

CONVERSE

Fall 2021

WE
together
WILL





A New Class of Transformative Leaders

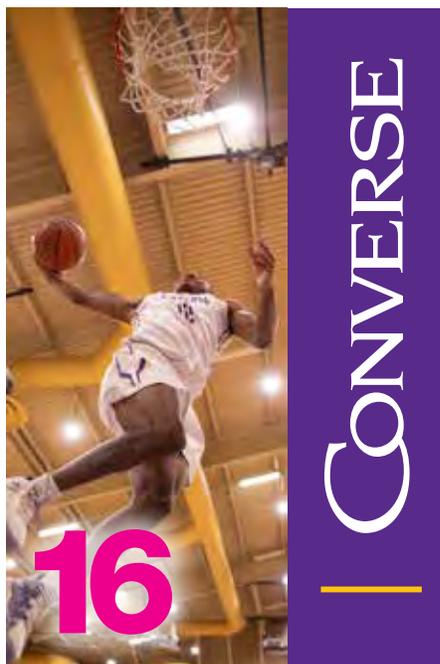
This August the campus was full of energy and activity as Converse welcomed the largest number of new undergraduate students in more than three decades.

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Fall 2021

CREATE

INNOVATE



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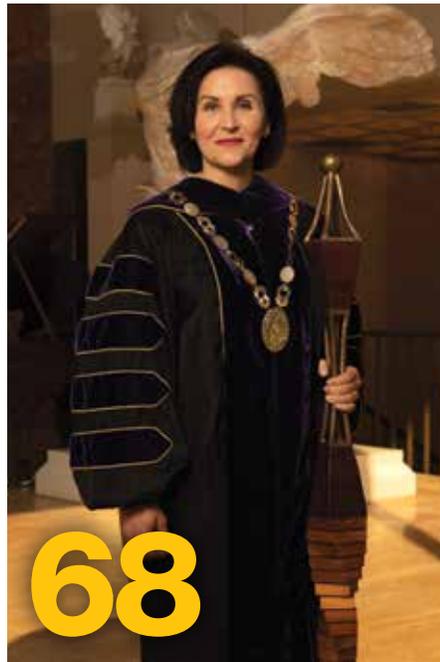
We will **create, innovate, and transform. Together.** This issue of Converse magazine was written by faculty, staff, students and alumni to capture the energy and spirit of our community.

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CONVERSE

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Converse University

“See clearly, Decide wisely, Act justly.”

Now more than ever we are heeding the clarion charge of our founder, Dexter Edgar Converse, as we proudly stand together and resolve that WE WILL for Converse. These three guiding principles **to see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly** have taken on new meaning as our campus has experienced unexpected tragedy with the loss of President Barker and as we undergo unprecedented transformation alongside positive new growth. In the wake of so much change, I am honored to update you on where we have been and where we are headed as we embark on a vibrant, prosperous future for our beloved Converse.

The fall of 2021 has been wildly different than any of us expected. We thought the COVID-19 pandemic would be behind us. We thought contact tracing, quarantine, and isolation would be a thing of the past. More importantly, we eagerly looked forward to gathering together for community celebrations, alumni dinners, recitals, athletic competitions, guest lectures, and performances. Sadly, the pandemic continues to defy expectations across our nation and region.

However, many aspects of this fall have exceeded our expectations in beautiful ways. We welcomed 352 new

students—the largest incoming class to Converse in more than three decades! Our vibrant campus is filled with a dynamic student population that includes:

- New students from 30 states and 15 countries with an average GPA of 4.03, a median SAT score of 1129 and a median ACT of 22.1 for those who chose to provide scores as part of Converse’s test-optional admissions process
- 315 students across the University elected to enroll in the Converse College for Women—175 more participants than we anticipated
- More than 112 emerging artists, performers, and musicians enrolled in the School of the Arts under the leadership of the new Dean, Dr. Chris Vaneman, a dramatic increase over last year
- Over 250 new student-athletes who will compete on our 13 women’s teams, five 5 men’s teams, and two 2 co-ed teams

It brings me great joy to witness the energy and enthusiasm on campus as we welcome the class of 2025 to our traditions and strong focus on academic excellence. However this fall is not how I personally thought I would be experiencing the fall 2021 academic term. I was planning to begin my service as the provost and chief academic officer, supporting our deans as we reinforce and grow our curricular and co-curricular programs. Mostly, I was excited to support my dear friend and mentor, Dr. Jeffrey H. Barker, as he served as the 11th President of Converse and led us toward a more prosperous future. Our campus has been heartbroken by Dr. Barker’s unthinkable loss and we feel his absence daily as we work to honor his legacy by enacting his vision for a stronger, more impactful University. Dr. Barker had big dreams for us and I am proud to have the opportunity to carry those dreams forward for Converse. So, with a heavy heart and a personal commitment to our success, I find myself in the President’s office this fall. I am honored to be able to support a place I love so much during this challenging time and I know our leadership team is up to the task.



Each morning I walk into my office and I am surrounded with Converse mementoes along with my own memories of experiences with past Converse leaders. I think about my interview with President Fleming and the enthusiasm she shared with me as I first began to learn of the special magic of this place. We will need that optimism and vitality as we tell the remarkable story of Converse. I look at the wooden conference table and I think of the strategy sessions that I shared with President Newkirk and then Provost Jeff Barker. We will need that creativity and ingenuity as we drive our city and region vibrantly forward through community partnerships and the strength of our excellent academic programs. And, I look at the photograph from 1909 that hangs over my desk, when the front circle had ruts from wagon wheels and Twichell Auditorium was the brand new jewel on campus. We will need to embrace our tradition of tenacity and resilience as we hold fast to the history and mission of a University that still believes that rich educational experiences should be open to all.

In the wake of such an unexpected late summer and fall, I have been reflecting on times of turmoil in Converse's history. Wendi Arms, our Associate Music Librarian, recently pointed me to an article from The News and Courier out of Charleston from April 23, 1895, written by J.E. Norment. In the article Norment chronicles the 1892 fire that destroyed Main Hall and the public meeting that was quickly held after the fire. In that meeting, money was raised without hesitation and the rebuilding campaign began at that moment without the need of a vote. Can you imagine what it was like to be in that meeting? Norment notes, "Converse College was no longer then merely a hope or an idea, but was a living determination, a settled purpose of the greatest interest and importance in the hearts of the founders." As we rise up to meet our future, arm-in-arm, we are grounded in that living determination—a determination that we can trace from Dexter Edgar Converse to Jeffrey H. Barker and through each alumni who believes that Converse is more than historic buildings and beautiful



grounds. Converse is built of the bonds that we share and our goal for this year is to allow those bonds to bring us close and to connect us to that living determination.

I am so excited to build our connection with you over the coming year and to get to know more about your Converse story. As we continue to focus on a future set forth by the trailblazers of our past, please know that your voice and vision for our beloved Converse is central to our success. Through the unexpected joys and pain, we will remain forever Converse.

Together, WE WILL

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Boone J. Hopkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Boone
Interim President



A Tribute to Dr. Jeffrey H. Barker

Compiled by Melissa Walker, Ph.D. Emerita
George Dean Johnson, Jr. Professor of History

I had the privilege of knowing Jeff Barker for almost 20 years, and I am honored to have been asked to assemble these memories of a gifted teacher, committed and thoughtful leader, and loving family man.

Jeff and I worked closely together, particularly during my later years at Converse when I served as faculty senate president and a member of President Betsy Fleming's cabinet. We shared many high points in Converse life as well as challenging and sad times. Sometimes I exasperated him, and sometimes he exasperated me, but our relationship was based in deep mutual respect.

My first experience of working closely with Jeff was as a faculty representative on the Honor Appeals Board which he chaired. Students who were found responsible for violations of Converse's robust Honor Code were entitled to appeal the verdict or the sanctions in their cases. Appeals were heard by a Board comprised of faculty, students, and administrators, led by the chief academic officer. We wanted to ensure that all students received a fair and impartial hearing and appropriate sanctions for violations. We were there to listen to students who had sometimes made serious mistakes. They were deeply remorseful and emotional at this, a low point in their college careers.

Dr. Barker was at his best in these hearings. He offered every person involved in the case—the Honor Board, the accused, the accuser, and the witnesses—the opportunity to be heard. He asked cogent and revealing questions. He weighed the evidence carefully. Most of all, he treated every student with respect, never shaming them or berating them, no matter how serious their offenses. From Jeff Barker's example in these

hearings, I learned a great deal about the quality of mercy and how to treat people with kindness.

I got to see a more personal side of Jeff when he and I co-edited his grandfather's memoir about growing up in late 19th century Kansas. Jeff talked about how much his grandfather, a lawyer and judge, had influenced him. He asked me to partner with him on that project back in 2008, and he eagerly plunged into the background research. Jeff's enthusiasm was contagious. We finished the book in 2009, and thanks to a recession which had academic presses all over the country cutting their budgets, for years, we were unable to get it published. We finally secured a publisher in early 2020, and working on the final edits was a bright point for both of us during the pandemic. I am grateful to have had the privilege of working with Jeff on a project that was for him a very personal labor of love, and I'm especially glad Jeff got to see the final product.

Former students and colleagues shared their own stories about a remarkable leader. Students hailed a devoted teacher and mentor. Bailey Szustak '13 said, "Even in my undergrad days Dr. Barker was who I wanted to be when I grew up, as a philosopher, a professor, and a human. He was so supportive, incredibly intelligent, and he had extraordinary life stories and a wry sense of humor. He went above and beyond to help me apply to grad school and stayed in touch as the years passed. His wisdom, passion for teaching, and care for his students are leading examples of the kind of professor and person I aim to be."

Stinson Woodward Ferguson '07 said, "Dr. Barker was a father figure to me during times I desperately needed



one after losing my father and stepfather. He was a Sensei to me. I treasured our regular meetings in his office over coffee, which always began and ended with a smile and a hug. There was never an agenda other than ‘just catching up.’ He gave me time and space to express any emotion I was feeling, with trust and without judgment. He didn’t just listen. He always took the extra step of seeking to understand me, validating my feelings, and offering me coping strategies.”

Brandy Blanton ’15 recalled a memorable interaction from her time as an orientation leader. At one assembly, she was tasked with opening doors for incoming students during a downpour. She wrote, “At one point, Dr. Barker came in, holding an umbrella. I chased after him, calling the wrong name like a silly person, but somehow he still realized I was talking to him, responded, and, of course, let me borrow his umbrella. In the bustle of the end of the assembly, I lost his very unremarkable black umbrella. I was so upset. NOT ONLY had I called this wonderful soul by the wrong name, but I had lost his umbrella!! My conscience continued to get the best of me. I got him a new umbrella and wrote him an apology/thank you note to go with it. I tried my best to sneak them both to his door and leave them without him catching me, but of course he did. He found the whole situation hilarious. He told me he had a theory that there were only about ten different black umbrellas in the world, and we were all passing them around to each other. I know the next time I see

a lost black umbrella, I’ll wonder if it didn’t pass through Dr. Barker’s hands before it landed where it is today. Just like those ten black umbrellas, Dr. Barker passed around so much of his kindness.”

Faculty members remembered Jeff as a supportive leader who encouraged them inside and outside the classroom. Dr. Monica McCoy, professor of psychology, said, “Jeff was my boss, and I respected him in

that position, but our interactions never felt like a boss/employee situation. Being with Jeff felt like spending time with a friend - an intelligent, funny, kind friend. At any gathering, I drifted toward Jeff because I truly enjoyed spending time with him. We shared a passion for teaching and Converse, as one might expect, but we also delighted in live theater. Early in his tenure at Converse, Jeff unhesitatingly supported me as I helped students stage a production of *The Vagina Monologues*. I was not sure how he would respond to my performance of “*The Angry Vagina*,” but when I next saw him, he gave me a wry smile and just said, ‘Remind me to never make you mad.’”

Dr. McCoy also remembered his gentle guidance. She said, “Before my first sabbatical, when Jeff was dean, I met with him repeatedly to prepare for my absence. I struggled to prepare for anything that might come up while I was away. Finally, Jeff said to me, ‘Monica, Converse will survive without you.’ He said this with such kindness that I felt relieved rather than devalued. With his wise counsel, Jeff reminded me that Converse was more than one person. I am trying to remember his words now as I try to imagine going on without him here.”

