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Converse College Board of Trustees Announces Dynamic Changes

Spartanburg's historic women's college will add a co-ed undergraduate residential program alongside its women's college, change its name to Converse University, and expand its international school into an international college

Spartanburg, SC— (February 7, 2020) — After many months of careful deliberation and research, Converse College has decided to expand its undergraduate residential program from single-gender to co-ed in fall 2021. In addition, Converse is embracing its 55-year history as a graduate degree-granting institution with a name change from college to university effective July 1, 2021. Under the university umbrella, Converse will maintain a Converse College for Women and expand its international school into an international college. These efforts will ensure a thriving future for Converse as it continues to build on its history of academic excellence.

The President and Board of Trustees cited ongoing changes in student preferences, a nationwide decrease of interest in enrollment at women's colleges, and proactive preparation for a decline in high school graduates beginning in 2025 as prompts for a re-envisioned Converse.

"Converse made history when we first opened our doors. We made history, when in the face of skyrocketing higher-education costs, we reset our tuition, reducing it by 43 percent. And, today, we make history again as we announce that Converse is opening its doors to all academically-

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qualified students who strive to be exceptional,” stated Converse President Krista L. Newkirk. “Fewer than two percent of female, college-bound high school students will even consider a single-gender college,” continued Newkirk. “We see the addition of a co-educational undergraduate residential component as a strategy not to just recruit men, but to reach more women who otherwise would not consider Converse.”

Studies from 15 single-gender colleges who added a co-ed component showed a two-year average enrollment growth of 74% and a four-year average growth of 86% for incoming classes.

The Converse Board of Trustees appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to request and review research on the future and reality of the change. Laura Chappell Bauknight '87 alumna and Ad Hoc Committee Chair said, “Our recommendation to the Board was presented with guidance to preserve and maintain a women’s leadership component at Converse.” Bauknight, also a Converse College Trustee, led the Ad Hoc committee as they closely examined other former women’s colleges that have implemented a co-educational structure. Committee members visited select college campuses that have made similar transitions, and reviewed input and feedback from alumnae, faculty, staff, students and friends of Converse.

Phyllis Perrin Harris, '82 alumna and Chair of the Converse Board of Trustees stated that the Board’s duty is to make decisions based on the best interests of Converse as a whole and with the top focus being the advancement of Converse students. “As a Board, we voted to change the name of Converse to Converse University to recognize the school’s 55-year history of offering strong Master’s programs, its recent accreditation as a doctorate-granting institution, and its sizable international student population.”

Harris continued, “Our new university status proudly recognizes the strength of the academics at Converse, the fact that an extraordinary 98% of our faculty hold a terminal degree in their field,

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and the work we've done to grow opportunity, launch degrees, and establish Converse in an exciting new light. Converse will focus on preparing students to become engaged, adaptable, global citizens committed to progress within our society and the communities in which they live and work."

Converse is home to a newly-launched doctoral program in professional leadership, as well as award-winning, history-making programs that include data analytics, science classes that utilize virtual reality goggles to enhance the learning experience, and education programs that have produced a legacy of award-winning teachers and school administrators across the nation. It is home to South Carolina's leading undergraduate music program, the *first* Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative and professional writing, and the Upstate's *only* undergraduate music therapy degree program.

For more information: <https://www.converse.edu/modelchange>

About Converse College

Converse College was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, S.C. who aimed to create an educational experience that enables women "to see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly." Effective July 1, 2021 it will acknowledge its university status under the name Converse University. Converse will be a creator of opportunity for all academically-qualified students through a personalized education that is combined with the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers. Converse pushes beyond traditional boundaries to make a quality educational experience available to every student who seeks it – both at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Converse College's mission is to help students develop their unique voice, a sense of value, and a vision for the future.

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