

CONVERSE

FALL 2019



TAKING THE LEAD

Converse's Commitment
to Strategic Advancement

President Newkirk



Dear Converse Community,

From the very beginning, Converse has supported a vibrant community that is committed to academic success and a strong future for our students.

Our founding vision in 1889 is rooted in the belief that students should be free to develop their scholarly excellence while building confidence and gaining skills to be lifelong learners and leaders. Today, we continue to uphold these ideals with an eye toward the future.

In a time of rapid change standards in higher learning, Converse remains a step ahead with our new degree programs, the growth of the International School, and our new instruction site at the University Center of Greenville—but we cannot stand still. Converse’s Innovative Strategic Plan 2018-2023 is guided by our vision to be nationally recognized as an excellent doctoral university, acclaimed as a center for creative thinking and learning, and as an engaged community that produces citizens who effect positive change.

In this issue of *Converse Magazine*, we explore stories of how Converse students and graduates are supporting this vision, from our campus to Indonesia and Italy, and to rural prisons in the United States. True to our core values from the beginning, we continue to graduate generations of leaders—creative thinkers committed to progress, integrity, diversity, and a legacy of exploration and excellence.

During this pivotal moment in our history, we hope you find the stories on the pages of this magazine engaging and inspiring as we work together to ensure a strong and sustainable future for Converse.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Krista L. Newkirk". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Krista L. Newkirk
President
Converse College

Strategic Plan 2018-2023

BRINGING A NEW VISION TO LIFE FOR CONVERSE

IN A WORLD OF ESCALATING COMPETITION IN HIGHER EDUCATION, THE INNOVATIVE VISION SET FORTH IN CONVERSE'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023 WILL MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE FUTURE.

Almost two years into the development and implementation of Converse's Strategic Plan 2018-2023, the vision and priorities set forward by the Board of Trustees and Converse faculty and staff are taking root and coming to life.

"The Board of Trustees has set a strong vision for the future of Converse. Our strategic plan supports the evolution of Converse, with a priority placed on preserving the most important aspects of our historic single-gender mission while growing our base of students and programs," said Chair, Converse College Board of Trustees Phyllis Perrin Harris '82. "We recognize that building a strong campus culture with a commitment to excellence academically, institutionally, and socially is key to our success."

The strategic planning process, which took place throughout 2018, included intensive planning sessions and retreat, allowing for "deep dives" into complex strategic issues. The alignment team, comprised of faculty and staff from across disciplines and functions, remains involved in implementation while continuing to refine goals and strategies along the way.



Three key themes serve as pillars for the plan to align mission-driven initiatives with market-driven demands:

- Vibrant Community
- Academic Excellence
- Sustainable Future

Strategic Plan Mission & Values

VIBRANT COMMUNITY	ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE	SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
STAKEHOLDERS		
Visible & Engaged Campus	Innovative Leadership in a Digital World	Identity & Resources
FINANCIAL RESOURCES		
Invest in People, Spaces, and Culture	Develop New & Expand Reach of Current Programs	Invest in Market Research
Increased Retention Revenue	Increased Net Tuition Revenue	Increased Donor Giving & Operational Revenue
INTERNAL PROCESSES		
Collaborative & Transparent Engagement	Build & Align Programs & Pipelines	Integrated & Sustainable Financial Plan
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY		
Comprehensive Retention & Professional Development	Expand & Enhance Academic Programs	Data-Informed Communication & Advancement Strategy

Strategic Plan 2018-2023

Building a Vibrant Community

A strong institutional culture leads to a more engaged community that is aligned with a common spirit and sense of purpose. On college campuses, culture is critical to the foundation and success of core values such as commitment to excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, and progress.

“At Converse, building a vibrant community has always been an important part of our mission. The environment at Converse is primed for strengthening our culture of inclusivity and engagement for students, alumni, faculty, staff, and our broader community,” said President Krista Newkirk. “At the same time, we are focusing on improving experiences and being transparent and intentional about our priority of student and employee engagement.”



Part of this strategy includes adding opportunities for faculty to participate in community boards and further their careers through professional development and enrichment opportunities. Converse will also prioritize enhancing spaces to encourage student interaction and improving campus technology to raise competencies while streamlining and modernizing the learning experience.

Advancing Academic Excellence

“The heart of Converse’s success has always been our dedication to scholarly excellence,” said Provost Jeff Barker. “Students are driven to achieve the best in all they pursue—to develop competence, confidence, and courage to realize their full potential in mind, body, and spirit.”

The strategic plan advances academic excellence through modernization, digitalization, and the expansion of programs and infrastructure.

One key priority related to academic excellence is expanding the reach of current programs and developing new ones. Converse developed and launched two new programs: EdD in Professional Leadership and BA in Child and Family Studies, expanding and



Strategic Plan 2018-2023

enhancing academic programs. Converse's plan also brings new technology, like data analytics and virtual reality into the classroom.

"We are also bolstering internship opportunities by engaging with local businesses to enhance career development and to deepen learning opportunities in a real-world setting so our graduates are better prepared for the workforce," said Boone Hopkins, Dean of the School of the Arts and Associate Provost for Student Success.

The plan also calls for an infrastructure for grants that includes developing a sponsored programs office with a grant writer.

"Critical for Converse, or any college or university for that matter, is implementing a strategic plan that enables us to address both our own unique challenges and the changes sweeping across higher education globally. We must chart the right course to ensure we have a thriving institution."

Krista Newkirk
President, Converse College



Ensuring a Sustainable Future

Moving forward, Converse's strategic plan aims to streamline operational processes to create an integrated and sustainable financial plan, data-information communications, and advancement strategies. This includes evaluating new ways to increase revenue generation, fundraising, and financial aid.

"Increasing enrollment in both undergraduate and graduate programs is integral to Converse's success," said Leigh Lanford, Director of Admissions. "By having the right academic programs, rich campus life, and competitive financial aid packages that ensure the success of our students, we are better able to attract, recruit, and retain the level of quality students in the Converse community."

Enhancing Converse's endowment and overall fundraising levels are also critical to a long-term, sustainable future. While the endowment is the most important element in ensuring permanent financial stability, annual fund and program-specific giving make an immediate impact in the lives of students and faculty on campus.

E X P L O R I N G O U R F U T U R E

Proposed Model Change Sparks Conversation on Progress

BOARD OF TRUSTEES APPOINTS AN AD HOC COMMITTEE TO EVALUATE POTENTIAL CO-EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND NAME CHANGE TO CONVERSE UNIVERSITY

Cultural shifts, population trends, and different expectations for student engagement are prompting more single-gender colleges and universities like Converse to expand enrollment. Converse is proactively addressing these new trends by studying a model change to add a co-educational residential program alongside its current single-gender focus.

Over the past several months at town halls across the Southeast and through online forums, the Converse community has engaged in discussions with President Newkirk and the Board of Trustees to explore the option of placing the school's traditional women's college under the umbrella of the newly named Converse University, while adding a co-educational residential undergraduate program as a separate college, as well as an international college.





According to Phyllis Perrin Harris '82, Chair of the Board of Trustees, the proposed model change is designed to preserve Converse's single-gender residential and co-curricular program experience, and the school's status as a women's college, while also increasing enrollment.

"The Board of Trustees has set a strong vision for the future of Converse," said Harris. "Our strategic plan supports the evolution of Converse, with a priority placed on preserving the most important aspects of our historic single-gender mission while growing our base of students and programs."

The Board of Trustees has appointed an ad hoc committee to thoroughly study options to expand Converse's enrollment to ensure a strong future while continuing to bring greater value to the higher ed learning experience.

According to Laura Bauknight '87, who chairs the ad hoc committee, the first steps in the committee process will

take place by September 2019, with a full report due back to the Board of Trustees by January 1, 2020.

"Our goal is to use feedback from the town halls, insights from multiple studies of comparable schools, and research from planned visits to other institutions to make an informed decision," said Bauknight. "Transparency and accountability to the Converse community is incredibly important and we will ensure that a thorough recommendation will be presented with only the best interests of Converse in mind."

The committee will meet on a regular basis to review input from alumni, faculty, staff, and students. They will also review and evaluate in-depth research provided by the administration and experts and determine if additional research is needed to make an informed decision.

◆ **Join the conversation!**
 Visit www.converse.edu/ProposedModelChange
 or email us at feedback@converse.edu.

TIMELINE OF PROPOSED

MODEL CHANGE

- May 2019* • Town halls on campus
- Summer 2019* • Town halls at Reunion and key cities
- Appointment of ad hoc committee
- September through November 2019* • Engage in further research of schools that have made this transition
- Conduct additional research and review feedback
- January 2020* • Ad hoc committee recommendation to Board of Trustees
- Early 2020* • Board of Trustees' decision
- Fall 2021* • If approved by the Board of Trustees, a model change would be implemented and the first class under the new model would be enrolled

What will the ad hoc committee do over the next few months?

The ad hoc committee will study incorporating a coeducational, residential undergraduate program. They will also evaluate the current organizational structure, affirm Converse's historical legacy, and preserve its mission while providing a pathway for future sustainability. They will review the feedback about the proposals received from the Converse community and study a name change to Converse University.

Why conduct this study now?

Converse is responding to ongoing changes in student preferences and future demographic shifts. Expanding enrollment to include a co-educational undergraduate program enables Converse to pursue programmatic and future growth opportunities while preserving the most important aspects of its historic single-gender mission. Converse strongly affirms that mission and the continuing value of the single-gender experience.

What factors are driving this decision?

Cultural shifts, population trends, and students' changing expectations on engagement are challenging colleges and universities like never before. Recent studies report that only 2% of female high school seniors will consider attending a women's college. The number of women's colleges has dropped from 230 in 1960 to 34 in 2018, with only 17 estimated to remain by 2026. A co-educational structure would



PLANNING THE FUTURE

enable Converse to make its distinctive learning environment available to an increasing number of women who would not otherwise have considered the institution.

Model changes at single-gender schools have resulted in an overall increase in enrollment, particularly among female students. Studies show 74% average growth over two-years in the total number of new freshman. Male students would benefit from Converse's strong academic programs, low student-to-faculty ratio, and a unique vision for student-faculty collaboration and research.

Will Converse preserve the single-gender experience and traditions if it goes co-educational?

Yes. The committee will focus on the best ways for Converse College for Women to continue the tradition of single-gender housing options with a focus on co-curricular programming and experiences that focus on Converse's Core Values of progress and leadership, community, excellence, diversity and exploration.