Dr. Neval Erturk, Professor of Biology, recounted one of Jeff Barker’s quiet actions of service to students. She wrote, “Last summer, because of the pandemic, our international students were confined to the dorms for an extended period. Jeff was really concerned about their

wellbeing. One day he called me to ask me to organize a lunch with them. He arrived with several boxes of pizza and ice cream. He talked with each of them individually. He asked them about their families and research. He was always thoughtful, considerate, and caring.”

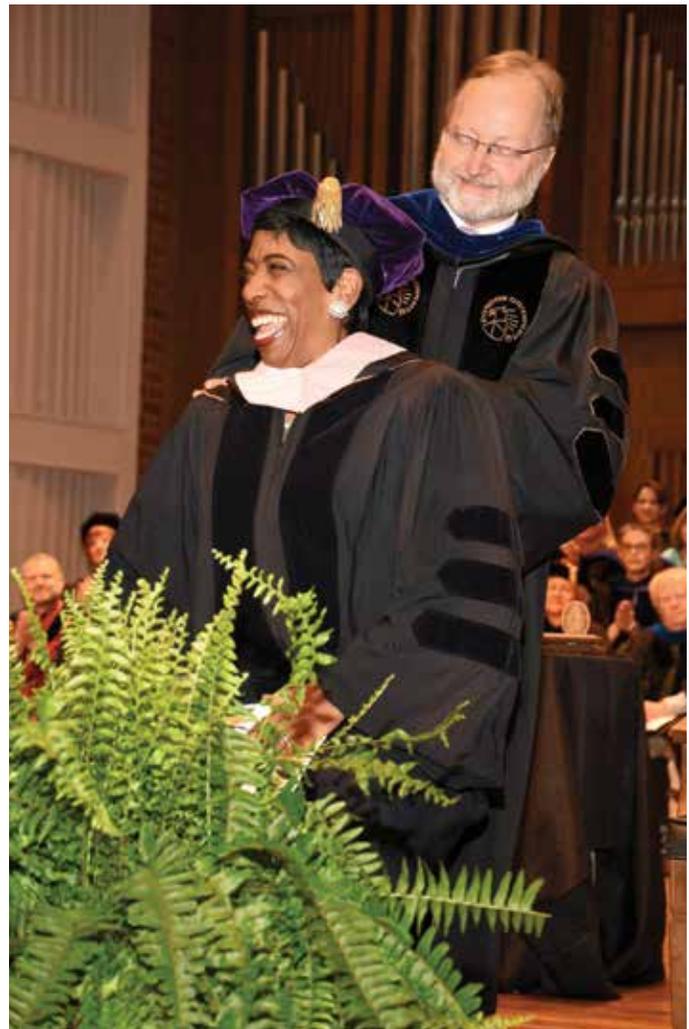
She added, “We all know Jeff cared for the Converse community, but he was also concerned for the wellbeing of the larger Spartanburg community. During the early days of the pandemic, I received a call from him around 8:30 pm. He was apologetic for calling late. He was trying to get an inventory of our personal protective equipment such as goggles, gloves, shields, and disposable masks to donate to the healthcare professionals. The next day he met me early in the morning to help me prepare a package to be delivered to Spartanburg Medical Center.”

Dr. Susanne Floyd Gunter, chair of the department of art and design, lamented, “I’ve lost my best sparring partner. Jeff would call to ask me about how we could implement some new program or idea and many times I would have to say ‘No, Jeff. We cannot do that. Our accreditor will not let us.’ Then, I would have to call our Art and Design accreditor several times, dig through a 3-inch handbook to cite specific standards, and put together a 25-50 page report on exactly why we could not do what he asked. He would always accept the report, shake his head, and say ‘Oh well.’ Through it all, I knew that Jeff Barker loved Converse and wanted us all to succeed. He protected this institution in ways most of us cannot comprehend. Both of us spoke the language of accreditation, even though he might make me prove something to him as if it was some sort of challenge—a challenge that I am going to sorely miss.”

Dr. Kevin DeLapp, Fleming Professor of Philosophy, said, “Jeff Barker was a dear friend and my philosophical role model. He truly lived the examined life that is philosophy’s greatest aspiration, and he threw himself into every class he taught. One of his favorite courses was on philosophy and film. Jeff’s movie choices were not for the faint of heart: each film he selected grappled with issues of the human condition. One stalwart on his syllabus over the years was *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Jeff’s ultimate invitation to his students with this film was to realize the meaning and value they can create through their relationships with one another, even in the face of

tragedy. In the sadness of his absence, I’m heartened by all the testimonies of Jeff’s positive impact on so many people’s lives, in virtue of which we must judge Jeff’s own life as a wonderful one.”

Dr. Erin Templeton, Dean of the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Business and a professor of English, credits Jeff Barker with shaping her career. She wrote, “Jeff Barker hired me as an assistant professor of English at Converse in March of 2007. He was an intimidating person to a brand new assistant professor, but I learned that beneath one of the best poker faces I have ever encountered lay a sharp sense of humor that was usually masked. Over the years, I worked closely with him, first as the Director of Study Travel, and more recently as Dean. That last is at least in part due to a seed that he planted very early in my Converse career. I can’t remember the specific details, but I remember that we were talking about dealing with a difficult situation that involved a student and her parents. Jeff was struggling to figure out how best to solve whatever problem it was, and he asked me how I



would handle the situation. I thought about it. I asked a couple questions for clarification, and then I told him what I would do. He looked thoughtful, nodded his head, and said, “That’s why you’ll be a very good Dean one day.” The verdict is still out on what kind of Dean I am, but until that conversation, I can honestly say that the possibility of becoming one had never crossed my mind. Jeff saw potential though, and he planted seeds not just with me but with many of our colleagues.”

Dr. Templeton went on: “He taught me that despite the popular myth, administration isn’t inherently antagonistic to faculty, and that the most important part of the job is to listen and truly understand where people are coming from—even, and especially, when it’s a different place from us. Most importantly, he taught me the value of having people in the room who aren’t afraid to disagree, that disagreement can be productive when it comes from a place of respect and consideration. I was often the person who disagreed with him in various rooms and at various tables, and I always appreciated that he never dismissed me or my concerns. Finally, on a personal note, I appreciated how much he loved dogs. We both adopted from the

humane society in 2008, and our paths often crossed on the way in or out of obedience classes. From then on, he always asked me how Parker was doing, and more recently, he frequently asked for updates on my Covid-puppy and frequently laughed about Ronan’s contributions to various Zoom meetings—even, much to my own chagrin, the Converse Board of Trustees!”

Throughout his years at Converse, Dr. Barker was a key member of Converse’s senior leadership team under President Nancy Oliver Gray, Betsy Fleming, and Krista Newkirk. Sally Jeter Gregg ‘80, former vice president for enrollment and marketing recalled, “Jeff Barker was at the table for every major challenge and every major decision made at Converse in the past 20 years.” She also recalled his deep love for his family. She said, “Jeff and I had boys who were about the same age, and we spent a lot of time sharing our concerns about navigating their teenage years and our pride at the young men they were becoming. I also remember how Jeff loved and admired his dad. Jeff’s dad was a renowned composer and a musician, and Jeff was so proud of his dad’s accomplishments and shared his love for music. But most of all, I remember the way Jeff adored his wife Jan. She was the center of his world.”





Beth Lancaster '96 former director of media and public relations, worked with Jeff for 17 years. She said, "I appreciated his sensitivity, his dry wit, his candor and willingness to gently offer an alternate perspective, his caring nature, his intellect, his great and often surprising sense of humor, and his genuine interest in an eclectic range of topics. His absence in this world will leave a true void."

Lancaster recalled an interaction that embodied Jeff's humble approach to leadership: "One of my most vivid memories is from when he first came to Converse. Right off the bat, I needed to photograph him for an introduction to our campus community. That photography session may have been one of the least enjoyable moments of his life to that point. It was clear he would rather be doing almost anything other than standing in front of my camera. A great sport--always and in every situation--his effort was monumental, but the big, comfortable smile I would later come to know and appreciate was elusive that afternoon. I think the moment defined him well: Jeff Barker was at ease with people and in sharing his gifts freely, but he did not seek the spotlight and was always humble."

Krista L. Newkirk, the tenth president of Converse, summed up Jeff Barker's character: "Jeff was a scholar, a pragmatic and proactive professional, a philosopher, and at heart, a teacher. He was also a friend. We shared a background of growing up on a cattle ranch and an

understanding of the work ethic and lessons that we learned there. He was calm in a storm and steadfast. He often appeared stoic, but behind the scenes, he cared deeply for people."

Retired associate vice president for academic affairs Dr. Brant Bynum, said; "My strong relationship with Jeff dates from even before he came to Converse; I was a member of the committee that interviewed and recommended him for the job.

From the very beginning we were closely and positively aligned. I served as his 'wing man' for seventeen years and always valued his integrity, loyalty, discretion, fairness, flexibility, calm demeanor, willingness to accept criticism gracefully and, above all, extraordinary dedication to Converse."

Dr. Bynum provided a fitting closing tribute to the man we called professor, leader, colleague and friend. Dr. Bynum wrote, "My nickname for him was Jefe (Spanish for Chief), wordplay on his name and position that also indicates his appreciation for subtle humor. Adios, mi Jefe! We will miss you."

Those who wish to give to the "Jeffrey H. Barker Memorial Fund," visit converse.edu/giving and select fund in the drop-down menu.



Be a Game-Changer

Join the Valkyries Club and support a growing sports tradition! As a member of the official booster organization of Converse Athletics, you will join a host of enthusiastic Valkyries supporters and provide crucial financial support for student-athletes.

To join, visit converse.edu/giving and select “Valkyries Club” link or call **864.577.2050**.



CONVERSE

The Search for Converse's New President

On July 5, 2021, Krista L. Newkirk stepped down as 10th President of Converse to become the 12th President of the University of Redlands in Redlands, California. She served as the President of Converse since July 1, 2016.

To continue fueling the University's momentum and vibrant transformation forward, the Converse Board of Trustees named Kim Kent '97 and Laura Bauknight '87 as the Presidential Search Committee Chairs.

"We are honored to be serving in this role, and we look forward to an open and transparent process," said Bauknight. "We believe our Committee reflects the best of our Board, campus and community, and we are excited to begin the work of seeking our next President."

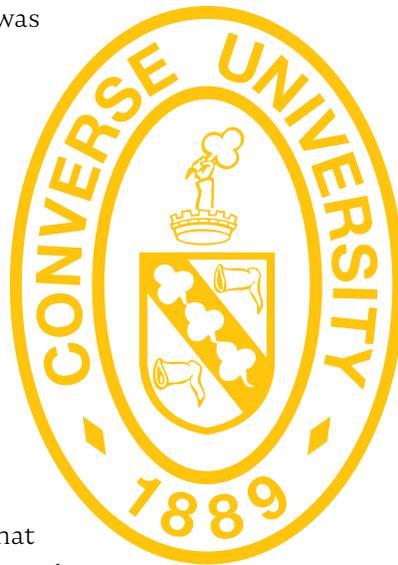
Under the leadership of Kent and Bauknight, a Presidential Search Committee was formed of current and former Converse Board of Trustees members, alumni, faculty, staff, and students. In addition to the 13 committee members, three additional members were appointed to serve as ex officio members of the committee.

One of the Committee's initial objectives was to assess firms that could assist with the search for Converse's next President. After a thorough review, the Committee hired Buffkin / Baker, an executive recruitment firm that has successfully led the presidential search process for other higher education institutions.

In addition, the Committee sent a survey in August to gather input on Converse's new President as well as the future of the University from alumni, faculty, staff, students, donors, and Trustees—ensuring that the voice of the Converse community was heard.

"The focus of this committee is to conduct this search process carefully and thoroughly," explained Kent. "By doing so, we will select the right candidate to continue the work of our strategic model change and our progress towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive Converse."

Please visit converse.edu/about/presidential-search for the most up-to-date information.



