education pricing system, that place in the center spotlight is nothing new to a particular group at Converse. Defined by some as the “divas of debate,” the students in Dr. Joe Dunn’s Model League have a winning reputation. “In the world of Model Arab League competitions,” says Dunn, “our students have achieved being the power of the country.”

“We’re pretty good at it,” Dunn says—which is a vast understatement. In the 25 years Converse teams have been competing, they’ve won almost every national Model Arab League competition, plus garnered international titles every year during the nine years they’ve been competing in Model NATO. The international conflict simulations involve debating, bargaining, developing coalitions, and formulating resolutions to solve issues based on real-life global struggles—allowing Converse students to develop incredibly valuable skills.

“There’s no question in my mind, having done this for all these years and competing against the best schools in the country (we’ve defeated Harvard, Berkeley, Georgetown, Northwestern, and the US Military Academy, among others), that our program hones the discipline, commitment, and leadership that catapults our graduates into brilliant career success,” says Dunn. “If you take a look at what our head delegates have gone on to do over the years, it’s just astounding.”

Converse model program participants have become foreign service officers, lawyers, judges, military officers, medical doctors, policy analysts, business executives, international investment consultants, ministers and missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, professors, human rights consultants, and top performers in career fields all across the spectrum. Dunn says, “They go out and do really good things with their lives.”

# The Gift of Empowering Women

It’s been said that people give to people, not to places or to buildings—or even to big ideas. Thanks to the generations of supporters who have helped Converse thrive, there are legions of incredible Converse women who are making the world a better place.

DEXTER EDGAR CONVERSE was hardly alone in his passion to afford smart and talented women an extraordinary education. The philanthropy that paved the way for the establishment of a college on 580 East Main Street was a community enterprise. In the words of one of Spartanburg’s leading citizens at the time, H.E. Ravenel, it began with “a few friends of the school.” This year, as we usher in the 125th anniversary of the College, there are now a few thousand friends of the school.

Asked about the history-making milestone of the price reset, Bobby Stewart, the College’s Vice President for Institutional Advancement, said, “It is our graduates who are the history makers. Our donors have long valued the opportunity to invest in women who will effect positive change in the world. The price reset for fall 2014 is the right thing to do for returning and prospective students. But, equally important, it means that our donors’ investments in these young women will go even further. No matter the size of a gift, with a lower tuition, every donor makes an enormous impact in the life of the College and the lives of our students.”



It was the spirit of “we” that made a way for Converse in 1889, and that very same force will ensure the College’s future. “This year,” states Stewart, “a record-breaking number of new students are joining the College. They are full of ambition and dreams, and we have the privilege and the responsibility to help them become effective leaders.”

“We have a great deal to celebrate, together,” continues Stewart. “Most of us have a personal connection to Converse. Either you’re an alumna or you have a mom, an aunt, a sister, a daughter, or a grandmother who made this place her own and became her own woman here. That’s a legacy well worth supporting.”

We invite everyone in the Converse family to consider making a gift to the College in celebration of its 125th anniversary and its continued commitment to bolder voice, greater value, and clearer vision.

**Give online at [www.converse.edu/giving](http://www.converse.edu/giving) or call 864.596.9053.**