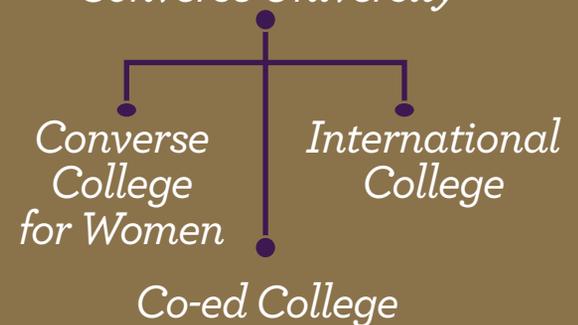
Will the committee evaluate all classes becoming co-educational?

Yes. The committee will evaluate the benefits of an education in a coeducational setting, giving women and men the opportunity to explore learning and leadership together.

**WHILE
PRESERVING
THE PAST**

PROPOSED MODEL CHANGE

Converse University



Ad Hoc Committee

Laura Chappell Bauknight '87, Ad Hoc Committee Chair

Dwight Van Inwegen, Board of Trustees

Kenneth B. Howard, Board of Trustees

Elizabeth Finlay Vingi '87, Board of Trustees

Mary Lib Spillers Hamilton '57, Alumna and former Converse employee

Austin Price Faulk '95, Board of Trustees and Alumnae Association Board, President

Jada Wood McAbee '94, Board of Trustees and Board of Visitors, Chair

Janae O'Shields '07, MA '09, Staff Council Chair

Madelyn Young, Faculty Senate President

Tyerra Clayborne, Student Government Association President

Valerie Brock Naglich '03, Alumna

Mary L. Thomas, Community member and Board of Visitors

Sally Jeter Gregg '81, Alumna and former Converse employee

Samantha Nicolson Larkins '12, Alumnae Association Board, President-Elect

Julie Staggs '86, Board of Trustees



Fulfilling Our Mission in Today's *Higher Ed* market

AS COMPETITION FOR STUDENTS CONTINUES TO INTENSIFY ACROSS THE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET, COLLEGES NATIONWIDE ARE COMPELLED TO SEEK NEW WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATIONS. INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE NIMBLE AND INNOVATIVE ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO THRIVE.



The need to evolve and grow in order to be a strong and thriving institution remains an ever-present reality for Converse. We are doing this in a manner that is responsive to emerging fields and workforce demands, and with the aim of finding new ways to fulfill our mission that make a positive impact upon our world.

Krista Newkirk
President, Converse College

Building on Strengths to Reach New Markets

This past December, in a landmark step forward for Converse, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SCASCOC) granted approval for Converse to become a doctoral institution. SACSCOC also granted approval for our first doctoral level program, the Doctorate in Professional Leadership, which opens this fall and builds upon our long legacy of developing leaders. The 60-hour program provides a terminal degree for professionals in a variety of fields, especially for those in the field of education. Courses include traditional areas such as leadership, management, and personnel theory as well as innovative topics in entrepreneurialism and legislative decision-making. The program is distinctive in its structure, which incorporates the drafting of the dissertation into coursework beginning in the second semester. Students are encouraged to leverage their dissertation process to seek solutions that have real-world application



in their professional lives, providing professional growth and advancement, as well as a benefit to their employer.

A second major initiative aiming to serve new markets began more than a year ago when Converse joined the University Center of Greenville (UCG). Our presence at UCG's campus opened in July 2018 with the launch of our first program there - the MAT in Early Childhood Education. This summer, we expanded our UCG offerings

to include a coeducational undergraduate degree completion program in Business Administration, and this fall our UCG offerings will grow to include an additional site for our very successful Master of Marriage and Family Therapy program and the Doctorate in Professional Leadership.

On campus in Spartanburg, curriculum innovation has touched nearly every department and division. A cohort of our new doctoral program began preliminary studies this summer. Our Converse

International School has infused the student experience with a valuable cross-cultural dimension as female and male undergraduate students from China who came to campus in 2017 to study accounting and medical technology were joined by the first International School music student from Dalian Art College this past year. We celebrated the first graduates of our undergraduate Healthcare Administration program in May of 2018, and welcomed our first graduate students in the new Master's in Management in Healthcare Management during the 2018-2019 year. Converse just launched a new degree program, Child and Family Studies, which has already attracted a dozen students in Spartanburg. That program will soon expand to UCG.

University Center of Greenville: One Year Later

Dr. Lienne Medford, Dean of Education and Graduate Studies, spearheads Converse's programs and operations at UCG, which began a year ago this summer. With an eye towards meeting the needs of the greater Greenville market, she says Converse's current mix of four degree programs that span the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels, positions Converse to serve adult students at every stage of their continued learning and career advancement.

The UCG programs have ramped up quickly, surpassing initial enrollment and revenue goals, and must continue significant growth in order to meet long-term enrollment goals.

"Our new degree completion program began this summer and we hope to expand it to include additional majors within the next year," Dr. Medford said. "We will graduate our first students from the MAT in Early Childhood program in December. Our Marriage and Family Therapy program is opening this fall with full accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education, which we did not expect to have this soon and is a wonderful accolade for that program's UCG debut. In addition, the program's first cohort for fall 2019 is expected to be full, exceeding enrollment projections."

The greatest UCG success thus far, however, is the doctoral program. "The EdD program is a year ahead of its projected enrollment," continued Medford. "As of July, Converse had received more than 70 applications between the main campus and UCG, with about 68 acceptances already processed. This puts us in excellent shape to begin this program's first year at both locations."

Achieving Long-Term Success

While reaching new markets and expanding Converse's presence within existing ones is crucial to staying ahead of the curve, other factors also remain integral to our long-term success.

"We hope these changes will have significant impact on enrollment revenue, but alumni support from current and future generations will always be instrumental to sustaining Converse," President Newkirk said. "Converse's long-term health will stem from a mixture of increasing enrollment revenue, sustaining annual giving to support student scholarships and other programs via the Converse Annual Fund, and significantly growing our endowment."

Major programs of study are complemented by recently added minors and certificate programs that prepare students to be flexible, adaptable, career-ready professionals, such as Interfaith Studies (read more about this program on page 26), Business Professionalism, Arts and Cognition, Applied Computing, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Music Business and Technology.



Meet A Converse Doctoral Student

Q&A with David Case A Minister-Turned-Educator



What motivated you to pursue your EdD?

“My background is primarily in church ministry and public education. I decided to pursue this degree to experience personal growth and expand opportunities for me in the future. I have known Dr. Medford (Dean of Education and Graduate Students) for several years and I knew she would develop an excellent program. I also have known for years about the exceptional reputation of Converse. I have not been disappointed. Everything so far has met or exceeded my expectations.”

As a teacher, how did you feel about becoming a student again?

“I feel great about it! It’s exciting to be in a cohort with others who are passionate about learning and growing. It has been helpful for me to step into the role of a student – I have no doubt it will strengthen me as a teacher.”

Any experiences that you’ve been able to apply right away in your current role?

“Yes, my perspective about personal scheduling and setting priorities has shifted. I am doing more to spend time reviewing and refining my personal and professional goals. I am already reaping the benefits of this.”

What aspect of the program have you found to be especially important to your professional development?

“The challenge to develop myself as a person first. My professional effectiveness hinges on my personal development and growth.

I appreciate the healthy push the program gives me to grow and sharpen my ability to think critically and work toward excellence in everything I do.”

What has been a standout feature of the EdD program for you?

“I love the aspect of being in a cohort. We started this journey together – and throughout the journey we are here to encourage each other and help each other finish strong. Everyone contributes to each one’s journey. It’s good to have the emotional and logistical support a cohort gives to every member.”

If you could share one important message with potential students, what would that be?

“Be prepared to work hard, think deeply and be challenged. The work is not overwhelming, but it is not a piece of cake either. The reading, research, reflecting and shared reactions in the cohort will broaden your perspective and deepen your own thinking about leadership.”

IMPROVING

*Quality
of Life*

design

THROUGH



A SPRINGTIME THURSDAY AFTERNOON FINDS TWO STATE ADMINISTRATORS IN THE MONTGOMERY STUDENT CENTER, WHERE CONVERSE INTERIOR DESIGN STUDENTS LEAD THEM THROUGH A SERIES OF SOPHISTICATED PLANS FOR THE LOBBY OF A SPARTANBURG FACILITY.

The administrators ask questions of the students as they navigate large, colorful, computer-printed designs pinned to a wall of the Piedmont Natural Gas Conference Room. The next two three-member teams in Converse’s accredited Interior Design program then show off their proposals, capping two months of intensive, interactive work for the Spartanburg Area Mental Health Center (SAMHC).



“
It’s a real client, and a real space. In the real world, you don’t ever do a design project by yourself, so this is a real-life experience.
 Hallie Lycans ’20
 Interior Design Major
 ”

It’s as real as it gets. After the lively two-hour presentation, SAMHC Executive Director Roger Williams and Center Administrator Jeff Greene told Converse Assistant Professor of Art Meirav Goldhour that they would be taking the students’ plans to state architects in Columbia.

The hands-on project came about thanks to serendipitous networking at a dinner party last year, when Williams met Goldhour. The two began discussing the Dewey Street facility’s ungainly 20-year-old lobby. The 5,000-square-foot entrance to the 50,000-square-foot outpatient center is supposed to help make

people feel better, but, as Williams says, “It’s not welcoming, it’s not inviting.”

Enter Converse. Culminating work that also included multitudinous emails and consultations with SAMHC, students talked Williams and Greene through designs for improved “wayfinding” and “biophilia”—terms about how people move in a space and about incorporating natural elements, respectively.

“We strive to improve quality of life,” says Ruth Beals, Owings Associate Professor of Interior Design, under whose leadership the program first earned its coveted credential

from the Council for Interior Design Accreditation.

Established in 1970 and billed as the only accrediting body focused on interior design, the Michigan-based agency calls its approval of more than 180 undergraduate and graduate programs worldwide “one of the most influential factors in curriculum development and student recruitment.”

After teaching 11 years at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Beals was hired in part to bring Converse’s 30-plus-year-old program up to those national standards.

Goldhour, who joined the five-member department in August, expounds on that: “We are in academia. We can’t just decide something’s visually appealing. We have to know why it’s visually appealing—what research has been done that a blue color is considered calming and soothing, for instance.”

In a tour of the interior design studios on the upper floor of the Milliken Arts Building, you’ll see such beguiling conjectural projects as a Japanese bathhouse, ice-skating rink, prison, and health center for air-traffic controllers.