2021-2022 PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

Co-Chairs

Laura Chappell Bauknight '87,
Trustee

Kimberly Varnadoe Kent '97,
Former Board of Trustees Chair

Members

Randall Chambers, *Trustee*

Phyllis Perrin Harris '82, *Trustee
and Former Board of Trustees Chair*

Ken Howard, *Life Trustee*

Karla Jones '85, *Trustee*

Mike Kennedy, *Interim Vice
President for Philanthropy and
Alumni Relations*

Randy Loggins, *Deputy Director
of Athletics*

Karen Mims '22, *Student
Government Association President*

Margaret Moore, *Faculty Senate
President and Associate Professor
of Physical Education*

Wallace Davison Prestwood '89,
Trustee

Linda Layman Redding '88,
Trustee

Madelyn Young, *Associate
Professor of Economics*

Ex Officio Members

Boone Hopkins, *Interim Provost
for 2021-2023*

Pamela Greenway, *Senior
Executive Assistant to the President
and Assistant Secretary to the
Board of Trustees*

Sandra Shearouse Morelli '78,
Board of Trustees Chair

The Transformation to Converse University

It's no secret Converse is growing and implementing some monumental changes. On February 7, 2020, under the leadership of President Krista Newkirk, with the full support of the Board of Trustees, Converse announced that it would add a co-educational undergraduate residential program alongside the Converse College for Women and continue to expand its international programs. The institution's model change also included a name change from college to university, effective July 1, 2021.

"Converse has always been a trailblazer. It is a small university with a mighty vision," said Newkirk. We 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, we made history again by opening our doors to all academically-qualified students."

Leading the Charge

Since the very beginning of this process, Converse has engaged its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community to find the best way forward. In February 2020, committees were created to focus on four fundamental areas:

- the classroom experience;
- alumni, donor, and community engagement;
- recruitment and marketing of prospective students; and
- the student experience on campus.

"Change is challenging, but through coming together with our faculty, our staff, our students, our alumni, our donors, and the community, we've risen to that challenge," said Newkirk. "We've developed a model that makes for a successful Converse and we have an energy and an excitement for what is

coming in the future."

Classroom Experience Committee

This committee was primarily composed of faculty and focused on research addressing best practices to ensure that the classroom experience is encouraging and inclusive. The committee strived to ensure that all plans moving forward:

- allow for each student to feel equally valued and empowered to participate;
- allow for students to have the specific tools they need to be successful;
- maintain a vibrant sense of community; and
- expand upon our tradition of academic excellence.

Recommendations of the committee include a shared online library of classroom best practices, revising student evaluations to include the inclusivity of the classroom experience, and the development of the Center for Academic Excellence. Located on the 3rd floor of the Mickel Library, the Center for Academic Excellence will be a teaching and learning hub for faculty, centering on conversations about classroom instruction and the academic progress of students. The 3rd floor space will be partially renovated using grant funding in the summer of 2021 to enhance the overall student learning experience at Converse University.



Alumni, Donor, and Community Relations Committee

This committee focused on the best way for Converse to communicate with key constituents, with an emphasis on exploring how to best cultivate and strengthen our relationship with each group. This committee also evaluated event structure to encourage alumni engagement both in time and talent.

Student Recruitment and Marketing Committee

This committee focused on the best ways to recruit and foster enrollment by an expanding demographic of students. The members of this committee worked collaboratively with the Student Experience Committee to ensure that all future marketing and communications efforts aligned with any decisions that impacted housing, programming, and student experiences.

Student Experience Committee

This committee focused on promoting a healthy campus culture that supported student retention and success, focusing not only the experiences of Converse's traditional students, but also non-traditional and graduate students. Areas that were evaluated included:

- Programming and living space for the Converse College for Women
- Student experiences and activities to promote unity
- Safety policies and practices
- Student programming and traditions
- Policy changes
- Athletics
- Facilities

The Converse Brand

On the cusp of a historic change, Converse seized the momentum of its future vision and reintroduced itself proudly, powerfully, and memorably with the new “We Will” marketing campaign. The “We Will” message highlights that we will be agents of transformation; that we will provide a rich educational experience that is accessible to all qualified students; and that we will demonstrate to each other and our community that we are born of creativity and ingenuity, as we mentor the groundbreaking and ceiling-smashing leaders of tomorrow.

The rebrand is the culmination of more than a year of research and planning, shaped by feedback from faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and the community-at-large. It not only tells the Converse story by communicating our strengths and relevance to prospective students, but it also helps to generate awareness and build pride among alumni, influencers, employers, peer institutions, and Converse's own internal community. In addition to external signage

on campus, campaign marketing strategies have included digital display ads, billboards, print ads, marketing videos, and more.



At-A-Glance

MISSION Converse empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.

VISION Converse advances a culture of belonging and collaboration that ignites creativity, innovation, and transformation.

UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE Converse University is the overarching entity of which all students, faculty, and staff are a part. The University will have an academic structure consisting of the existing academic schools: School of the Arts; Education and Graduate Studies; and Humanities, Sciences and Business. Under the university umbrella, Converse will maintain an undergraduate Converse College for Women.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

converse.edu/proposedmodelchange



Meet Isaiah Caston '25

Coed Trailblazer Enrolled in Converse University's Inaugural Freshman Class

HOMETOWN Spartanburg, SC **MAJOR** Psychology and Contemporary Music Media

CREATE

Why did you choose Converse University?

From the time I was in middle school, I had heard such wonderful things about Converse, and by the 10th grade, I knew it was where I wanted to continue my education. At the time, the undergraduate program was only available for women, but while I was at my high school college fair, Michele [Converse Undergraduate Admissions Counselor] told me that there was a high probability that Converse would soon go co-ed. Ironically, the first year of undergraduate co-ed is my first year there! I'm so thankful for that.

How has the Converse community made you feel welcome?

Converse is one of the most welcoming places that I've been to, and I've been to some pretty welcoming places. As of right now, I have gotten to know the Admissions team the most. I'm very appreciative of all that they have done for me—and I'm not even attending the school yet! I also have to talk about Dr. Robins and Dr. Berry, they're so awesome! I'm truly looking forward to furthering my musical intelligence with them!

What are you most excited about experiencing your Freshman year?

I can't wait to experience the freedoms of being a college student as well as meeting tons of new faces. I would consider myself quite the social person so I am really looking forward to that! And lastly, the music. I love music more than anything and the atmosphere at Converse just screams music and art. I'm just so excited!

What would you say to someone considering enrolling at Converse? Do it. You won't regret it.



Converse College for Women

Share your power; find your purpose. That phrase is at the heart of the Converse College for Women, an empowering living-learning community that focuses on mentorship, service, and leadership.

“We are rooted in the Converse sisterhood that spans more than one hundred and thirty years,” said Dr. Chandra Hopkins, Dean of the Converse College for Women. “Our purpose is to live out the Founder’s Ideal to see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly and we do this through community events,

engaging programming, women’s-centered courses, and traditions that unite us.”

Students who enroll in the Women’s College, which is housed in Pell Hall, will experience professional development opportunities that are spread throughout their four years at Converse. In addition, those who choose to enroll in the College will have the opportunity to participate in monthly community events and annual traditions.

“Converse is a special place where our students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and a wonderful support for and belief in each other,” explains Hopkins. “At the Women’s College, we intentionally build upon this unique formula as we work together to serve others, to support women and girls, and to empower each student to find their purpose and change their communities for good.”

Discover more! converse.edu/CCW



Traditions at Converse

The Converse College for Women will have its own set of traditions that connects its members to generations of Converse women. Big Sis, Lil’ Sis will continue in the first year. The second-year students will be part of the Sisterhood Brunch and Bracelet Ceremony. Third-year students will have a junior leadership experience including community service. During their fourth year, Converse College for Women students will experience a senior candlelight dinner and service celebration.

Campus traditions that will be part of Converse University include:

- 1889 Week
- Freshmen pinning
- Sophomore Social Celebration: picnic with gift of picnic blankets
- Junior Ring Ceremony
- Senior BBQ
- Montgomery by Moonlight
- May Day – with incorporation of May King
- Hats On and Hats Off



Meet Karen Mims '22

SGA President Finds Her Place in the Converse College For Women

HOMETOWN Myrtle Beach, SC **MAJOR** History

CREATE



Why did you choose Converse?

I chose Converse primarily for its location and small class sizes. One of the high schools that I attended had relatively small classroom sizes and I wanted the same experience of a small, but mighty community.

What inspired you to continue your senior year under the Converse College for Women umbrella?

In addition to its location and small size, I also chose Converse because it was a women's college. As a history major, I loved the idea of being part of something historic like a women's college. I also love that Converse provides a very women-empowerment type of environment. Honestly, I don't know when I'll have another opportunity to encounter a specifically curated environment like this, so why not join the program when I can?

How do you hope to see the Women's College progress in the coming years?

The Women's College is already starting out incredibly strong. I hope it continues to progress creatively, specifically as it relates to its programming and leadership opportunities.

What excites you about the change from Converse College to Converse University?

As SGA President and a heavily involved student, I feel all the school spirit, love, and support when students come out to events, activities, panels, workshops, and more! With an extra-large incoming class, I can't wait to see all the new faces at these campus events. I'm also excited to see how Converse as an institution grows its support systems. How will we expand to empower *ALL* students? How will current students embrace that? Will they embrace that? What work needs to be done so this is a campus for all? Again, I've met some of the best people here and I wish that same experience for everyone that walks across this campus.

What kind of future do you envision for Converse University?

I hope Converse University grows to be able to provide more financial aid to its underrepresented, minority students. In my almost four years at Converse, I've seen a handful of my peers leave because paying for their education was not feasible. I also hope to see a future with a faculty that grows alongside its students. Students of color want to see more educators on this campus that look like them. Being able to identify with some of the same experiences as your professor is life changing.

What would you say to someone who is considering Converse?

Tour the campus. Explore every inch of the Converse website, generate any questions, and reach out to current students and alumni. Converse is what you make it. Get involved, go to class, reach out for help, meet new people.



CONVERSE

VALKYRIES ATHLETICS

Converse has a rich history of competitive NCAA Division II athletics programs. Now, Converse continues building and growing elite women's teams while also welcoming male athletes to the unique and diverse tapestry of the Valkyries.

In addition to its 13 women's sports teams, Converse Athletics now has expanded equestrian (IHSA) to include men, added esports as a co-educational team, and launched five new NCAA Division II male teams: basketball, cross country, soccer, tennis, and track and field (indoor/outdoor).

"It's a very exciting time for Converse Athletics – for both male and female student-athletes," explains Jenn Bell, Director of Athletics. "As the athletics department ramps up for our 2021-2022 season, we have worked tirelessly to ensure the infrastructure, including facilities, coaches, and administration, are in place to support our student-athletes."

Along with the new teams, improvement to athletic facilities will include putting green resurfacing, breakaway backboards, gym floor resurfacing, tennis court resurfacing,

an improved sound system, and a new esports off-site training facility. Thanks to the continued support and extreme generosity of Agnes Binder Weisiger '63, Athletics was additionally able to begin construction on a turf soccer field this summer. This \$1 million gift will also provide a non-regulation track around the field's perimeter. Future improvements to athletic facilities on the horizon include expansion of the Marsha H. Gibbs Field House and climate-controlled storage in our auxiliary gym.

Faculty mentorship for each sport and programming centered around The Valkyrie Way will be key components of Converse Athletics for both men and women.

Bell continues, "Across all of our teams, a Converse student-athlete is known as someone who is highly competitive, is committed to excellence, is a person of character, and is devoted to building a close community."



Meet Mira Pölzer '24

Valkyries Student-Athlete Joins a Community of Game-Changers

HOMETOWN Munich, Germany **MAJOR** Business Administration with a concentration in Sports Management

CREATE



As a student-athlete, how has Converse supported you on and off the field?

First of all, it's great how academics and sports are becoming combined. Not only at Converse but in America in general. This allows me to play the sport I love while still performing in the highest possible way in the classroom. Here specifically, Coach Muir helped me during our weekly academic meetings where I could not only get academic advice but could also discuss any other challenging situations that I might be facing. Also, Coach Val has done a great job recruiting team players for next year, and she is always willing to listen. She helped me through a difficult year during the pandemic. Last but not least, Converse and our donors are supporting me and the Field Hockey team by building the turf—thank you!

What excites you about the change to Converse University?

Converse being called Converse University benefits international students because a bachelor degree from a

university is internationally more accepted. What excites me about Converse becoming co-ed is about the new sports programs. I believe it will bring Converse Athletics to a different standing within the overall community. I also hope that a different culture of supporting each other through this change will be implemented and developed!

As you look to the future, how do you hope Converse Athletics will grow?

For field hockey, I hope to win the conference next year and that we get to participate in some bigger tournaments as well. But in general, I just hope we continue to build a stronger campus community where everybody is supportive and celebrates each and everyone's successes.

What would you say to an athlete considering Converse?

I would say that if he or she wants to grow as a person and is always willing to give a hundred percent to do so, then Converse is the right fit!

