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Contact:
Holly Duncan
Office: 864.596.9704
holly.duncan@converse.edu

Converse College Receives Over \$750,000 to Support Biomedical Research and Expand Student Research Opportunities

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (October 6, 2020) – Converse College has been awarded grants of over \$750,000 to support its faculty-led biomedical research and expand research opportunities for students. Funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) through the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), the grants are a portion of the \$18.9 million that has been awarded to South Carolina institutions upon NIH’s renewal of the South Carolina IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (SC INBRE) to support biomedical research and infrastructure in the state.

“At Converse, we provide our students with unique learning experiences where they can apply their knowledge, and we empower them to become innovative leaders in their fields,” said Krista L. Newkirk, President of Converse College. “These grants help our students to be fully immersed in their research experience during our Summer Research Program and will provide continuity with their scholarly activity during the academic year.”

The first grant, secured through the efforts of Dr. Neval Erturk, Professor of Biology at Converse, supports overall biomedical research in the college’s Department of Biology, Chemistry and Physics in the amount of \$500,000 over a period of five years. The grant will be applied to faculty and student research across pressing issues in biomedical sciences, such as drug metabolism, obesity, toxicology, biosensor development, and the biology of addiction.

“Involvement in research encourages our students to develop independent critical thinking skills while providing them with experience that is invaluable both for graduate study and work in the industry,” said Dr. Erturk. “This grant will also help expand our efforts to encourage participation in biomedical research projects by minority and underserved groups.”

The funding will also support and enhance Converse’s award-winning [Science Technology Research Scholars \(STARS\) program](#), which encourages high school students to pursue their love of science and interest in the STEM fields. The STARS program allows local high school students to explore the STEM fields while participating in hands-on research with individual mentoring by Converse professors.

Through the Development Research Project Program (DRP) with the SC INBRE, Dr. Chris Varnon, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Converse, secured a \$100,000 grant for two years to support his independent research in the psychology of addiction through the study of invertebrate behavior. Varnon, an experimental psychologist specializing in comparative psychology and behavior analysis, is pioneering biomedical and behavioral research in the United States on alcoholism and substance abuse working with Orange Head roaches (*Eublaberus posticus*).

“We are very pleased and honored to receive this grant, so we can continue to make headway in this critical research of behavioral patterns in substance abuse,” said Dr. Varnon. “The grant will also allow Converse students to gain hands-on experience designing new experiment techniques, and credibility within their fields of study as co-authors on published research papers.”

Converse also received a one-time \$40,000 grant to specifically support and enhance the college’s experimental facilities and laboratories with new supplies, essential gear and test subject facilities, further strengthening the programs at the institution. Additional facilities and administrative indirect funds of at least \$125,000 will be granted to the college over a five-year period to support operational costs.

Converse has been a recipient of SC INBRE and National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding for more than five years with over \$875,000 in support of biomedical research and student training. Converse is proud to be one of a coalition of seventeen South Carolina colleges who are uniting to grow biomedical research opportunities, pioneer original research, and uphold a standard of excellence for our region.

About SC INBRE

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) established the IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) to increase research capacity by programmatic expansion and networking of research activities of faculty and students at academic institutions throughout certain targeted states – with South Carolina being one of those states. SC INBRE is achieving that goal by supporting the career development of faculty and hands-on research training of students at the program’s network institutions through annual workshops for faculty and students focusing on career development, mentoring and other relevant topics, as well as funding opportunities available to any faculty or student at SC INBRE’s network institutions.

About Converse College

Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC 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, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. Converse is 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 qualified 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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