After immersive courses in theory, with hypothetical designs based on analysis, deep research, and collaboration, students in the 74-credit-hour Bachelor of Fine Arts program roll up their real-world sleeves.

This last year alone has yielded three community projects, including the Spartanburg Area Conservancy’s plan to turn its farm and barn into a food cooperative with retail and teaching spaces. The SPACE project was more blue-sky than actual blueprint—unlike the mental health center, which is one of 16 such sites in the state and whose 145 staff serve some 6,000 patients annually.

In the last three years, Converse’s program has seen 100 percent placement after graduation, with 50 percent typically working part-time in the field during their senior year, Beals says. One of them, Brianna Putnam ’19, is among several Converse interns at Milliken & Co. and has earned a full-time job there.

Back at Montgomery, after the presentations, Williams tells Goldhour, “It’s so funny, you keep telling us, ‘Thank you for giving us the opportunity,’ and we’re like, ‘We’re not doing anything, you’re doing all the work, we thank you.’ We’re committed to this, it’s not just an academic exercise.”

“Converse had an excellent record of job placement, of good work, but they were lacking some digital presentation and design theory,” she says. “They were doing great work, but it just lacked theoretical premise—students did the work, but they didn’t know *why* they did it.”

Each room looks, feels, and operates like a professional design studio, with state-of-the-art printing and computing equipment, high-end trade magazines that industry has donated, and desks that each student takes as her own.



“

It's been amazing just teaching the students how to look at things really hands-on, having the opportunity to meet with real clients.

Meirav Goldhour
Converse Assistant Professor of Art

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An *Italian* experie



nice

A JAN TERM JOURNEY FOR CONVERSE STUDENTS

by DEB PELUSO '15



We landed at Leonardo da Vinci International Airport in Rome, Italy on an overcast morning in January. More than 20 Converse students joined Professors Andrea Elliott and Jena Thomas for a ten-day study travel trip to Italy to immerse ourselves in the art and culture of Rome, Siena, and Florence. The trip was so popular that there was even a waitlist of students hoping to join the journey.

Despite rain in the forecast for the next ten days, that first day would be the only day we'd need our umbrellas. The remainder of our time there met us with 50-degree days and occasional sunshine. Perfect weather for walking the skinny, crowded streets to Piazza di Trevi to see the Trevi Fountain, roaming the vineyards of the Castello di Verrazzano in Siena, and exploring the Ponte Vecchio or Old Bridge in Florence.

The trip was facilitated through Converse's Travel and Study Abroad program and provided Art Appreciation or Art History

credits. For many students, this was their first trip outside the United States – for a few, it was their first trip outside of South Carolina. We had a crash course on learning how to exchange our money for euros, navigating the windy, moped-filled streets and mustering up the courage to venture out on our own during free time.

Our adventures began in ancient Rome, where we visited the Colosseum, the Arch of Constantine and the church of San Clemente. Our first evening there we enjoyed a multi-course meal including cacio e pepe, zepola con le alici (anchovies)

and silky tiramisu. Many stores were still adorned with Christmas lights, despite Christmas having been more than three weeks prior, and the wet streets reflected the colored lights in an impressionistic glow.

Some of the most memorable moments were seeing the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica. We were fortunate to be visiting during the "off-season," and though the Vatican was bustling with tourists, our tour guide, Ioanna advised us that this was smallest crowd she'd ever seen it.

Students frantically sketched as we ventured from one ornate room to another. Once we arrived in the Sistine Chapel, we paused to observe the frescos and Michaelangelo's extraordinary ceiling. No photos were permitted; guards constantly shouted "Nessuna Fotografia" in Italian, and then in English: "No photography!"

The walk to the Borghese Gallery was chilly but picturesque, as we walked through Villa Borghese, a hilly park and the largest in Rome, past musicians and ice cream vendors. At the Borghese, we visited the gallery for a guided tour and then hopped on a small "trackless train" for a journey of the expansive gardens.

Art Education senior Madeline Taylor said the Borghese Gallery was the highlight of her trip. "Going to the Borghese

Gallery and seeing Bernini's masterful sculptures in person was so surreal," she said. These sculptures took my breath away, and I will never forget those moments. Traveling to Italy was one of the best experiences of my life."

The next part of our Italian adventure took us north to the medieval, walled city of Siena. A guided walking tour through the tiny town with our guide Ioanna took us to Siena Cathedral, a massive gothic cathedral with a Tuscan Romanesque façade.

Only an hour drive away, our next stop was the intimate hill town of San Gimignano, just southwest of Florence. We visited the shops lining the streets and sampled cheese, boar meat, and finocchiona, a traditional Italian salami with garlic, black pepper and fennel.

A few adventurous souls ventured up the Torre Grossa, the tallest bell tower in San Gimignano. The long, cramped, winding stairs to the top are not for the faint of heart – or those with claustrophobia. But it is worth the climb for the birds-eye views of the Tuscan hills below.

The final leg of the journey took us to Florence where, along the drive there, we stopped at one of Italy's most famous wine regions in Tuscany. We had a personal tour of the Castello di Verrazzano and its impressive vineyards, home of the renowned Chianti wine.

Upon arriving in Florence, we ventured out to the Arno river to see Brunelleschi's extraordinary dome casting an evening shadow over the city. Our group dinner was a feast of bruschetta, gorgonzola gnocchi, salmon, and beef with artichoke.

The following day took us to the Accademia Gallery Museum where we all had our first experience to admire Michelangelo's David in person.

Interior Design senior Hallie Lycans said seeing Michelangelo's David was a highlight of the trip for her. She said, "Finding out there are three David sculptures by three different artists [Michelangelo, Donatello, and Verrocchio] was so interesting."



Carolyn Kerecman '19, a Studio Art major, spoke about the impact of learning in a foreign country. "Everything was a sensory experience, from the decadent food to the stunning art, and even the lovely string lights hanging in the streets," she said. It was enriching, seeing

how we could all look at the same thing, and yet each sees something entirely different. We would check out each other's sketchbooks at the end of the day, trading them around the room as we recounted our long days traversing the streets of Florence, Rome, and so on."

to learn about these places and pieces of artwork in the classroom throughout my years at Converse and then go and see these pieces in real life. To see the architecture and different types of design were so beneficial for my career moving forward. I am so lucky to have had this experience, and I thank Converse for giving me this opportunity."

“ Sketching allowed us to document this sensory overload, each student capturing what resonated with her on the trip. ”

Carolyn Kerecman '19

Hallie Lycans found the entire experience to be rewarding, both personally and professionally. "Italy was an amazing experience," she said. "It was rewarding and surreal



RAISING the CURTAIN on *Growing* OLD

THEATRE CONVERSE'S RECENT DEVISED THEATRE PRODUCTION, *GROWING OLD*, MIGHT BE CONSIDERED A MASHUP OF ORAL HISTORY, DRAMATIC IMPROV, AND REALITY TV, ALL ABOUT ISSUES FACING SENIOR WOMEN.



“I had to cast people who had good interpersonal skills because, in addition to being great actors, they had to be able to interview well and listen,” says Dr. Chandra Owenby Hopkins, Associate Professor of Theatre. Hopkins served not only as the show’s director, but also as its conceptualizer and initial community networker.

Three years ago, Hopkins debuted Converse’s first such project, *Home*, focusing on shelter and relationships. For *Growing Old*, students fanned out across Spartanburg for two months, listening to seniors in at least eight community organizations, from the Shepherd’s Center to Archibald Rutledge Apartments senior housing.

In these “service rehearsals,” as the eight cast members and two stage managers called them, students also delivered food via Mobile Meals and served at the Spartanburg Soup Kitchen; dined with residents at the Summit Hills retirement community; and worked on a Habitat for Humanity home, among other stops.



See the common thread? Hopkins focused the production on food insecurity in the American South and the social isolation of elderly community members, and earned a \$13,000 AARP grant to support it.

Even better, the award stipulated that 85 percent of the money would pay student stipends, with each earning more than \$1,100.

“So that’s awesome,” Hopkins says. “They got paid. They had to go through this rigorous process to apply and audition, and they’re doing many, many hours of contact work, and this allowed them to get out in the community and work, so, yeah, it was cool.”



“

I think what makes it so special is that it's a totally student-done production, and very often I think that's not true, but Chandra makes that possible.

Janis Dengler
Converse Professor Emerita of Dance

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It was cool for Janis Dengler, too, who was one of the countless senior citizens included in this project. “I think Chandra is one extremely creative person, and I think she brings that creativity and energy to her classes,” says Dengler, who is a Converse Professor Emerita of Dance and a beloved legend among alumnae.

The students then took that energy to area seniors.

“When the students interviewed me, I told them I could sit here all day and tell you stories, but I think you need to come to aerobics class,” says Dengler, who taught at Converse for 41 years, “and, by darn, they did; a few of them came to class. I tried to emphasize to them that as you get older, one of the most important things is to keep moving. I don’t care what you’re doing, keep moving.”

The effort kept moving, through four performances at Hazel B. Abbot Theatre in February.

“It was huge,” Hopkins says. “It was beautiful and really hard work; a well-worth-it work of labor. I think maybe I underestimated the hours involved. At the core, it was pretty amazing and powerful to see these students grow together, to see them embrace a positive attitude and reach beyond themselves.”

Cast member Anastacia Hutchinson '19 echoes those sentiments. She recalls a favorite moment with an Archibald resident who dictated a sweet potato pie recipe—food, of course, being a leading ingredient in what evolved into an actual script.

“We were in this battle of smiling and pointing at each other with the fondness of two best friends who

know exactly what the other is talking about. In that moment, we both saw memories of our grandmothers standing on tippy toes, kneading dough for fresh bread or stirring the okra soup in a large stock pot.”

Those memories will never grow old, especially since many of the interviewed seniors came to watch the performance.

“It’s always fun to do big-name shows like *Chicago* and *Rent* and all those, but they don’t really honor the human experience as much as this can, and one of my favorite parts about *Growing Old* was watching the faces of the women when we told their stories, and they were

telling us how proud of us they were. And we said, ‘No, we have to thank you.’”

Likewise, Dengler praises the troupe’s outreach. “I think Converse needs more of that,” she says, and referring to President Krista Newkirk, adds, “They have done a good job with that in the last two years with the new president.”

While Dengler calls the experience a “good light to throw on Converse,” Hutchinson adds, “If Converse continues to do something like this, we would be able to make a name for ourselves in honoring our community that has done so much for us in the past.”