Dynamic New Home for Converse Athletics' Inaugural Esports Program

Walk around Drayton Mills, a historic textile mill, now transformed into a thriving community with luxury loft apartments and a connected marketplace, and you might find a local brewery, a restaurant, or even a boutique. What you might not expect to stumble upon is Converse's dynamic new space that houses Athletics' inaugural co-educational esports program.

Located 2 miles from Converse's main campus, the 2,500-square-foot space at Drayton Mills features distinctive exposed brick, broad windows, 25-foot ceilings, modern glass doors, and an elevated 2-story loft. Converse incorporated custom designs from faculty members Meirav Goldhour, Assistant Professor of Interior Design and Mike Massengale, Instructor of Art, as well as current Art & Design students, to create an aesthetically-pleasing, attention-grabbing esports hub, which opened in August 2021.

"Using the latest industry-standard design software, we blended rich historic architecture with bold, modern elements," explained Goldhour. "Our collaboration with Athletics allowed us to help create a space with supportive infrastructure, gaming stations, and equipment for the Valkyries esports team."

In the near future, the space will also allow up-and-coming esports athletes from local high schools to fuel their passion for esports and utilize the training hub through clubs, camps, and community events. Converse also plans to create and broadcast live-streamed esports competitions to the main Converse campus to engage the campus community and allow students to gain IT experience as they execute the broadcasting.



Interior Design 3D renderings created by Meirav Goldhour, Assistant Professor of Interior Design



Interior Design 3D renderings created by Meirav Goldhour, Assistant Professor of Interior Design

“We are thrilled to have a presence at Drayton Mills and expand our influence in the greater Spartanburg community,” said Jenn Bell, Athletic Director for Converse. “With this elevated space, our Valkyries esports team will be able to thrive as a robust collegiate team with student-athletes from all over the world.”

With the growth of collegiate esports, Converse will promote its strong STEM programs, including Computer Science offerings that advance the opportunities of our esports students.

“This is just the beginning. With the 40+ talented student-athletes that we’ve already recruited, and now with this amazing space to really support

us, we’re aiming to be in the Top 25 Colleges and Universities for esports in the nation,” said Bell.

In addition to other conferences, the Valkyries esports team will compete this year in the Peach Belt Conference for *League of Legends* and *Overwatch* as well as in the Carolina Esports Conference— a regional-based championship to title the Best Esports Program in the Carolinas.

“We want our new suite to be an esports hub for collegiate student-athletes and community members,” said Bell. “As Converse Athletics draws local and national attention, we look forward to putting Spartanburg on the global map as we drive our region vibrantly forward.”

NAVIGATING FORWARD:

Converse Prevails Against Pandemic

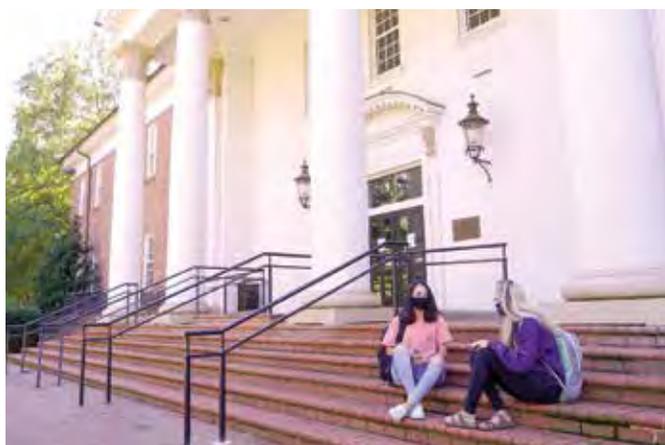




As the spring 2021 semester concluded, Converse along with the rest of the country experienced reduced COVID-19 infection rates and an increase in vaccination rates—allowing the campus to return to in-person operations for Fall 2021.

Starting in August, students, faculty, and staff began attending classes and performing their work responsibilities at the Spartanburg and University Center of Greenville campuses, to include classrooms returning to their regular capacity as public health conditions allowed.

“As the country continues to recover, Converse has stayed vigilant to ensure that our campus can continue to return to normal,” said Dr. Boone Hopkins, Interim President. “To encourage higher vaccination rates, we have even offered incentives, like housing grants and meal plans, to those students who are fully vaccinated.”



Throughout the pandemic, Converse has strived to exceed expectations. During the Fall 2020, January 2021, and Spring 2021 terms, Converse utilized a high-flex instructional model, with in-person and online components and options for asynchronous learning. The campus also observed safety guidelines and protocols to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 which included:

- Use of face coverings in classrooms and public areas;
- Reconfiguring seating arrangements and occupancy to promote physical distancing;
- Placing signage to reinforce physical distancing measures and line management in high-traffic areas;
- Redesigning how meals are provided and seating arrangements in the dining hall;
- Installing safety shields to separate individuals in customer service areas;
- Allowing non-essential staff the option for remote work;
- Health screenings through a daily symptom checklist questionnaire;
- Free, on-campus vaccination and testing clinics; and
- Providing assistance and accommodations for those who are immunocompromised.

While guidelines have shifted slightly for the Fall 2021 semester, Converse continues to keep protocols in place to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

“To do all this safely and successfully, Converse has remained adaptable,” said President Hopkins. “We’ve adjusted how our campus community lives, studies, and works so we can maintain an enriching learning environment.”

Read on to learn more about how Converse preserved in the midst of a national health crisis.

CONVERSE

COMPASSION, COMMITMENT AND COMMUNITY by John Jeter

If nothing else, the pandemic provided a booster shot to Converse's reputation as a family unit—and then some. Beyond just creating and following a required do-this-do-that list of health-and-safety guidelines, the University tried to attend to every aspect of life on- and off-campus.

Here's one example. "We were able to help a family purchase a headstone for their loved one that had died due to COVID, and they didn't have the money for that," says J.W. Kellam, Associate Vice President for Student Financial Services.

The fund came from two rounds of federal assistance totaling nearly \$1.3 million to Converse, split evenly between students and campus operations. Every penny was disbursed, Kellam says, from helping pay childcare costs to a student who nearly dropped out because she had relied on her elderly parents — both of whom died.

Kellam is among several administrators who credit Converse's response to the health crisis that strained everyone's mental, physical, spiritual, financial, and emotional health. Not to mention the campus's ongoing work.

How did Converse make things work when just about every other institution suffered missteps?

"We all wore multiple hats, which is also what gave more holistic and individual attention to everybody, which created more buy-in," says Kristin Lacey, Vice President of Operations and Strategic Planning. "When we're making operational decisions, we're being mindful that our students, our faculty, our staff, our adjuncts, the Converse community in a broader sense—all are working through the pandemic in different ways."

The coronavirus hit mental health especially hard. As Bethany Garr, Director of Counseling and Wellness, says:

"I think the biggest issue that we've seen is just the amount of grief that people are dealing with. We have not seen a year where we've had so many students experience deaths in their immediate family—there's been a huge amount of loss."

Couple that with the normal-world stresses of academics and athletics, extracurricular activities and the typical demands of college life: and, Garr says, "I can't imagine how

overwhelming that kind of student experience would be."

So Converse stepped up. Garr and Lacey credit students' desire to learn in the classroom, and faculty and staff's all-hands-on-deck efforts with mitigating the pandemic that infected fewer than 7% of the Converse's overall population of roughly 2,000 people.

"The thing that I'm most proud of is the fact that the entire community got on board with all of this," Garr says. "I mean, I could write policies and procedures until my hands bleed, and it's not going to make a difference unless everyone is willing to follow those guidelines and willing to hold each other accountable and make sure that as a community we were all staying safe and healthy."

That's not all.

Converse's 781 traditional undergraduate students, Converse II students and graduate students received an average financial assistance of about \$850 each, Kellam says, and he added this kicker: Several students donated some or all of their aid to a benevolence fund for their peers.

Not terribly surprising given an institution with a 19th-century mission statement that feels especially resonant these days: “see clearly, decide wisely and act justly.”

“A big part of the work is just understanding the culture of Converse and being aware of how some of those policies and procedures may affect the students we have here, the traditions that we have or things like even just the community in Spartanburg, and how our students and our employees might be uniquely impacted as compared to other institutions,” Lacey says.

In other words, Converse continues to live by its mission to “see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.”

“Resilient and adaptable,” Garr says. “We all had to help out in areas that we’re not typically responsible for, and I think in the grand scheme of things, being able to be more resilient and adaptable makes you a stronger person in the long run and then that makes us a stronger institution.”



Forging Connections Through the Arts & Diplomacy

At Converse, students performed on stages that had to be re-created, re-invented and expanded so we could fill our most essential need: interaction.

“Students were able to experience art at a time when face-to-face, human-to-human interaction was so severely limited for so many months,” says Chris Vaneman, Dean of the School of the Arts. “From a practical standpoint, visual and performing arts are essentially a social activity.”

Hence “Essential Acts,” a series of outdoor performances that began last fall. Every Friday at 4 p.m., students throughout the School of the Arts brought their endless hours of practice in music, theatre and visual arts

to pop-up performances from the Montgomery patio to the Marian Anderson statue.

“For our little audiences and our students, it just did wonders for our soul,” says Susana Lalama, Associate Professor of Music Education. “It made us feel like we are still important as far as what we do, it made us feel human again. I think it gave them that little sense of, “No one can take this away from us, because we’re going to find a way to be the musicians that we are.”

Converse not only brought the arts to the outside world, but brought the outside world to Converse ... through virtual diplomacy.

Kennedy Anderson '21, a Political Science major, served as Secretary-General for the 2021 Model NATO conference, which normally draws some 200 collegiate delegates to Washington, D.C.

This year, Converse’s multi-award-winning debate team took on the responsibility to create a full-on platform that ultimately attracted around 300 participants from all over the world. Zooms came in from Slovakia, the London School of Economics, Penn State and the Royal Military College of Canada, among other places. Many of them had never attended the event, which is held annually on Valentine’s Day weekend.



Margaret Atwood's "The Penelopiad" at the Rainey Amphitheater



Musical Performances on Johnson Plaza

And thanks to the unexpected boon of remote connections these days, Converse managed to attract the highest-level NATO diplomat ever to address a model conference.

For Kennedy and her team of about 20 students, days turned into months of logistics work, from arranging multiple classrooms and their technology to figuring out schedules across numerous time zones.

“I think it says that even in the worst of times Converse is pretty perseverant,” she says. “This was a 100% student-led thing, and this was from the brain of Converse. And I think that shows kind of the ingenuity and spirit that has really been pushed into us.”



The 36th Annual International Model NATO virtually co-hosted by Converse



Open Figure Drawing Event

The Students' Perspective:

Q&A with International Students, Jemma and Erica

“Everyone is just so passionate about what they’re doing.”



The first thing you notice when you chat with Jemma Van Jaarsveldt '24 and Erica Crowther '24 is that they seem like twins.

They finish each other's sentences, they're both Converse freshmen theatre and dance majors, and both are from South Africa: Emma from Johannesburg, Erica from Pretoria. Last fall, they took Converse courses online, and both arrived on campus in late January.

In May, Converse Zoomed with them while they sat side-by-side in the Montgomery building. (The Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.):

What was last fall like, attending Converse online?

Jemma: It was weird.

Erica: It *was* weird, but it was nice to be home and have class. It wasn't as hard as you would expect it to be online. Also, with the time difference, we only had class at night, so our classes started at 6, so we had the whole day to do our work before the class starts ... It's nice to be in person, I must say. Zoom has its advantages, but it's nice to have sort of a routine of walking to class, it gets you more motivated. ... It's nice to be on campus, it makes a difference.

Have you had any fun?

Jemma: Quarantine for the first two weeks and then *boom!* I get COVID ... so now that we have been exposed, we go to everything. Every event that's on campus, we are there.

Erica: You know, South African people, we like to do things, we don't just—

Jemma: We like to have fun—

Erica: Not just sit and do nothing.

What are some differences between learning here and being a student back home?

Jemma: I want to say the professors here are amazing.

Erica: Yes!

Jemma: And that's one thing I really admire Converse for because every one of my professors are so passionate about what they are doing. I've never taken a class on history in my life. Then I had Dr. [Edward] Woodfin [George Dean Johnson Chair of the History Department], and I added history as a minor. Everyone is just so passionate about what they're doing and that's just so amazing to be around. Even the students, music students doing their recitals, everyone—

Erica: And it's a different kind of teaching than we have in South Africa, which we really enjoy. It's more encouraging and supportive.

Jemma: And they want to help you, whatever you need—

Erica: Where, in South Africa, it's more like, 'Get yourself together.' You make a mistake, it's like, 'Zero, it's not my problem,' and here everyone's really nice ... so it's not boring to go to class because the teachers really like what they do, and they really care about their students, I would say.

Jemma: We were surprised because—

Erica: We're not used to kindness. [Both burst out laughing.] The teacher's, like, "If you have a problem, just email me and we can extend the assignment, or we can discuss it," and I was like, "*What?!*"

Jemma: Back home, if you email professors, it's like, "Why are you emailing me? Just do the work."

Are you happy with selecting Converse?

Jemma: I believe you're never in the wrong place, so we made the right choice.

Erica: If we were given the choice again, we'd make the same decision again to come back. I think we've grown a lot—

Jemma: Yes!



Erica (far left) and Jemma (center) perform in Dance Converse's The Promise of Tomorrow.

In A Virtual World, Alumni Stay Plugged In

How do you navigate networking and maintaining the bonds of the Converse community in the midst of a pandemic? Houston-based alumna Danielle Beckford '05 "Zoomed" in with a solution and went to work on re-engaging her local alumni chapter.

"It's been a weird thing—we still want to be able to get together and see each other, and so we have to rethink how we do events," says Danielle, a project marketing manager at Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church.

Before COVID-19, alumni would get together for, say, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo or when the University president came to town.



The Houston area alone includes around 85 Converse grads, Danielle says. Last December, the chapter gathered online for “Cocoa with Connies,” an ugly sweater contest and a name-that-Christmas-carol game.

Valerie Dowling '07, a Converse Alumni Association Board member and chair of the TAPP committee, points with pride to the Houston chapter's revitalization.

“It's been interesting to watch the challenges and opportunities that come with a virtual world,” says Valerie, who lives in the Washington, DC, area and works for International Republican Institute as Director of the Women's Democracy Network. “but it also creates an opportunity for people to connect more and more broadly,”

Another benefit, both say: Nobody has to leave the house, let alone get dressed up.

Danielle says the process has even helped her improve her networking and community-building skills—especially, she says, with “other people who were passionate about what I'm passionate about.”

So, what does all this say about Converse alums' determination to be together?

“We're a resilient group,” Danielle says, “and we're going to do what it takes to make sure that we stay connected and just to let them know that someone is there.”

Reunion Weekend Recap



Although virtual events could never replace the joy and spontaneity of reconnecting with classmates in person, Converse hosted some of alumni's favorite traditions online for Reunion Weekend 2021. This year's virtual reunion provided attendees the opportunity to tune in for 'live' virtual events as well as an in-person social event at Mata's in Spartanburg, SC. In addition, the 2020 and 2021 Alumni Achievement Award recipients were recognized with an exclusive virtual ceremony.

DID YOU KNOW? The Office of Alumni Relations is hitting the road again and looking forward to in-person events. Learn more! converse.edu/alumni.



com·mence·ment

\kə-'men(t)s-mənt\ (noun)

A beginning or start.



After academia’s spring rites were all but eliminated nationwide last year, Converse was exhilarated to begin the pomp-and-circumstance season with a blowout dance party and an in-person Commencement Ceremony.

The celebrations kicked off in May, when the nine-piece Jessie’s Girls band rocked more than 300 students, faculty and staff for three hours nonstop in the Quad.

“With COVID, everyone was masked and socially distanced so nobody really got a chance to interact,” says Daylee Pruitt, a junior Contemporary Music major and one of Converse’s Music Business & Technology students who produced the show as part of their practicum.

“The idea of live music and being able to come out and dance and have fun with your friends and eat and drink, it’s just a really good experience

that people wanted to have,” she says. “That’s one way that I can help connect people because at Converse, being a close-knit community, almost everyone knows each other.”

Pam Wylie, Converse’s Interim Registrar, wanted that same feeling for the Class of 2021 for Commencement — a return to the University’s annual celebration of community and accomplishment.



“We’ve tried to keep elements in the Commencement ceremony that feel like Converse as much as possible.”

Because safety protocols still prevailed, Converse had to limit attendance to 1,500 in the Vikings’ 5,500-capacity football field but, with the help of live-streaming, the University pulled together a hybrid production that blended the high-tech and traditional.

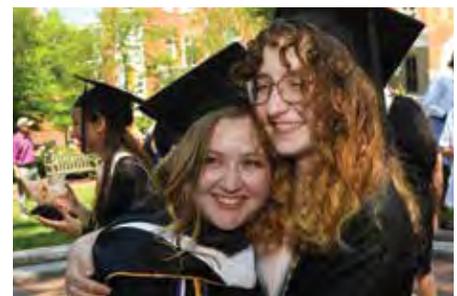
While Spartanburg High School’s stadium might not have the same intimate feel as Converse’s historic Twichell Auditorium, the roughly 400 undergraduate and grad students still experienced the spirit of Converse during its 129th Commencement Ceremony.

As Wylie puts it, “The Class of 2021 overcame many challenges. They fervently pursued passions, attained academic excellence, and grew as individuals who now stand ready to pursue professions and build up



communities. That’s something to commemorate.”

In other words, from the semester-ending party to the college-career-ending celebration for seniors, the Converse show goes on.



Fostering Wise Leaders

The joy was palpable as students, faculty, staff and guests hailed undergraduates and graduates degree candidates at Converse's 2021 commencement ceremony on Sunday, May 23 at the Spartanburg High School Stadium.



It's not just beakers and Bunsen burners for Converse's Department of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. In addition to what's taught in the traditional teaching lab, the department provides students with an integrated approach that combines interdisciplinary coursework, community partnerships, and faculty-mentored research, thereby equipping students with the skills needed to be successful in a variety of future careers.

A key component of the department's DNA is an emphasis on faculty-mentored research. Under the leadership of biology professor Dr. Neval Erturk, Converse has received more than \$626,000 in support of biomedical science research and student training from SC INBRE (IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Courtney Dziejwior '21, chemistry and music double major, can testify to the positive impact research at Converse had on her academic experiences and beyond. Dziejwior conducted a prolonged experiment on the synthesis of stimuli-responsive, programmable polymers the summer after her freshman year and continued the project for three years. "It was a great experience that led to me producing a thesis on the project for honors in-field," Dziejwior explained.

The Lab & Beyond

by Rachel Black '23



Dziewior's experiences at Converse also helped her land an external research opportunity through the Research Experiences for Undergraduates program at Boston College and prompted her to pursue a PhD in chemistry. In fact, this fall she will continue her studies at Duke University. "My experience at Converse made it really easy to aspire to getting into a graduate school," Dziewior said.

Biology major Phylcia Allen '21, similarly stressed the close faculty-student relationships in Converse's science community. In the summer of 2020 she worked with biology professor Dr. Edna Steele and fellow biology student Mary Owens Davidson '22 to investigate the effects of herbicides on the

worm *Eisenia fetida*. In addition to strengthening their research techniques and presentation skills, the experience allowed the pair to deepen their personal relationship with their professor. "The faculty here are always eager to help, whether with coursework or professional advice," Allen stated. "I found that the STEM community on campus is very welcoming."

The inclusive environment is something Dr. Will Case, associate provost for student success, associate professor of chemistry, co-director of the Nisbet Honors Program can't emphasize enough. "In STEM fields, the research shows that having a sense of belonging, a sense of place, really helps in

terms of being able to do well in the classroom," he explained. "It pains me sometimes when I see students in freshman-level science classes who feel like they don't belong, or who feel it's too hard...We want to take away that 'scary' factor...and allow students, when they come [to Converse], to be confident and ready to succeed."

Converse's enthusiasm for science-related opportunities goes beyond the undergraduate experience. The community programs at Converse are a way for younger students to start building their confidence and forming relationships with professors and students before they begin their college journey.



Spearheaded by Dr. Erturk, the Science, Technology, and Research Scholars (STARS) program at Converse encourages interest in scientific research careers by pairing outstanding high school students with Converse faculty for long-term, in-depth science and technology projects. Accepted students are individually mentored in one of the Converse laboratories in biology, biochemistry, psychology, and computer science. In 2018, the program was honored with the Ibrahim Janajreh Young Innovator Award, recognizing it as a remarkable South Carolina program that encourages young people in STEM fields.

Davidson, who participated in STARS as a high school student, is a prime example of how the program inspires students to develop a love for STEM. “Through the program, I was able to make connections with Converse professors at an early age,” Davidson explained. “Because my professors believed in me then, as they continue today, I had the confidence to pursue other research opportunities and was able to participate in grant-funded research.”

The department’s connection to the community extends to creating business partnerships that help prepare students for careers in STEM fields. Board of Trustees member Dwight Van Inwegen, a finance executive at Thermo Fisher Scientific, helped provide Converse’s science department with multiple pieces of equipment, including a gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer (GC-MS) that was donated to Converse in 2019. A centrifuge was donated the following year,

and a benchtop nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectrometer was purchased for Converse in 2021 with the help of Sandra Shearouse Morelli ’78, Board of Trustees chair who also graduated from Converse with a Bachelor of Arts in chemistry.

Van Inwegen explained that he first became interested in the mission of Converse through his wife, who graduated from Converse in 1987. “We have a mission [at Thermo Fisher Scientific] to help bring more women and minorities into STEM roles.... I think it’s great to be able to create opportunities for women to get them into the sciences,” Van Inwegen expressed. The addition of new instrumentation is timely given Converse’s growth. The partnership between Converse and Thermo Fisher Scientific enhances the college’s facilities and the education of its students while simultaneously providing potential career opportunities for alumni.

The vibrancy of the sciences isn’t limited to those within the department. A wide variety of interdisciplinary courses are available that allow students across all majors to explore the connections between science and various fields. Project Glaze, an honors interdisciplinary course taught in January Term of 2020, is an example of this. Dr. Case and assistant professor of art. Mary Carlisle, co-taught the class to allow students to see the links between chemistry and ceramics. At the end of the course, students created a final piece, which was judged based on several criteria by professors and guest judges. “I think I learned as much as the

students,” Dr. Case admitted. “I was less informed about how you make a ceramic piece...I think it was really one of those things we do well at Converse, which is [working] together, but also sharing our collective expertise to create an experience for students that I think is pretty powerful. It’s something that [the students] will remember.”

Another example of an interdisciplinary course includes The Biology of Sexuality and the Literature of Love, Marriage, and Birth, taught by Dr. Steele and associate professor of English Dr. Laura Brown. Courses like these demonstrate Converse’s commitment to a well-rounded liberal arts education—allowing non-majors to explore the sciences in a way that works best for both their field of study and their personal interests.

The University’s small size is advantageous as it provides a wide range of opportunities within the sciences to tailor academic instruction to meet the needs of each student. This individualized approach aligns with Converse’s mission of empowering students to “see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.”

Ultimately, the words of Dr. Case encapsulate the academic prowess of Converse and its emphasis on the sciences. “Size can be deceiving... Although we aren’t large in numbers, we are mighty in capacity and in the resources and educational experiences we provide students.”

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clearly wisely justly

Advocating Diversity and Inclusion at Converse

by Azalea Acevedo '21

The words of the Founder's ideal to "see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly" are often repeated at Converse and guide the institution to enact changes to ensure an equitable and inclusive future as it embraces new students and a new name. These changes include a Diversity Strategic Plan, faculty and student trainings, and the creation of new departments and positions.

But, the best measure of success is to look at the students. An environment that fosters creativity and offers support will produce leaders that, together, will propel the university into the next 131 years. If anyone has that kind of momentum, it is Converse's students..

"Our students are stepping forward, like 'hey, I want to be a part, here's my

voice," says Danielle Stone, Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion as well as the Title IX Coordinator.

"Converse has done a phenomenal job of letting that voice be heard and connecting with one of our core values," she says.

Many students step forward from the moment they arrive on campus. Lori

Scronce '24, is one such example. She is a presidential student ambassador, Palmetto Players representative, incoming president of her class, a School of the Arts representative, SGA member, and incoming vice president of the Ally Club. All this in her very first year of college.

“When I came here, I just knew I had to be more involved,” says Scronce.

“I believe that being involved helps make your college career a little bit easier and more fun... you get to know more people... the ins and outs of how the college is run.”

Scronce is far from the only member of the Converse community to express this belief.

“I came here and decided I wanted to be part of a change,” says Alexis Hunter, Class of 2021.