Strengthening Our Global Society

First Interfaith Studies Graduates

In professions ranging from medicine to education to diplomacy, the ability to bridge cross-cultural and cross-religious divides is vital – and increasingly in high demand. Converse’s Interfaith Studies program, a minor that launched two years ago and is one of the first of its kind, is part of a growing movement within higher education to equip students for productive, positive, cooperative interaction with people of diverse viewpoints and backgrounds.

Put simply, it is based upon the premise that our local, national, and global societies will grow stronger if we can have meaningful conversation and cooperation with people who are different from us while also remaining true to our own beliefs and identities.

Powering the program was a startup grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, which provided Converse with funds for research, conferences, and education on how to create such an innovative program. Partnership with the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a national nonprofit that assists in building interfaith programs, also provides training and the sharing of best practices.

Converse’s first graduates of the program include Cassidy Rindge, who graduated in May. Having served as student chaplain for two years, Cassidy says that “It’s been cool to see the program grow as the movement grows.”

“At the heart, someone’s religion or non-religion is what motivates them,” says Cassidy, and “College is our chance to explore and hear new perspectives.” She describes Converse as an ideal space for this learning process: “[Exploring the question] what do I believe and why is such a challenging thing, and it’s important to find middle ground.”

Dr. Sherry Fohr and Rev. Jason Loscuito serve as co-directors of the Interfaith Studies program. On the curricular side, Dr. Fohr teaches two core courses for the program: World Religion and Interfaith Field Studies. She also identifies other qualifying courses not only in Religion and Philosophy, but also in History, English,

and additional subject areas. Dr. Laura Brown teaches an English class on Women in Protestant Reformations, Dr. Edward Woodfin teaches a history course on The Arab-Israeli Conflict, and Kelly Vaneman teaches a music course on Diverse Cultures and their Musics.



Venture into the World



Rev. Loscuito teaches the other core course for the minor (Interfaith Literacy and Communication) and arranges campus events like Speed Faithing and Dinner and Dialogue, which hone students' ability to communicate their viewpoints and to better understand the perspectives of others. Speed Faithing is a fun twist on the speed dating concept that allows students to present their faith to other students within ten minutes. Dinner and Dialogue hosts speakers for important conversations, such as anti-Semitism in America. Each person brings their unique set of beliefs and ideals to the conversation, and all explore together the shared values that transcend individual religions – for example, the golden rule and caring for our environment are shared values that come through many sacred texts. Rev. Loscuito and Dr. Fohr cooperate to funnel these opportunities to students, as well as other opportunities in the larger Spartanburg area.

Rev. Loscuito also finds opportunities for study travel, including a recent weekend conference at Elon University. Rev. Loscuito, Dr. Sherry Fohr, and four students also attended and the Parliament of World Religions conference which was held last year in Toronto and which drew more than 8,000 people for “inclusive dialogue for a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.” Sessions explored factual information on difficult topics like climate change and women’s rights, but there was still time for song and ceremony. Converse participant Kaylin Dionne ’22 reflected, “I prayed with Muslims. I chanted and meditated with Buddhists. I sang with Christians. I listened to some really emotional stories from Native Americans. The Sikhs would make a free lunch every day for everybody, and the food was amazing.” She added, “We got to see things we talked about in class actually happening at the conference. It really brought to life everything we’d read and discussed.”

The Interfaith Studies Program reflects Converse’s core values of diversity, exploration, and community as well as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Converse designed the QEP in 2017 in conjunction with our SACSCOC reaccreditation process. With the theme “Converse Across Boundaries: Learning through Diverse Experiences,” it focuses on fostering within all Converse students the skills to engage with and discuss diverse cultures, perspectives, and life experiences. It is a shared commitment across the faculty to help students gain the ability both to ‘converse’ across social boundaries, and to appreciate what may be the ‘converse’ to their own background (a play on Converse’s name for an initiative tailored to the Converse experience).

As the program grows, so does Converse’s ability to positively impact our world. “To see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly,” in the words of our founder, Dexter Edgar Converse.

Learn more!

www.converse.edu/interfaith-studies

Decade

CELEBRATING A
OF
Creative Excellence

by MONICA JONES '03

TEN YEARS IS A MILESTONE WORTH CELEBRATING, AND CONVERSE COLLEGE'S MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM COMMEMORATED IN FINE STYLE THIS SUMMER WITH TWO EXCITING EVENTS IN TWO DIFFERENT VENUES.



Interested in obtaining your MFA?

The application deadline for Winter/Spring residencies is October 1; the deadline for Summer/Fall residencies is February 15.

Apply today!

www.converse.edu/mfa

Kicking off this salute to the MFA program and its graduates' accomplishments, a reception was held at the Ciclops Cyderi and Brewery, located in Spartanburg. Managed by Clara Jane Hallar, a poetry graduate of the MFA program herself, the brewery launched a special release beer in honor of the anniversary, based on a recipe created by Jane Austen. Literally, a literary beer!

As Michael Millen, head brewer for Ciclops Cyderi and Brewery explains, "We brewed a beer inspired by a great writer, Jane Austen. She was a home brewer herself, as were many women of the time, and although her recipes are not recorded, their flavor profiles and descriptions are. We made a Gruit-styled ale, subbing herbs and spices for hops. During her time, hops were not always readily available to the general public, so they would use herbs and spices in their place to flavor the beer."

The reception was followed by an MFA Alumni reading on the Converse campus in Zimmerli Common Room. The reading featured poet Lisa Hase-Jackson, novelist Sonja Condit, and YA novelist Gwen Holt, who has just published her fourth Young Adult (YA) novel, *Imani Unraveled*, with Owl Hollow Press, under the pen name Leigh Statham.

The Converse low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program began in the summer of 2009, under



the guidance of Professor Richard Mulkey. Mulkey has been at Converse for most of the last 25 years, but after a brief stint with Wichita State directing their MFA program, he and his wife, Professor Susan Tekulve, explored the possibilities of Converse having its own MFA program. After lots of research and proposal drafts to the faculty, it was launched with Professor Mulkey as Director.

"This is the only such program in South Carolina," says Mulkey. "It provides an opportunity for adult graduate students to maintain their professional and private lives while setting aside time each week

to study literature and practice the writing craft in a program with an award-winning faculty of poets, novelists, and essayists."

“It has become, as we hoped it would, a highly distinctive program for the college, with a large number of successful graduates.”

Richard Mulkey
 Director of MFA
 in Creative Writing

Converse's two-year co-educational low-residency MFA program is designed for independent writers looking for advanced instruction in fiction, YA fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, and environmental writing. The program emphasizes the apprentice mentoring relationship with students, and offers an individually tailored curriculum of courses and projects, resulting in mastery and understanding of writing skills and contemporary literature.

The 48-hour credit requirements are completed during four nine-day residencies at Converse, which are offered twice annually, with four mentoring semesters, a fifth graduating residency, an analytical project on literature or craft, and a book-length creative thesis and oral defense.

Students and graduates of the MFA program have published or had accepted for publication more than two dozen books so far with presses from William Morrow/Harper Collins to Word Works Press, according to Mulkey, and says he can't keep up with the number of published stories, essays, and poems—but he estimates it's well over 100. "They've been featured in the Paris issue of *Rolling Stone Magazine*, have received numerous fellowships, grants, and awards, including a Kundiman Foundation grant, a

Gulbenkian Foundation fellowship for a writing residency in Portugal, the John and Susan Bennet Memorial Arts Fund grant, a Southeast Review Nonfiction Prize, an AWP Intro Award, a SC Poetry initiative Prize, The Bryant-Lisembee Poetry Book prize, Press 53's Fiction prize for a collection stories, and a host of others."

Of her decision to seek an MFA, Gwen Holt says, "I chose the MFA in YA lit program at Converse because I have been working in commercial fiction for several years but wanted more of a literary program. I love literary fiction, and I wanted to improve my writing and take it more in that direction." In addition to her success as a novelist, Holt is the managing Fiction Editor at *South 85 Journal* for the Converse MFA program and is the winner of the James Applewhite Poetry Prize honorable mention, and Southeast Review Narrative Nonfiction Prize. She already has another book completed and ready to go out to editors: a collaborative YA novel in verse, with co-author, Chris Menezes—himself a graduate of the MFA program in poetry—whom she met in an add-on poetry workshop.

Assistant Director, Sarah Cooper, herself a poetry graduate of the program, found that she could work around her day job as a faculty member at Clemson while she earned her degree. "I decided I

wanted to pursue an MFA, and the low-residency option was attractive because of the schedule," Cooper said. "After some research, I learned Denise Duhamel was on faculty at Converse, and I knew that was the person I wanted to work with. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to study with her and other poets I came to know and respect: Suzanne Cleary, Rick Mulkey, and Richard Tillinghast. Each faculty member challenged me as a writer."

Keeping the number of enrolled students between 25-30, the program remains intimate, with the students knowing each other, and all faculty members closely connected to the students. This isn't always the case with larger programs that enroll between 60 and 150 people. Almost all of the faculty have been with the program since the first or second year of its creation, making it feel like a big family. One faculty member describes it as "a rigorous yet nurturing place to hone your craft," according to Mulkey.

The student demographic is amazingly diverse. There have been journalists, lawyers, medical professionals, soldiers and marines who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, teachers, business professionals, retirees, actors and life-long students. Ages have ranged from 23 to 70 plus, with a

median age falling between the late 30s to mid-40s. Students have also come from all over the United States, including California, Washington, Oregon, New York, Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, and numerous other states, including South Carolina.

“As our graduates have moved on and started their own publishing careers, we invite them back once each year during our summer residency session to read from newly published books,” says Mulkey. “This helps to continue developing a bond between faculty, students and alumni.”

“ WITH DOZENS OF BOOKS PUBLISHED BY OUR GRADUATES, THE PROGRAM HAS NOW ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS A PLACE THAT TRAINS AND MENTORS SUCCESSFUL WRITERS.”

Professor Richard Mulkey





DOING TIME





WITH INMATES

by COURTNEY HAMMETT '19

Molly Glibbery Austin '15 never imagined that a few years after graduating with honors from Converse, she'd be spending a lot of time in prison. But she has found a calling within the walls of the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC), where she provides music therapy for male inmates. Before her graduation, Austin was involved in Delta Omicron, Model Arab League, academic coaching, and served as president of Musicians Helping Others. "Converse is always home," and "I miss it every day," she says. "The Music Therapy program has really blossomed."

So, how did it lead to prison work in Florida?