Hunter came to Converse as a transfer student and began involvement in campus activities in 2018. She is the vice-chair of the Converse Activity Board, a member of AAAS, FCA, the International Student Organization, and has previously served as a peer mentor. She also co-founded the Converse Disability Acceptance Committee (CDAC).

“A group of girls and I put everything together and formed a committee,” says Hunter, in response to being asked to organize events centered on disability awareness by Tania McDuffie, the Assistant Dean of Academic Support.

That group of students included Rainy Travis, Class of 2021.

“Lex came to me because she knew that I was involved in Special Olympics and she wanted to have some other input from someone who had experience,” says Travis.

Travis coaches a swim team and a standup paddle-boarding team in the Special Olympics, where she began volunteering in 2013. Together, Hunter and Travis pulled together a group of students with the same goal: increase student awareness and acceptance of disabilities.

“We planned a disability awareness week and then we were like, you know, ‘Why isn’t this an actual club?’” says Travis.

So the week of events morphed into a full-fledged club as a result.

The seed of institutional support that gave the CDAC founders the space to identify places for change is integral to Converse’s goals to bolster student inclusion and foster creativity. This is part of the vision of the newly created Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which is soon to be housed in the former SGA suites in Montgomery. Karen Mims '22, serves as the department’s Student Affairs intern. Part of this role places her as a student representative – most notably on the Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC).

DAC supports the University’s Diversity Strategic Plan and is made up of representatives across students, faculty, and staff. They meet biweekly to lead the Converse in creating and sustaining an inclusive learning, living, and work environment where all can feel that they are welcomed, valued, and supported.





Mims says of the committee: “They’re very accessible people... so if anyone ever has an issue or a question about diversity and inclusion at Converse, the DAC committee are the first people you should reach out to.”

Mims experience outside her intern role underscores the effect of support from the institution on students. In addition to her upcoming SGA presidency and vice-presidency of her class, she founded the Empowerment, Rights, and Advocacy club (ERA), which focuses on empowering students in the political sphere through voter education and registration.



“I feel so lucky and privileged in starting ERA,” says Mims. In her Freshman year, she was approached by Tori McLean Good, then Director of Leadership Development & Orientation, and classmate Bethany Klein ’20.



“They were wanting a freshman that was involved from their freshman year so that ERA wouldn’t just end with them. They reached out to me because they saw that I was involved with Freshman Council and SGA,” says Mims.



Stone’s position in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which she was promoted to in August 2020, focuses on creating an open and inclusive environment in which students like Mims are empowered to lead. This includes engaging students and encouraging greater awareness that leads to responsibility.



“You can find us programming with watching movies... with doing open mics... educational postings

around campus... having intentional conversations,” says Stone.

This latter goal is manifested in Restorative Conversations, which began in Fall 2020 as a platform for sharing stories or experiences about instances of diversity and inclusion, and Diversi-Tea, a monthly forum that includes featured speakers and students. April’s Diversi-Tea panel was composed of undergraduate and graduate students.

“We talk about things such as women in the workplace, minority women in the workplace, how to have restorative conversations... mental health and what that looks like for all,” says Stone about Diversi-Tea.

Providing space for students to have conversations means listening when they see and act on issues facing the campus. At the end of March 2021, it was announced that the Spartanburg Police would hold a training simulation on campus. The announcement prompted students to voice concerns surrounding the safety of armed members of law enforcement on campus.

“Our students came together and started a google form which has been looked at by higher leadership,” says Stone. “Based on that, they wanted forums and places to discuss.”

The first of these was held on March 30 and more were held over the month of April. These meetings allowed students to express areas of most concern with the administration and Campus Safety, and allowed the administration to modify their plans so students felt safe on their own campus.

“That’s number one. We heard, we saw, we responded,” says Stone. “We’re acting on what the students are wanting and we’re supporting them through that as well.”

Stone says listening is the most important thing Converse can do to move forward. It is especially important as she says the biggest restraint on student participation is fear: of unknowns, reprisal, or simply discomfort.

The seed of institutional support that gave the CDAC founders the space to identify places for change is integral to Converse’s goals to bolster student inclusion and foster creativity.

Supporting students in dealing with these concerns is vital to engagement. Mims remembers faculty response to a student’s demonstration after the shooting of Duante Wright in April. The student, Jimmie Sanders, and another male student sat on the quad with signs.

“Dean Rhonda and Danielle... they were both like, he’s out there, let’s go talk to him,” says Mims, referring to Rhonda Mingo, Dean of Students, and Danielle Stone.

“There was never a moment of ‘oh, let’s shut this down.’ They very much welcome that space for student activism,” she says.

“It is very much supported, but sometimes it just takes that one person to make that first step,” she says.

Alexis Pitts ’20, an administrative graduate assistant in the athletics department, echoes the importance of support systems.

“I’ve learned the hard way that [a support system] is needed. To be successful you need other people along the way. I can’t do it by myself,” she says.

Pitts is a first-generation student and used to relying on herself. Her time at Converse has taught her to slowly unlearn this mechanism.





programming and resources we need – it’s not thought of as we want them,” Pitts says. This is also true of campus events, such as sports games or other programs.

“Because we don’t express it all together, there’s a belief that graduate students aren’t interested in things that are happening on campus, when in fact those are the things that maybe would improve their experience.”

Including graduate students involves addressing their needs, which can be vastly different from undergraduate students.

“Maybe you can bring your children and your family because this is a

while this option was discussed, and current students were not the only opinions heard during the process.

Eggimann also works to ensure all alumni feel included in the community, a goal she says the administration understands is overdue. Emphasis on the differing experiences of graduate students, first generation students, those who attended Converse II (the program for nontraditional undergraduates), and self-identified alums of color has been brought to the forefront. While there are already men in the graduate and international undergraduate school alumni population, the model change will mean a new group of undergraduate alumni.

Student participation from all segments of the community is necessary to continue building a foundation for a more diverse and equitable future.

“It’s just understanding that you don’t have to do it on your own, even though that’s probably been your survival strategy... Me not seeking those things [support and mentorship] contributes to that fear of the unknown, in my experience.”

Maintaining these systems beyond the undergraduate years is also important to Converse’s future. Pitts says she believes that as Converse expands as “Converse University,” the inclusion of graduate students will increase.

“The things that we may need as graduate students – the

community. It’s being intentional about inviting a particular group,” says Pitts.

In her role as Director of Alumni Relations, Jessica Eggimann ’00 works to ensure engagement with students after they leave Converse – whether decades ago or last year.

“I think they are more willing to engage in the last 4 years,” says Eggimann, speaking about changes she has noticed among alumni.

One area this was apparent was the discussion around the decision to go co-ed. Transparency was important

“We are recognizing that we are in a new generation,” says Eggimann, reflecting on Converse’s focus for the future in comparison to her undergraduate years twenty years ago.

“You can’t engage in one way,” she says.

In recent years, the Alumni Association Board was expanded from 20 members to over 30 to attain different perspectives from a broader alumni base. In response to the needs of a changing alumni population, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee was created in the summer of 2020. This representation



A new mural, designed by Mikki Nunn '22, was installed this fall in the Multicultural and SGA suites. The mural was made possible by funding from Rock the Tower and the Jones Rushing Scholars Program.

demonstrates a commitment to our values, which include the community that makes our school unique.

Student participation from all segments of the community is necessary to continue building a foundation for a more diverse and equitable future.

Hunter says, “You’re never going to discover who you are... your strengths and what you can bring to the table if you’re not willing to put yourself out there, to be bold, to speak out when things aren’t right and to speak out when things are. Everyone has something to contribute, no matter who they are.”

As its students, faculty, and alumni use their voices to promote diversity and inclusion, Converse is able to reinforce what it has always been: a community in which leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly are made and supported.

New Gifts to Support Diversity Initiatives

Jones Rushing Scholars Program

The generous donation made by Emily Jones Rushing '73 and her husband, Hugh, will support the Office of Diversity and Inclusion by creating the Jones Rushing Scholars Program. This scholarship fund is a four-year undergraduate program that will help to recruit, retain, and graduate students from underrepresented populations while supporting diversity and inclusion at Converse through an appropriate balance of scholarships and general needs.

Dr. Kay Woodward Endowment

Phyllis Perrin Harris '85 endowed the Dr. Kay Woodward Endowment for programmatic support within the Converse College for Women to address leadership and the disparities of Black women who enter the workforce. The funds will be used for a speaker series; mentorship and empowerment; women-centered learning; entrepreneurship skills; and/or service and leadership programs and activities to accomplish this goal. The naming of the gift is in honor of Dr. Kay Woodward, the first Black faculty member at Converse.

Meet Phyllis Perrin Harris, Outgoing Chair of the Board of Trustees

Phyllis Perrin Harris '82 has served as Chair of the Board of Trustees since 2018. She studied Politics at Converse College, which she attended from 1978 to her graduation in 1982. She is the General Council, Chief of Compliance, Ethics, and Government Relations officer at the American Red Cross.



Q: What inspired you to join the Board of Trustees?

My journey in many respects almost goes back to my being a student at Converse. At that time there were only about 15 students of color. And it was a challenging environment. When I left, I left in a place where I was really angry because I felt that my experience was one that, while academically I thrived, from a social perspective I didn't feel as included as I would have liked. Eleven- to 12- years after I graduated, someone from Converse asked me to make a donation, I declined, and he asked why, and I shared that I didn't feel included. He shared that with the then president, Nancy Gray. She came to my home to meet with me and 8 or 9 other alums who were African American, and we talked for three hours about our experiences. At that point I came to a place of forgiveness with the College. My first engagement was on the Board of Visitors for about a year. In 2002 I was asked to join the Board. I rolled off in 2010, and I was asked to get back on around 2016. For me to engage with Converse, I had to come to a place of forgiveness. I received so much from Converse and I attribute

much of my success to the academic foundations I received from Converse.

Q: What were your goals, and those of the Board, for a sustainable future when you came into the role?

When I became Board Chair, we were not having discussions of becoming co-ed. We were just having discussions about the financial sustainability of the College. Financial sustainability of most colleges and universities, number one, comes from student enrollment. And we could see from the data that as an all-women's institution over the course of probably 10 years enrollment was ticking downward, which is not a good place. And that was despite the fact that we did the tuition reset in 2015. After the tuition reset, there was a bump, and then we still continued to see enrollment decline. We knew that we could not survive over the long term, and all of us love Converse and we wanted it to survive. But we had to find another way to bring in revenue, to bring in additional programming that would be appealing to young women, as well as young men.

Q: How has the Board ensured transparency and listened to students?

My most significant task was being on that initial Presidential Search Committee and ensuring that there was a student representative. The student SGA representatives are Board members by our own bylaws—they hear everything. There are some discussions that are strictly for the appointed Board members, but 95% of the time they are in the room. I've been so impressed year after year with the caliber of young women who sit at that table. The 2020-2021 representative Kennedy [Anderson] is just a remarkable young woman and represented the interests of the students incredibly well.

Q: Financial sustainability of the college was the main issue when you were appointed. At the end of your term, are the challenges different?

I'm leaving from a place of great hope and optimism. We have more students who have deposited for enrollment in the fall term. Despite this terrible, terrible year of COVID, we are financially in a much stronger position than we were when I became Board Chair. The only area

that I wish I could have seen a bit more impact, particularly since I am the first African American to be the Chair of the Board, would be more demonstrable progress around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. But I think we have a great Diversity strategic plan, and plans and goals, they take time. We see that in our own nation as well. We're much better off than places in our country, but certainly we have a ways to go. I think we're on the right foundation and the thing that we can never underestimate is the culture of community at Converse. Even when we disagree, we still are a strong community.

Q: What legacy of your time do you hope to leave behind?

Obviously a legacy of long-term sustainability for the college that was grounded by an inclusive decision-making process. I hope I've left a legacy for the young women... that they saw a very strong woman that they could model themselves after. I was a very shy, uncertain, not well-versed student when I arrived at Converse and... then by the time I was 28 or 29 I had my first leadership role in the workplace and it went on from there. And I know I owe all of that—the foundations—to Converse.

Career Development: Opening Doors to Opportunities

Establishing meaningful relationships with students represents not only a cornerstone of Converse's commitment to community, but a guiding principle for the Office of Career Development.

With a clear understanding that students thrive in an environment where the emphasis is on the individual, Career Development aims to foster relationships with students centered on their vision of career success. Our approach includes individualized, intentional opportunities through experiential learning, coaching, and advising—ultimately preparing them for successful outcomes in the workforce or in a postgraduate program.