"It's kind of a crazy story," she says. After completing a music therapy internship in hospice, she worked for two years at an eating disorder clinic. Then, she worked towards a Master's of Music in Music Therapy at Florida State University, which she completed in December 2018. While there, she learned that the prison system needed music therapists to volunteer their services.

The position went from volunteer to part-time to full-time, as the FDC developed one of the first holistic mental healthcare programs of its kind. Austin conducted research for her graduate thesis in the prison, and she hopes more research like this will be done in the future.

"It's pretty innovative for prisons to have such complex mental health treatment," says Austin. The program involves individual therapy, group therapy, classes, yoga, music and art. The idea is to help patients "in the least restrictive environment possible," with care suited for the individual. The Residential Continuum of Care provides the appropriate amount of supervision and guidance, judging which inmates pose risks to themselves or others, which need extra help to get to appointments, and so on. Various professionals are able to weigh in on treatment plans, so Austin is part of her patients' futures.

Austin anticipated the question before I asked: How does she work with the populations that have done awful things? Some crimes, like those involving children, are hard to overlook. “Maybe you can prevent this from happening again,” she hopes, but “it’s tough sometimes.” She used to not look at inmate records – they aren’t allowed to ask, but charges are public and accessible. “I

lives were on. Could they harness the confidence of the song’s subject, yet steer their lives in a new direction?

But music therapy is so much more than therapy with songs sprinkled in. For patients with low intelligence and low literacy, it’s a way to learn. In one patient who suffered from delusions, following

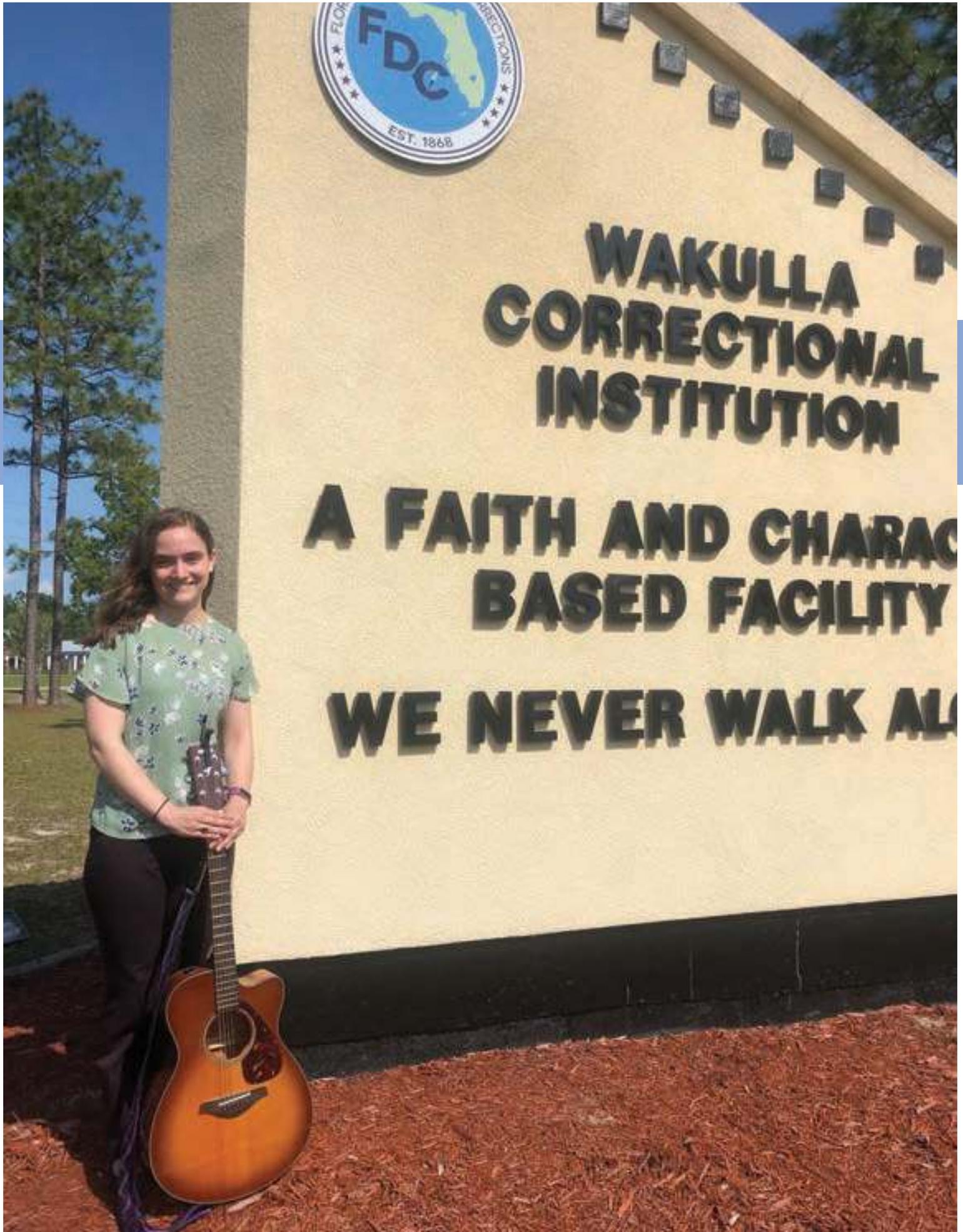
MOLLY AUSTIN HOPES TO BREAK THAT CYCLE OF VIOLENCE:
“WE ALL HAVE GOOD AND BAD IN US.
WE CAN CONDEMN, OR WE CAN BE PART OF THE CYCLE
THAT BRINGS OUT THE GOOD.”

can know as much or as little as I want,” she says. She couldn’t avoid hearing about charges though, and sometimes knowing them could help address symptoms. So, she developed a process where she gets to know the person first, then looks them up at the right time. There are plenty of tragic cases in what she calls a “convoluted legal system,” which prompts her to want a law degree sometimes. For the senseless cases, compartmentalizing to separate the person from the crime is key. Working with her patients is mostly great, as Austin likes them and has “always been drawn to help people who are underdogs.”

The hardest part is motivating patients to want treatment. That’s the genius of music therapy. “We’re therapy ninjas!” Austin explains that by using music her patients enjoy, “they don’t realize it’s work.” Sometimes, that work is practical. In one case, she led the men in discussion of the song “Highway to Hell” by AC/DC. After singing and playing the song, the lyrical content provided a chance to ask about the “highway” the inmates’

directions and learning to play Christmas songs grounded him. Through a process called institutionalization, inmates may lose their identity and sense of self after a long time behind bars. Some may also lose cognitive ability. Music therapy helps regain their personhood. Even something as simple as choosing a song or instrument is a humanizing event. “They can be individuals today, they can have a choice,” she emphasizes. When they learn a chord, they get praise and feel validated, excited. They feel human.

From day one, Austin says, “the goal is to prepare for release” and to “prevent recidivism.” American prisons are notorious for having revolving doors, wherein petty crime leads to a snowball effect. Primarily, she says “what I’m doing is for the welfare of my patients,” but society at large also benefits. With therapy and education, many inmates are eventually able to lead fulfilling lives on the outside. In the meantime, the men are learning to cope with their situation and are less likely to harm themselves or others.



Globetrotting Gabby



Barely a year had passed since Gabriella Chamberland's Converse graduation when she texted her mother from Jakarta about multiple blasts that rocked Indonesia's capital, killing at least eight people and wounding 23.

"She led with, 'There was a bombing.' I just looked at her understated text and started laughing," her mother, Maria Tobia, a New York criminal-defense lawyer recalls of the message from Gabby, then 22. "That's classic Gabby."

Chamberland, now 25, is still just as understated. At the time of the Ankara bombings, she was teaching arts and crafts while co-directing the Jakarta Education Center. Today, she lives in Turkey, teaching English on a year-long Fulbright scholarship.

"I have always wanted to travel abroad and work with different communities," she says matter-of-factly in a chat from her Ankara apartment overlooking a basketball court, dog park, small markets, and coffee shops. "Before I decided to go to college, I thought I was going to go straight into the Peace Corps, but you need to be 18 or have a degree."

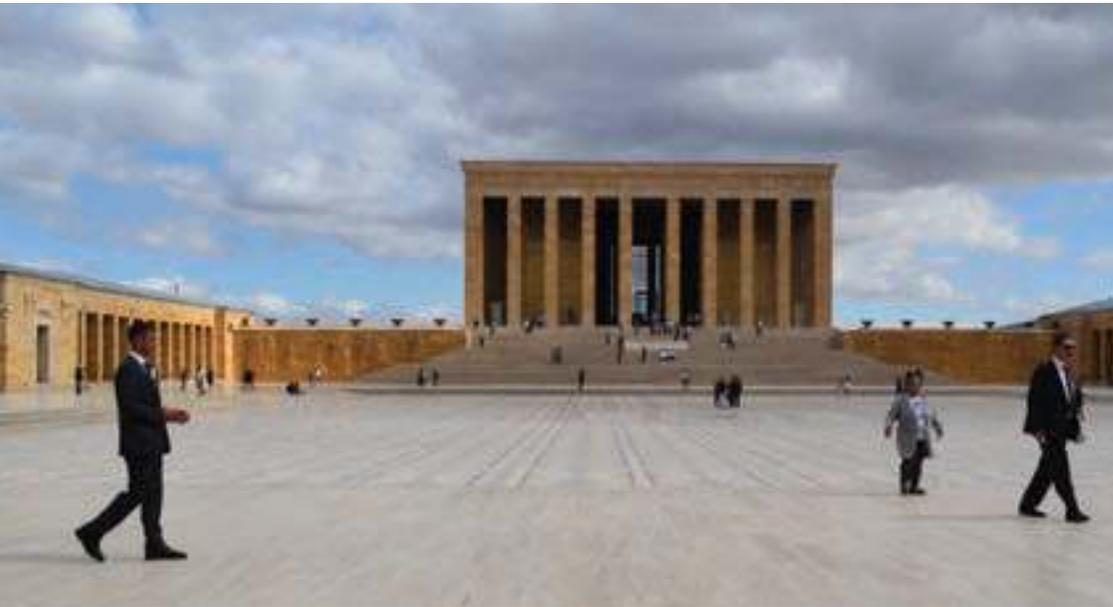


She doesn't mention, for instance, that she won Converse's Community Service Alumni Achievement Award this year, to go alongside her Mary Mildred Sullivan Award, which she earned at graduation for "unselfish service" and "nobility of character."

Gabby's exhaustive two-page resume reads like Google Maps for Hyper-achieving Humanitarians.

Even before she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Politics in 2015, she was already crisscrossing the country and traveling the world working on issues that revolve around women, refugees and underserved children. She completed college in three years on an athletic scholarship, playing goalie for two years on Converse's NCAA Division II soccer team. She also made the Dean's List—three times.





She was a star performer in Converse’s much-heralded Model Programs debate teams. She worked with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans and West Virginia and for AmeriCorps in Oakland and Appalachia. For her Fulbright grant, Dr. Douglas Weeks, Babcock Professor of Piano and one of some 1,650 volunteer Fulbright Program Advisors on campuses nationwide, helped with her submission.

Dr. Joe Dunn, Chair of History and Politics, wrote on behalf of her applications to four graduate schools—all of which accepted her into their Masters in Social Work programs. While exploring her options, Gabby will begin an internship this October with UNICEF in Ankara, Turkey, within their Child Protection division. She will be working on Gender, with a focus on Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) prevention and response.

“In my 48 years as a college professor, I have sent scores of my

students into the international environment working in various areas of humanitarian and human-rights activity, but none would I rank above Ms. Chamberland,” said Dunn. “I do not know that I have witnessed an undergraduate who was more involved in so many activities.”

Gabby is certainly experienced internationally. She has traveled to Argentina—she speaks three languages—as well as to the Middle East and throughout Europe. Domestically, she’s been coast to coast, including several stops in her native New York, where she earned a certificate in International Affairs from Bard College.

“If you’re doing something you love,” says her father, Donald, an electrical engineer in Queens, NY, “travel is part of it, and in her case, she has made the best of it. Traveling is obviously a way to meet different people and experience different cultures. She’s grasped that wholeheartedly and

I'm very proud of her for that.” So is her mom, who says Gabby’s “globetrotting method of learning” came in part from Converse. “Traveling is her manner of understanding the world and herself. I think Converse gave her incredible opportunities. I’m so grateful for that.”

Photography is another passion, one Gabby leveraged with thousands

of images she made during her Qatar Study-Visit Fellowship from September 2014 to December 2015. Gabby published several photos to accompany her May 2015 article in the Carolinas Council on U.S.-Arab Relations newsletter about a transformative moment in Doha’s old marketplace.

“The universality of all humanity was never more prevalent than when I

connected with this shopkeeper about art, writing, photography and finding one’s place,” she wrote.

Classic Gabby.

“She has the mind of an artist in that she has great empathy for other people,” says her mother. “She can observe and feel things, and I think seeing the world and meeting other people is like air to her.”



“ As I look at my photographs of the kind old man standing in the middle of his shop, a contented smile upon his face, I HAVE HOPE THAT WE ALL CAN FIND OUR PLACE WITHOUT FEAR OF CHASTISING LIFESTYLE CHOICES OR CULTURE.

His shining mosaic lamp symbolizing the varied and singular tapestry of humanity.

Gabriella Chamberland '15

”



Rock the Tower Rings

OFTEN WHEN YOU DONATE TO AN ORGANIZATION YOU HOPE YOUR GIFT BENEFITS PEOPLE AROUND THE CORNER OR AROUND THE WORLD. BUT DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR MONEY REALLY GOES? CONVERSE ALUMNAE DO WHEN THEY ROCK THE TOWER.

“

We became project-based last year. We wanted donors to see exactly where their money was going and to be able to support Converse in a way that was meaningful to them.

Kristina Pisano
Associate Director of the Annual Fund

”

These are the projects made possible by the record-setting \$102,797 raised during 2018 year's 24-hour Rock the Tower blitz:

Art & Design: Meeting the campaign's full \$15,000 goal, with Jane Schwab '77 matching every gift up to \$7,500, the department gave students a place to sit while they work. New drafting chairs replaced old folding ones that had become too few for the growing program.

“Overnight, three classrooms were transformed and the morale and pride in the Milliken Building soared,” says Dr. Susanne Gunter, Department Chair. “The simple gift of chairs has made the process of teaching and learning more effective and improved the aesthetics and comfort of students taking long, intensive classes.”



Fundraising Bell



Biology, Chemistry

& Physics: The department looked to the future—through high-tech, virtual reality goggles purchased with gifts given towards the \$25,000 goal, of which Sandra Morelli '78 matched up to \$8,000.

Converse is one of six private colleges in the nation to have virtual reality goggles in the classroom. Will Case, Associate Professor of Chemistry, explains: “Imagine the opportunity to see organs in a virtual, augmented-reality way without having to use cadavers. Imagine being able to see how atoms come together to make chemical lines and form compounds—things student can’t often visualize through a textbook.”

Valkyries Athletics: The Athletics Department scored with \$10,000 to finance a new PA system, upgrade facilities, acquire more and better equipment, and cover the costs of travel to regional competitions. Sandy Hartnett '75 matched every gift up to \$5,000.



Mathematics & Computer

Science: Exabyte, Yottabyte, Zettabyte. Most of us don’t know what those are, but with the help of a \$3,000 matching gift from Henrietta Humphries '70, the department met its \$5,000 goal to purchase software to mine all this mind-boggling data.

“The amount of data that companies and businesses and governments have to deal with is overwhelming,” says Jessica Williams, Assistant Professor of Mathematics. Noting that the software makes Converse an innovator among small liberal-arts institutions, she says the acquisition adds to students’ job marketability.



Music Therapy: The need for more instruments that students can take into community classrooms struck a chord with alumnae, two of whom matched every gift up to \$4,000 toward the \$8,000 goal.

The gifts, says Megan Hoyt '16, founder of Heart Strings Music Therapy Services LLC in Greenville, “put the Music Therapy department on the cutting edge of an up-and-coming, well-established licensed profession.”



Theatre & Dance: Lights! Camera! Plumbing! It takes more than a stage to stage a professional production. That’s why the department is using \$8,000 to refurbish the plumbing, wiring, and air conditioning, along with new chairs, lighted mirrors and freshly painted walls, for Hazel B. Abbott Theatre’s dressing rooms. Thanks to an in-kind donation from Hodge Floors, the rooms also got new flooring.

“By having a quality space, we can then create something that is quality for you to enjoy,” says Layla Thurman '20, a theatre major and the president of Palmetto Players. “By contributing to us, you’re giving something to yourself and you are also helping to create a theatrical experience.”

Mickel Library: The library turned a new page when it met its \$5,000 goal. The funds support the purchase of ergonomic chairs, charging stations for mobile devices and a new bulletin board. The space was also spruced up with freshly painted walls in the Gwathmey wing. Ann Lanier Jackson '86 matched every gift up to \$2,500.

“The goal is to create a space that engages students and provides resources that help them explore topics independently or collaboratively,” Pisano says.



Rock the Tower also provided the opportunity for supporters to give directly to student scholarships, which continues to be a priority as the student population – and students’ financial need – grows.

Pisano, who has been at Converse only 18 months, says she has been researching how much better project-based fundraising resonates. “Younger donors in particular want to know exactly what their money is used for because our budgets are so limited,” she says.

“Specific projects also connected with a lot of alumnae who studied in one of the departments sponsoring a project, and we had many gifts from donors who had never given or had not given in a long while.”

Haley Thomas ’18 was one of nearly 90 first-time donors. The record number of tower rockers totaled 560. That’s up from 504 the year before.

“I loved the project-based giving opportunities for Rock the Tower,” said the former theatre major. “I was so excited to be able to give back to the department that gave me so much more than a degree. The dressing rooms turned out amazing, and I can’t wait for future students to use them.”

Converse alumnae and friends took to social media and were the real drivers of the campaign – from Facebook to Instagram to Twitter. They played a key role in reaching and inspiring the additional 56 donors and \$20,000 given this year, Pisano says.

“Rock the Tower is primarily driven by social media,” she says. “As we cultivate younger generations of alumni whose ongoing support will be critical to sustaining this institution for decades to come, that’s how they communicate and that’s how they show it.”

Take this Tweet, for instance:



Valerie Dowling
 @valeriedowling
 Hey @ConverseAlumnae!
 #CountMeIn for
 #RockTheTower!
 I’m thankful for the friendships
 & experiences that Converse
 gave me. I’m proud to invest
 in helping other young women
 have the same opportunity!
 #RedDevils Join the fun at
converse.edu/rockthetower/

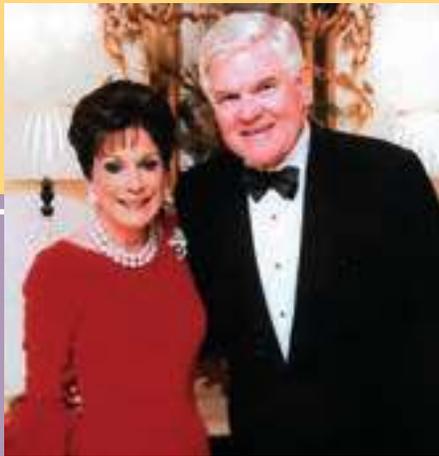
In another #RocktheTower post, Katie Landon Fitch ’02 shared her appreciation of the fundraiser’s updated model:

“I love a good social media campaign. I’m a social media junkie and a student of philanthropy. But this one is extra-special. It’s a sweet opportunity to reflect on a transformative time in my life and a tremendous sisterhood of Converse alumnae.”

Dr. Susanne Gunter agrees.

“Rock the Tower is an amazing display of how alums, friends, faculty, and students can come together to support critical needs that impact the daily experience of every student. It demonstrated how our College family can come together to achieve goals.”

GET READY TO
ROCK THE TOWER
11.07.19



Alumna Helps Future Converse Generations

THE BARRIER THAT STANDS BETWEEN CAPABLE YOUNG WOMEN AND A CONVERSE DEGREE IS OFTEN THEIR ABILITY TO AFFORD THEIR EDUCATION.

giving spotlight

In fact, the majority of Converse students and graduates can tell you about the significance of receiving a scholarship to help offset the costs of their education. More than 90% of our undergraduate students depend on and receive some form of financial aid or scholarships. Many students would not be able to pursue an education without this assistance.

Growing scholarship support is one of the College's most important fundraising priorities.

◆ **Rene Sifly Nalley '65** is answering this call with a commitment of **\$500,000** to create the Sifly Sisters Scholarship. ◆

She is stepping in to help future generations of Converse students who demonstrate financial need. Nalley is one of three women in her family to graduate from Converse. Her sisters, Suzanne Sifly Weston '61 and Carroll Sifly Hobbs '67 are also alumnae.