That method for success was recently put to the test as COVID-19 forever altered the professional landscape. From internships to interviews, the traditional means of professional development was transformed, and as students had to adapt, so did the Office of Career Development.

Face-to-face appointments shifted to an online format. Employment fairs and networking events went virtual. A global pandemic was not in anyone's strategic plan, but the Office of Career Development met the challenge head on with creativity and ingenuity, supporting students like Chloe, Jhazmin and Angela.

Chloe Griffin '22 Major: Biology and Mathematics

Steadfast determination combined with access to Converse resources was Chloe's roadmap to success. In fact, in the summer of 2021, Chloe snagged a coveted internship with the Oak Ridge National Labs in Oak Ridge, Tennessee through the Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internships (SULI) program. Chloe worked alongside Dr. Zachary Grant to "research and create new ways to understand really complicated [data] systems."

Chloe credits her success in part to the support of her faculty members as well as the Office of Career Development team: "The professors at Converse are extremely supportive. All of the things I've been able to do, all of the amazing opportunities that I've had, were because of professors being there to back me up." Professors like Dr. Mangum, who connected Chloe with professionals in the math industry, who in part, encouraged her to pursue experience with a national lab.

The undergraduate research opportunities partnered with the Office of Career Development, helped Chloe



establish herself professionally. Director of Internships and Career Services at Converse, Cathy Gowan, assisted Chloe with resume development in preparation for the Oak Ridge National Labs internship. "Converse offers vast experiences and opportunities that you can't really find anywhere else. You have all these opportunities to really expand beyond the classroom and get into actual fields that will prepare you for the workforce."

Jhazmin Gomez-Reyes '21

Major: Economics and Hispanic Studies



For Jhazmin Gomez-Reyes, understanding corporate culture was very important: “As a Hispanic woman and a first-generation college student, I have a lot of feelings about diversity and inclusion in the workplace.” During a Career Development mock interview with Dr. Keshia Jackson Gilliam, Jhazmin was able to further discuss questions on identifying the value systems of future employers.

Encouraged by a close staff mentor, Jhazmin also attended an employer information session presented by the Office of Career Development and learned about the Ford Motor internship program but “had no idea how to approach

a resume, cover letter, or interview.” By working with the Office of Career Development, Jhazmin successfully developed her professional brand, applied to Ford Motor Credit, and was accepted as a 2020 summer intern.

In spite of COVID and through her internship, Jhazmin was exposed to all levels of Ford employees, from fellow interns to top executives, providing her with a wide range of hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. “I found my voice at Converse. At the start of my internship, I was terrified. But, as I became more self-assured, I realized that this is a learning experience and mistakes are actually opportunities to grow. As I became more confident, and more comfortable with being uncomfortable, I wanted to continue to grow more.”

Now a Converse alumna and a fulltime Ford employee because of her opportunity as an intern, Jhazmin encourages peers to interview as much as possible “even positions you don’t think you’re qualified for, even if you’re not interested. It’s a good learning experience, whether or not you’re expecting an offer, you learn more professional behavior and it gives you the opportunity to ask for feedback!”

Angela Crosson '21

Major: Interior Design



Angela Crosson always envisioned herself attending an art school but after obtaining her Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design at Converse, she looks back on her four years and has no regrets. Prior to enrolling, Angela did her research and discovered Converse’s Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). Not only did Angela recognize that a CIDA school would set her up for technical success, she also realized a liberal arts curriculum would provide her with the transferable intellectual and practical skills needed in the professional world.

Continued on next page

Thoughtful career preparation did not stop upon enrollment—Angela continued to take advantage of the opportunities at Converse. She became the CIDA assistant for the Department of Interior Design and worked alongside former department chair, Ruth Beals. As a sophomore, Angela went on to obtain two internships—launching her into a part-time position and an additional internship her junior year.

Angela’s academic work bolstered her design knowledge but the Office of Career Development gave her the tools that allowed those skills to truly shine. “Whenever I was applying for a job or internship, I always had Career Development read over my resume and cover letter. I think Cathy [Gowan] must have reviewed my resume more than five times, and every time she provided me with great feedback. And, I always ended up getting the job or internship after I was interviewed.”

Whether it was a networking event, faculty mentorship, a career to professional course, or employer information session, Angela utilized all the resources Converse offered. “I’m prepared because of Converse. Through my work experiences as well as relationships with faculty and Career Development staff, I have gained so much confidence. I know my work ethic and what strengths I can bring to a company. I know it’s ok to ask questions and it’s also okay not to know everything at first.”

Like with Chloe, Jhazmin, and Angela, the Office of Career Development takes a two-prong approach to helping students achieve their professional goals. The first is anticipating and providing comprehensive

services and resources based on the individual student. The second is recognizing the ever-changing needs of employers and identifying any potential gaps in students’ education and/ or career experiences.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), a professional association that works with employers and serves as a leading source of research and data, has associated key behaviors that will better prepare students to enter the workforce. Based on that information, the Career Development team has identified six core competencies of focus that include:

- Critical Thinking
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Diverse & Global Perspective
- Technology and Digital Fluency
- Career & Self-Development

Through the student worker and internship program, as well as co-curricular training and development, the Office of Career Development will continue to weave career readiness and the six core competencies into the classroom. These fundamental proficiencies not only prepare students for professional success but also align with Converse’s mission of empowering students to see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.

As the professional arena continues to transform and employers’ needs change, the Office of Career Development will be ready. With plans of an alumni mentorship program, micro-internships, project-based learning, and new opportunities for donors to fund experiential learning opportunities, the Office of Career Development will innovate to support our most valuable resource— students.

Help fuel opportunity-expanding, experiential learning at Converse.

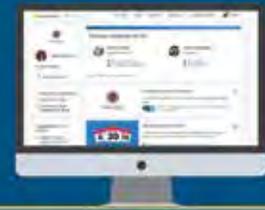
If you are interested in driving vibrant transformation in our students through the work of Career Development, contact Tori McLean Good, Director of Career Development & Employer Relations at **864.596.9647** or **tori.good@converse.edu**.

Let's Shake On It!

Handshake, an online college-to-career network, created in tandem by career services and industry professionals, connects students and recent graduates with opportunities around the globe. This service proved essential during the pandemic. Through Handshake, students were able to attend employment fairs, submit and review applications, and set-up interviews all in one place.

 handshake

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- Enterprise
- American Credit Acceptance
- OTO Development
- Johnson Development Associates
- The United Way of the Piedmont
- Synnex Corporation
- Department of Social Services
- ScanSource
- Emergency MD
- Waffle House
- Spartanburg Regional Healthcare
- Blue Cross Blue Shield

Converse is not the only higher education institution to see the substantial value of the Handshake platform. Spartanburg's six other colleges and universities use Handshake, providing abundant career development opportunities for students by collaborating on events and hosting virtual information sessions with local employers.



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Mother-Daughter Doctorates

by Kelly Ferguson '21

On May 23, 2021, an unlikely and heartwarming scene played out at the Converse Commencement Ceremony: Mother and daughter donned the cap and gown together, both graduating with Doctorates in Professional Leadership (EdD). Wanda Cody, 56, and Jennifer Roach, 39, are the first mother-daughter duo to graduate from Converse at the same time. The pair is no stranger to being pioneers in their field. Not only did they shake it up with their co-graduation, but they are also part of the first cohort to graduate from Converse with the doctoral degree.

They held so much faith in Converse's new program, that they enrolled before it had received full accreditation. The two women meticulously searched for a program that would best serve their needs, and after comparing many different schools in the area, they realized that Converse was the best fit. Not only had Converse recently expanded into a University in 2020, but the institution had also made programs more accessible in 2018 when it joined the University Center of Greenville. This, coupled with the affordability and flexibility, made

Converse the best school for them. Wanda and Jennifer especially appreciated the support built into the program, both citing a statistic that 60% of people don't finish their doctoral program because they lack dissertation support.

At Converse, the doctorate program is built for people who already have busy lives and other jobs they are working at the same time. Both women are currently working in K-12 education: Lauren as an assistant principal and Wanda as a middle school English teacher. Together,



they have a combined 27 years of educational experience. Despite the added responsibilities of pursuing a doctorate, they felt as though the program was manageable to complete. The once a week classes combined with online coursework allowed them the convenience they

that instead of using grades to motivate students, educators should shift to a competency-based learning model, with emphasis on life skills to naturally teach students the value of education. Wanda seeks to improve education overall for both students and teachers.

Grammar is no longer taught on a large-scale curriculum in the state, but instead grammatical corrections are made on an individual basis. Jennifer believes in the importance of teaching grammar, so for her research, she implemented grammar into her 8th grade class's curriculum for a year. When comparing standardized test scores, her students nationally ranked higher on average than students who hadn't benefited from this education. Jennifer seeks to publish her findings and hopes that she will be able to enhance her district's

Students are put on a path of success from the start, so they can focus on their purpose for furthering education: finding ways to improve their community.

needed to balance both a career and school. Additionally, the structure of the program was especially helpful. The program incorporates regular coursework to write the five required chapters of their dissertation. This built-in structure means that once students have completed their time with Converse classes, they have essentially finished their dissertation. Students are put on a path of success from the start, so they can focus on their purpose for furthering education: finding ways to improve their community.

Wanda loved that the Converse program was in leadership, but that it was diverse and didn't necessarily lock students into an educational track. This allowed her to marry her business bachelor's degree and educational experience. Because of her multifaceted background, she chose to focus her dissertation on why teachers are leaving South Carolina. Her research showed that while legislators believe the main problem is insufficient teacher pay, local teachers felt that the problem had more to do with student motivation and behavior. She proposed



Jennifer's dissertation similarly focuses on improvements needed in education. Before serving as an assistant principal, she was also a middle school English teacher. Her studies focused on the teaching of grammar in South Carolina schools.

grammar curriculum. Eventually, she would like to advance to writing state-wide curriculum. Wanda and Jennifer obtained their Doctorates in Leadership so they could improve their communities, sharing their knowledge for the benefit of others.

At Converse, they found the right program to complete their education, as well as a comradery in their cohort with passionate faculty. The duo had also attended Clemson together for their Master of Arts in teaching middle grades, where Dean Lienne Medford ran the program. Dean Medford is now the Interim Provost and Dean of Education and Graduate Studies. In fact, she's a large part of

why Wanda and Jennifer decided to attend the Converse Doctorate program. Jennifer expressed her appreciation for Dean Medford's attention to detail and genuine care for her students, saying, "One of the main reasons we chose Converse was our experience with Dean Medford. We followed her to Converse because she is a phenomenal educator."

Dean Medford reciprocates the appreciation for the entire cohort, saying, "These students bring a wealth of perspective and experience to our program and our classes. In addition, we are seeing dissertations whose research is making an impact in the community: in parks and recreation, the public schools, [and] community involvement such as after school programs." Medford noticed that after students complete their dissertations, they want to serve their community, "volunteering to serve on expert panels and review targeted proposals and even in some cases to serve on dissertation committees. It's wonderful!"



Doctorate in Professional Leadership Hooding Ceremony

Family and friends gathered on May 14, 2021 to celebrate the first cohort to graduate from Converse's Doctorate in Professional Leadership program.



One for the Books

by Sally Jeter Gregg '81

I've known Tom McDaniel for years, but only about a quarter of the 44 years he spent at Converse College, where he was honored for a litany of achievements. Even still, he is fittingly lauded as a guiding force for the University.

When Converse Magazine asked me to interview Tom, I was thrilled to catch up on his life since his retirement a little more than five years ago. I also knew Tom is hardly one to talk about himself, but, as a 1981 Converse alum and one of his former colleagues, I hoped I could get him to do just that.

Before our phone call in early April, I went through the long list of Dr. McDaniel's service to Converse since he arrived in 1971: Interim President, Senior Vice President, Vice President, Provost, a Dean, Acting Dean of several departments, Department Chair—what didn't Tom do for Converse? And how do you distill all of those accomplishments and the storied career of such a great man into one magazine article?



At the appointed hour of our call, after reminding myself that Tom would be 80 now, you can imagine my surprise to hear his winded voice on the other end of the phone.

"I'm riding a stationary bike three hours a day and if you don't mind, I'll just keep on pedaling while we talk," he said, apologizing for the distinct whir of a bicycle in the background and asking if I could hear him well enough.

Not a problem, I said.

"I had a fatal heart attack a year ago ..."

What? Fatal? How can that be?