"Converse was very important to the Sifly household," Nalley said. "All three girls graduated during the '60s. I loved my time at Converse and have wonderful memories. My husband and I have wanted to give back and are glad to be able to help students who desire to attend Converse and only need a financial boost to realize their dream."

This isn't the first time the Nalleys have stepped up for Converse students. In 2010, Rene issued a challenge to fellow alumnae and friends to make new gifts in support of scholarships. She and her hus-

band, Jim, matched dollar-for-dollar every new gift for unrestricted awards made during that time, doubling the impact of those gifts.

James W. Kellam, Director of Financial Planning, is grateful for the Nalley family's generosity. "I work with wonderful prospective students every day who would contribute greatly to the Converse community, but who struggle to find a way to pay tuition. Our team is deeply dedicated to helping them with financial planning, and every new gift in support of scholarships helps us achieve that goal."

"The Sifly Sisters Scholarship is a direct investment in the bright future of young women who, without these funds, may not be able to afford a higher education," said Kellam.

Nisbet Honors Program Benefactors Double Their Endowment

NINETEEN YEARS AGO, ON AN EASTER SUNDAY, ALUMNA **MARIAN MCGOWAN NISBET '62** AND HER HUSBAND, OLIN, MADE A DECISION THAT WOULD CHART A NEW COURSE FOR CONVERSE'S HIGHEST ACADEMICALLY ACHIEVING STUDENTS: THEY GAVE CONVERSE \$1,000,000 TO ESTABLISH AN HONORS PROGRAM.

Today, they are deepening their commitment with an additional **\$500,000** to grow the endowment that supports it.

Providing students with a community where they can explore their full potential through independent research and intellectually-challenging conversations, the invitation-only Nisbet Honors Program supports Converse's continued dedication to academic excellence. Marian Nisbet is impressed with the program's continued success and the professional achievements of its students. "The first year they started with three students," she said. "Now they have 113; that's amazing."

The program began in the year 2000 under the direction of Dr. Laura Brown, Associate Professor of English, and Dr. John M. Theilmann, Andrew Helmus Distinguished Professor of History and Politics. In 2018, Dr. Will Case, Associate Professor of Chemistry, joined Dr. Brown to continue its successfully legacy.



"Dr. Brown and Dr. Theilmann have done an incredible job over these many years. Now with Dr. Case coming in, the program will have a new dimension to it," Nisbet said.

Brown looks to the future with appreciation for how far the program has come over the last two decades. "I have always loved working with our academically gifted and most motivated students, and it has been a delight to work with a donor as supportive, genuine, generous, and kind as Mrs. Nisbet," Dr. Brown said.

"The new gift will help us expand offerings for travel, research, course innovation, and professional development."

Dr. Case shares this passion for working with students who want to challenge themselves. "This program has helped attract many of Converse's brightest students, and it has unlimited potential to grow and expand. Converse has been a good steward of Mr. and Mrs. Nisbet's initial investment, and as Mrs. Nisbet sees the far-reaching impact of their gift it inspires her to continue to support the program."

Marian Nisbet agrees. "The faculty have put so much of themselves into this program. They started with nothing, and they've grown the program exponentially. The relationship between the faculty and the students in the program is what I think has sustained it."

Alanna Ivey Wildman '71 Continues Family Legacy of Supporting Student-Athletes



WHEN CONVERSE COLLEGE'S STUDENT-ATHLETES RETURNED FROM SPRING BREAK, THEY WERE EXCITED TO EXPERIENCE THE RENOVATIONS MADE TO THE IVEY FITNESS & TRAINING ROOM IN THE WEISIGER CENTER.

Supporting the **mission and vision** of Converse College has been and continues to be a **prime family legacy giving objective.**

Named for Erin and James W. Ivey, parents of Alanna Ivey Wildman '71, who gave the space when the Weisiger Center was constructed, the training room has always been an area for Valkyries needing taping, icing or attention from one of the three trainers. In recent years, as Converse's athletic program increased from five to thirteen sports plus two reserve teams, the growing number of athletes caused significant wear and tear on both the training and fitness rooms. As an NCAA Division II program, the needs of student-athletes engaged in such high-level competition called for improving the training room.

In addition to fresh paint, new tables and modern flooring, a wall separating the two rooms was removed.

An office has also been constructed where a trainer or team physician can privately meet with student-athletes.

Athletic Director Jennifer Bell was looking for meaningful ways to enhance the student-athlete experience and found a willing partner in Alanna Wildman.

"Thanks to her help, we were able to do that in this space. The student-athletes appreciate it and feel a sense of pride."

Wildman's support for the project came through The Ivey Family Foundation which enables her family to continue shepherding the legacy her parents created. Long before physical fitness became an important part of the national consciousness,

Wildman's parents maintained an exercise regimen. "On a very personal level, the Weisiger Center's promotion of physical activity and training resonated with my parents' lifelong commitment to better overall health through daily exercise," said Wildman. "Erin and J.W. Ivey rarely missed beginning their day at home with a vigorous workout."

"The Ivey Family Foundation appreciates the opportunity to remodel and expand the Ivey Training Room," said Wildman. "We thank President Krista Newkirk; Krista Bofill, Vice President of Institutional Advancement; Jennifer Bell, Athletic Director; and Harper Construction for the new design to meet the current and future needs of Converse College athletes."

giving spotlight

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CONVERSE
Annual Fund

Zimmerli *Performance Center*



“PRESERVING TWICHELL IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDING AN ACCESSIBLE, FUNCTIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL SETTING FOR THE EVENTS OF MANY DIFFERENT SPARTANBURG COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND ESPECIALLY FOR OUR CONVERSE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.”

Krista Newkirk
President, Converse College

For decades, Converse College Life Trustee Kurt Zimmerli and his wife, Nelly, have generously provided leadership and financial support for the arts at Converse and in the Spartanburg community. Now, it's their moment to finally take center stage as they championed the campaign to renovate a world-class performance hall that is near to their hearts.

In February, Converse bestowed the name Zimmerli Performance Center on the facility that houses Twichell Auditorium at a reception honoring the Zimmerlis.

Twichell Auditorium has long been hailed as one of the South's leading performance venues. A \$3.5 million fundraising campaign provided the first major renovations to the facility in 30 years. It will also provide for Twichell's continued maintenance and enable its award-winning arts education programs. The Zimmerlis made a lead gift towards the campaign, which has raised \$3.2 million to date.

During the reception, they were surrounded by friends who joined them in supporting Twichell's renovation, and who toasted their contributions to Converse and to Spartanburg as the Zimmerli Performance Center was unveiled.

"Each of us has gathered here to thank you for believing in the transformative power of the performing arts, and for stepping

forward once again to ensure Twichell Auditorium continues to impact audiences far and wide as one of the South's most iconic performance venues," President Krista Newkirk said to the Zimmerlis during the reception.

Twichell Auditorium has long been known as a place where outstanding performers take the stage, and for providing cultural experiences for students and the greater Spartanburg community. Named as an historic John Philip Sousa site to commemorate the many performances given by Sousa and his band there in the early twentieth century, the auditorium has hosted such famed artists as Tony Bennett, Chet Atkins, George Burns, Duke Ellington, Burl Ives, Itzhak Perlman, Yo Yo Ma, and Marilyn Horne.

The 1,500-seat auditorium, which houses a 57-rank Casavant Freres organ with more than 2,700 pipes, serves over 20,000 individuals each year, with more than 10,500 patrons purchasing tickets for performances.

The renovation project, that will be completed Mid-October, will provide new technology, including LED lighting systems and digital audio, along with greater accessibility and refined amenities for patrons that will preserve Twichell as an outstanding venue where Spartanburg can gather as a community to celebrate the transformative power of the performing arts.

During the event, Dr. Douglas Weeks, Babcock Professor of Piano and a longtime friend of the Zimmerlis, performed a special tribute to the couple. Afterward, guests moved to the Twichell lawn to hear Converse Life Trustee and former Spartanburg Mayor Bill Barnet share personal reflections on the Zimmerli's contributions to our greater community and to the College.



"It is important that we not only honor the history of this place – of Twichell and of Converse – but that we also recognize the contribution that [the Zimmerlis] have made to our lives, and to the arts and to culture," Barnet said. "Kurt and Nelly entered the United States with very little resources. They moved from the Northeast to Spartanburg, SC and they built a family and a remarkable business. They created a very special understanding and appreciation for the arts and for culture, and they created an enormous impact on what you and I share today – not only in this place but in many other aspects of our community. They have done so much for our lives and its appropriate, I think, that we spend a moment in appreciation for what they have done."

The End of an Era

by Jennifer Palmer '16 with contributions from Lily West '20

ON THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2019, MR. CHARLES MORGAN DEPARTED FROM THIS WORLD, SURROUNDED BY HIS LOVING FAMILY. BEFORE HIS PASSING, THOUGH, HE GRACIOUSLY SAT FOR AN INTERVIEW.



Morgan's Converse story began more than a century ago. His grandmother graduated from Converse in 1900. His father, Elford Chapman Morgan, was the first dean of faculty and his mother, Martha Hamilton Morgan, was the first in Morgan's family to teach at Converse.

"I can remember playing with my toy soldiers under the privet hedges outside of Wilson Hall — digging in the ground with my mother's sterling silver spoons," Morgan said. "I can remember very fondly the importance of using a hot knife to cut a fruitcake at the Christmas parties for the faculty in our home — taking my dog and hitting golf balls on the golf course on the back campus — swimming in the swimming pool in Dexter."

Upon being asked why he referred to himself as "Mr. Morgan" despite having a doctorate, Morgan smiled.

"It was the name I was born with," he answered. "I graduated [from

"I grew up many years ago in a different world."
Charles Morgan
Associate Professor of English Emeritus

Tulane’s doctorate program] as an ABD — All But Dissertation.”

“My father taught me, when in doubt, never address someone as Dr. unless you knew he had his doctorate. In college, professors were addressed as ‘Mr.’ instead of ‘Dr.’”

Morgan began teaching at Louisiana State University New Orleans in 1965. However, Converse offered Morgan a job the same year. “When I came [to Converse], I wasn’t much older than most of the students – around 25.”

“I had been away for eight years,” Morgan continued, “I was ready to come home. My true love was going to Converse.”

It was at Converse that Morgan met his other true love: his wife, Paula Sigler.

“She was a music student;” Morgan wrote, “piano performance ’73. The fall after she graduated she wanted to go to Paris because growing up in New Orleans she had studied French ... but her parents had a connection in London and felt safer knowing she was there rather than in Paris. I happened to be in London with a Converse group that fall. London is a rather magical town for a courtship.”

It was his passion for travel that inspired Morgan’s friends to establish a study abroad scholarship in his honor.

“In the fall of 1970, my friends Jeffrey Willis and John Byars started Converse’s London Term,” Morgan wrote. “At that point, it was an entire

fall term in London. The next year it was over-subscribed with 60 students! So, the college needed to add a third professor to have enough courses. In the fall of 1973, I got to go to London again. In the spring of 1980, Paula and I and Molly, our 2 1/2 [year-old child] spent three wonderful months in London.”

Morgan was married for 40 years to Paula and had two daughters. He went home every day for lunch.

“There was a while when I had a wife, two daughters, a female dog, taught at an all-women’s college, and life was good.”

Rachel Collins is a class of ’13 Converse graduate who transferred from Cottey College, a two-year institution. Collins wrote, “I used to visit his office quite often, and he served as one of the ‘advisers’ for my senior thesis. I learned a lot of grammatical precision from that man. I do recall one occasion when he told me to have a little self-confidence, as my self-esteem and assurance were quite low.”

Dr. Emily Harbin, current Director of the Writing Center and Assistant Professor of English and a Converse alumna, also has fond memories of Morgan.

One of her favorite memories as a Converse student was during Mr. Morgan’s Chaucer class when he taught the Canterbury Tales.

“The image I have of him in my mind is that he has taught Chaucer

for so many years, but he’d blush every time, turning beet red because of some of the content.”

Some people would pretend they didn’t understand what was happening, hoping to provoke his blush.

“He fell over a desk one time ... a student talked about a ‘horizontal hokey-pokey.’ It probably became some sort of game to see who could get him to blush the most or the longest.”

Harbin became serious in her next statements, though. “He’s taught a lot of graduate students here; he’s had a lasting impact on education here, and has been a part in shaping future teachers.”

“He was truly someone whose door was always open,” Harbin said. “He would always take time to talk to his students about things they were interested in, what was going on in their lives... he was an effective teacher and a kind human being.”

Harbin went on to say, “Charlie doesn’t have a title that matches up to how much of an impact he has had on Converse... I can only imagine how many people he has touched over fifty years.”

Donations in Professor Morgan’s honor can be made to the Charles Morgan Endowed Travel Fund, Office of Institutional Advancement, at Converse College; 580 E. Main Street, Spartanburg, SC 29302.



CONVERSE S C E N E

A Thousand Thanks

Converse welcomed donors to campus for the 2018 'Thousand Thanks' event. Our fall event celebrated our Leadership Society donors who have given \$1,000 or more over the past year.

Guests had an opportunity to interact with faculty, staff and students, as well as see first-hand how their gifts make a difference.







President's Leadership Forum

On International Women's Day 2019, Converse held its annual President's Leadership Forum, a free professional development and networking event.

Cathy Bessant, chief operations and technology officer for Bank of America, took part in a fireside chat moderated by President Krista Newkirk.

Named the "Most Powerful Woman in Banking" by *American Banker* magazine for the last two years, Bessant has led Global Technology and Operations for Bank of America since 2010, delivering end-to-end technology and operating services across the company through nearly 95,000 employees and contractors in more than 35 countries.



CONVERSE SCENE



Town Halls

On May 14, 2019, Converse hosted town hall meetings on campus to discuss the option of placing our traditional women's college under the umbrella of Converse University, while also adding a co-educational residential undergraduate program as a separate college, as well as an international college. To provide all members of the Converse community the opportunity to join the conversation, additional town halls were held throughout the Southeast over the summer as well as two virtual town halls.



CONVERSE S C E N E





Mark Kent Memorial Putting Green Dedication

A memorial to honor Mark Kent, husband of former Chair of the Board of Trustees Kimberly Varnadoe Kent '97 was held on April 24, 2019, outside the Marsha H. Gibbs Field House. The Mark Kent Golf Endowment will support the Converse College Valkyries Athletics Golf Program, putting green, and simulation room.





Silver Soirée

President Newkirk and the Board of Trustees hosted a gala to celebrate donors with lifetime cumulative giving of \$25,000 and above on April 25, 2019.





CONVERSE SCENE





CONVERSE
S C E N E



Founder's Day

On April 26, 2019, the Converse community gathered to celebrate our founding. Keynote speaker Grace Adams Bagwell '07 shared her advice on creating a community in a world where there are so many barriers to engaging with each other. Three members of the Converse family were also honored: Rhonda Mingo with the Spirit of Converse Award, Jane McRae Jackson Avinger '62 with the Dexter Edgar Converse Award, and Cassidy Rindge '19 with the 2019 Weisiger Cup.





CONVERSE S C E N E



Jane McRae Jackson Avinger '62 Receives Dexter Edgar Converse Award

Jane Avinger was honored during the Silver Soiree donor gala and the Founder's Day service in April for her service as a leader and altruist, along with her passion for beauty and the arts, which has left a lasting impression on Converse, its students, and the greater community far and wide.

The Converse Legacy Club

Converse welcomed a new group of graduates into the Converse Legacy Club during the hooding ceremony at the undergraduate and graduate commencement ceremonies. This esteemed circle of women consists of graduates with a family legacy – Converse graduates whose sisters, mothers, grandmothers or great-grandmothers previously attended the College.



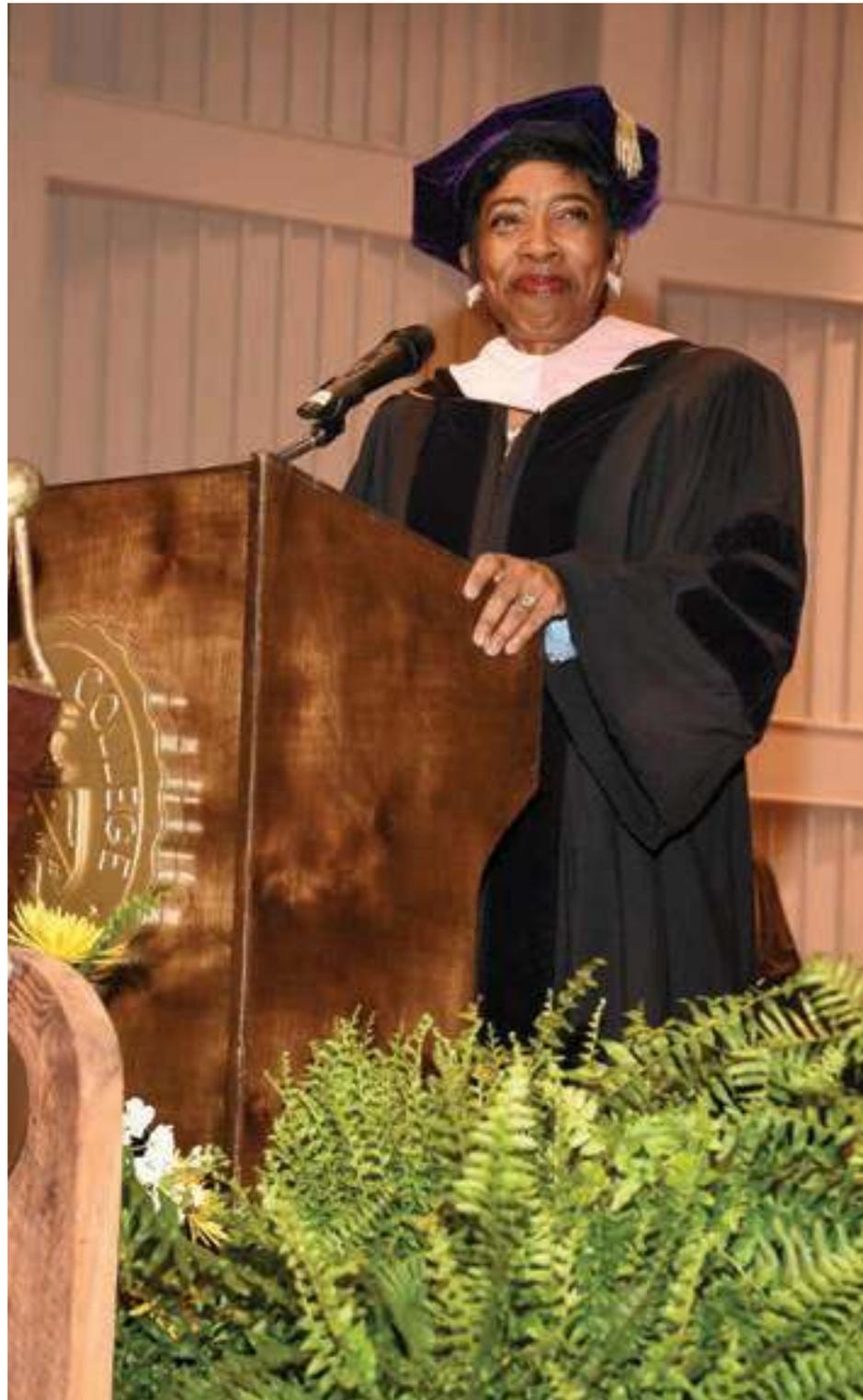


CONVERSE S C E N E

Commencement

Converse held undergraduate and graduate commencement ceremonies on May 18, 2019. Carla Harris, Vice Chairman for Global Wealth Management and Senior Client Advisor at Morgan Stanley, gave the undergraduate commencement address and received an honorary degree. In addition to her success in business and her leadership in the community, Ms. Harris is a professional singer. To everyone's delight, she accompanied the Converse Alumnae Gospel Choir for a special performance at the undergraduate ceremony.







CONVERSE SCENE





Reunion

Reunion Weekend 2019 was a huge hit, with dinner and dancing on the quad, late nights laughing in the residence halls, the parade of classes, and celebrating our award winners.

See more:
www.converse.edu/reunion



**REUNION
WEEKEND**
SAVE THE
DATE
**MAY 29-31
2020**



Mindy Traphagan Study Area Dedication

On June 13, 2019, the Traphagan family along with members of the Class of 1987 gathered in Mickel Library for a Study Area Dedication in memory of Mindy Traphagan '87.

CONVERSE SCENE



Upstate Women In Leadership Conference

The 2nd Annual Upstate Women in Leadership Conference was held on June 20-21, 2019. This event promotes women in leadership across the Upstate through networking and includes workshops and peer panels with relevant information related to workplace advancement and leading in our communities.