He chuckled. "I had a bleeding ulcer in the middle of the night, followed by sudden cardiac death in the ICU."

Death? Really?

"Happily, I was resuscitated and now have a healthy heart, thanks to exercise on the bike and a little better diet."

After absorbing the shock that my old friend had nearly retired from life altogether, I asked Tom how he endured that much time in the saddle on a daily basis.

"Well... let's see," he said, in the way he likes to pontificate, "I usually watch *Judge Judy* or an episode of *Chopped*."

"And to think," I said, chuckling out loud, "I thought you'd be writing philosophical papers and moving at a slower pace. Instead, you're the Jack LaLanne of cycling and learning how to cook."

Dr. Joe Dunn knows Dr. McDaniel better than just about anybody.

“Tom is ever the academic,” he assured me. “Still making time to write scholarly papers, still teaching a class on school law, which he developed 50 years ago,” said Dunn, the Charles A. Dana Professor of History and Politics, Chair of History and Politics, a position like Tom held leading the Department of Education when he first came to Converse. “He is still going to the College most days and still passionate about the role of the liberal arts in higher education.”

Reflecting on the remarkable imprint Tom left on every facet of Converse’s educational program, Joe said, “Tom

When I asked Tom about his success in sports, he referenced, as he likes to do so often, the great Yogi Berra, that master of malapropisms: “Well, you know,” Tom said, “half the lies they tell about me aren’t true!”

Turns out the quip is only half-true.

“My brother, John, my identical twin, and I both loved sports,” Tom said. “John and I were on the football team at Herndon High in Virginia. We were the Herndon Hornets. John was the quarterback, and I was a halfback. Our team had another set of twins and the press loved it. In fact,

“Tom has set and modeled what an academic is. His life has been an absolute commitment to teaching and an absolute commitment to scholarship. He is truly a moral exemplar.”

has set and modeled what an academic is. His life has been an absolute commitment to teaching and an absolute commitment to scholarship. He is truly a moral exemplar.”

Joe is also the only colleague who regularly pokes fun at Tom — and can get away with it.

“He’s the only reason Converse still has an overhead projector. He drives the oldest car I’ve ever seen. He’s the only person I know who’s more frugal than me and probably has every dollar he’s ever made. He’s also as good as they come. He lives a simple, humble life. Never speaking ill of anyone, such a deliberate thinker, and always an optimist.”

He pauses for a reveal.

“And, oh,” Joe said, “did you know that Tom was a star athlete in his younger years? I like to say he’s a man for all seasons.”

the Washington Post ran a story on the sports page about the four of us, entitled, “The Touchdown Twins.”

“On the brink of an undefeated season, we were up against our archrivals from George Mason, and both teams were undefeated at the time of the conference championship game.”

By this time, I’m gobsmacked and listening with intent, as Tom kept on.

“So, George Mason was ahead in the fourth quarter, and our team had no timeouts. With only 6 seconds left in the game, we were 55 yards from the goal line when one of their linemen called for a timeout because a shoulder strap had broken. Just then, our coach sent in the play for me to run around the right end, which I did for the winning touchdown.”

“When the gun went off ending the game, I was carried off the field on the shoulders of my teammates.” With

“When the gun went off ending the game, I was carried off the field on the shoulders of my teammates.”



nostalgia in his voice, Tom said, “I still have a picture of that moment in time. We won the championship and the first undefeated season in school history.”

“WOW!” I said, as Tom continued spinning on his borrowed stationary bike, “Talk about one for the books – you’re a living legend!”

Then, with his familiar grace and humility: “No, just living,” he joked. He thought that was the best word in the phrase.

“Resuscitated,” said Tom, “is my new favorite word, and I hope to live to be at least 90. I want to see our grandchildren grow up, spend time with our son and daughter [both are college professors] and continue to contribute to Converse in any way I can.”

Spoken like the dedicated senior administrator he has always been.

He gives credit to Converse, too, telling me he is pleased with the work the institution has done to ensure a useful educational program for the years to come.

And, when I asked about his greatest joy at Converse, he summed it up as the essence of what he “loves most about academia – the collegial commitment to helping a new generation.”

That’s the Tom I know, the scholar and friend who embodies our Founder’s Ideal – to see clearly, decide wisely and to act justly – and dedicating himself and most of his life to the entirety of Converse’s mission.

“Well,” I said, as we concluded our chat, “that’s the perfect tribute to a place we both hold dear.”

And a place, Tom McDaniel will tell you, that has given him more glory days than he can count.

At-A-Glance

When we were talking about Tom's favorite times, places and things, I asked him to answer a few questions:

FAVORITE BOOK Other than the ones I've written, *The Shakespeare Requirement* by Julie Schumacher

FAVORITE MOVIE *Gone with The Wind*

FAVORITE DESSERT Key Lime pie

BEST FRIEND My wife, Nan

WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED MORE OF?

Love and forgiveness

WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED LESS OF?

Hypocrisy and prejudice

FAVORITE SPORT TO WATCH Football

FAVORITE YOGI BERRA QUOTE "I didn't really say everything I said."

Dr. McDaniel's title and positions through his career at Converse

- Came to Converse College in 1971 as Chairman of the Department of Education and Director of MAT Program
- Named Charles A. Dana Professor of Education in 1984
- Vice President for Academic Affairs, 1990-1993
- Interim President, 1993-1994
- Provost, 1994-2002
- Deanships: Acting Dean of the Petrie School of Music, Acting Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
- Writing: Tom has authored 300 academic journal articles, book chapters, and nine books, the last one entitled *The New Dean's Survival Guide*.



Inaugural Presentation of the Dr. Thomas McDaniel Award

On May 14, 2021, the first ever Converse Hooding Ceremony was held at the University Center in Greenville to recognize the pioneer cohort to graduate from the Doctorate in Professional Leadership. During the event, Tom was genuinely surprised when President Newkirk presented the inaugural "Dr. Thomas McDaniel Award," given in honor of Tom's many years of service to Converse. The award will be given yearly to recognize the best Doctorate of Professional Leadership dissertation and research excellence.

A Generous Legacy: Meet Jane Boatwright Schwab '77

by Ella B. Webster '20

The first time I spoke with Mrs. Jane Boatwright Schwab '77 over the phone, she asked to reschedule. It's not because she's too busy or doesn't want to help, but because her neighbor is having a fiftieth birthday party for her son and needs balloons. Mrs. Schwab, who has just held a celebration herself, has plenty of leftover balloons she would like to share, and she wants to bring them over to her

neighbor herself. Though she apologizes at the end of our call and again when we speak the next day, her actions are in fact a perfect representation of who she is at her core: unconditionally gracious and generous, choosing to delay talking about her own accomplishments in lieu of helping out another. These qualities above all else are the ones that characterize Mrs. Jane Boatwright Schwab.

However, these qualities are far from the only endearing things about Mrs. Schwab. She speaks about many things, from her adoration for her family, to her work in interior design, to her love of travel, all with a clear passion.

She often hosts Converse alumni events in her home—such as the Christmas party—and remains a committed member of the Converse alumni population. These traits and many others make it clear why she remains a treasured member of the Converse community.

Mrs. Schwab was familiar with Converse before attending and graduating in 1977. Several family members, including her cousin Elizabeth Boatwright Coker, attended Converse before her. Mrs. Schwab speaks fondly of her own time at Converse with her sister Nancy and with her friends, whom she describes as “a wonderful group of women” who were “very creative about having fun—and we had lots of it!”

Mrs. Schwab graduated Converse with an undergraduate degree in political science. She had always enjoyed interior design, but the major wasn't offered at the time. Pursuing a degree in art was out of her comfort zone, she had never seen herself as an artist.

For several years, she worked in other jobs such as sales. However, she soon realized, “I enjoyed sales, but I did not





love what I was doing.” In her 30s, Mrs. Schwab decided to pursue her passion for interior design at the University of South Carolina where she obtained a degree in art and a minor in interior design. She also went on to attend Parsons School of Design in New York and spent several years working at the New York firm of Marshall Schule Associates.

On completing school and internships several years later than the average student, Mrs. Schwab said, “You have to listen to your inner voice. Don’t be afraid to start at the bottom—or even start over, for that matter.”

Mrs. Schwab’s commitment paid off; she has enjoyed a large amount of success in the field of interior design. She was a partner in Circa Interiors and Antiques in Charlotte, NC for years and then in 2016 she founded Jane Schwab Interiors in Charlotte, NC.

Her designs have been featured in such magazines as *Southern Living*, *Southern Accents*, *Milieu*, and *Veranda*, and her home in Jackson Hole was a featured cover story in *Veranda*.

She is even an author. Mrs. Schwab’s 2013 book ***The Welcoming House: The Art of Living Graciously***, which

she co-authored with Cindy Smith, remains at the top of the bestseller lists in the interior design genre.

“It was a labor of love,” she said, “and we’re really proud of it.”

Throughout all of her successes, Mrs. Schwab has maintained her lifelong connection to Converse. One way she has remained involved is through her presence on a variety of Converse Boards including the Board of Trustees, the Board of Visitors, and the Presidential Search Committee. She also served as the National Council Chair for Converse Alumnae Affairs.

On her contributions to Converse Boards, fellow Board member Benjamin Wall said, “Her extraordinary creativity and her energetic personality were invaluable contributions to the Board’s strategic planning and discussions.”

Along with serving on many Converse boards, Mrs. Schwab has worked with several Converse students as interior design interns. Notably, she took on class of 2017 student Hannah Suggs as an intern and later hired her to work at Jane Schwab Interiors.

“Anything I can do to make the path easier for someone, I am happy to do,” she said. “It was a real pleasure to have [Hannah] there.”

In addition to all her other contributions, Mrs. Schwab remains a generous donor and is an advocate for alumni support of the school.

“I really want to encourage all of my fellow Converse alumni to engage in areas of their lives that are important

to them... Whether it’s sending prospective students our way or a financial gift... it will all have an impact.”

There are many things that stand out about Mrs. Schwab, such as her kind nature, her warm manners, and her quick wit. One of her most striking qualities is her clear love for Converse and her humility when she speaks about her many contributions.

“[When I was a student,] Converse was an environment for opportunities: academically, in sports, student government, travel, and most of all, for establishing friendships... The thing that hasn’t changed is that Converse still provides an environment for all of the above,” she said. “I am grateful to Converse for the opportunities that I had as a student, but also the opportunities that I continue to have as an adult. Converse has given me so much more than I could ever give to her.”

On Friday, September 24 at Opening Convocation, which took place as part of Converse’s inaugural Family and Friends Weekend, Jane Boatwright Schwab ’77 was presented with the Dexter Edgar Converse award. The Dexter Edgar Converse Award is the highest honor bestowed by Converse University. It was first given in 1992 and has been awarded annually to those who bring honor and strength to Converse University through their leadership, generosity and involvement both in the University community and in their own larger and varied communities.



The “Rose Man” Helps Converse Bloom

The familiar saying goes, “Take time to stop and smell the roses” and if you have ever walked the well-loved outdoor paths of Converse, you may fondly remember doing just that. It is hard not to be captivated by the stunning array of colors that appear each year as our roses come to bloom. But did you know that Mr. Leland Burch, fondly known as the “Rose Man,” has been volunteering his time to care for the Converse Rose Garden for more than 10 years?

Leland, a consulting rosarian certified with the American Rose Society, past President of the South Carolina Rose Society and the Greer Rose Society, has been cultivating his passion for roses by nurturing one of Converse’s most breathtaking spots on campus.

A Wofford College graduate who married a Converse College graduate, Mr. Burch’s initial connection to Converse and first visit to the campus was when he was dating his now wife, Mrs. Margaret Burch ’61, in 1960.

Over the years, Margaret and Leland have remained connected to Converse, as Margaret has received a Distinguished Alumna Award, has been gifted Converse with a beautiful, historic college blazer, and the two have given generously of their time and talent.

When former Converse President Betsy Fleming observed that the historic rose garden behind Twichell Auditorium was in need of some significant care about a decade ago, she asked Leland to help bring the rose garden back to life. Ever since that day, Mr. Burch has been nurturing beautiful roses for the Converse community to enjoy.

An Interview with Mr. Burch

Q: What has kept you caring for the Converse Rose Garden for the past 10+ years?

I really enjoy caring for roses and seeing them bloom. Growing and maintaining roses has been a hobby of mine for about 30 years, maybe more, and I just enjoy doing it. When President Betsy Fleming asked me to care for the Converse roses, it was in the middle of summer, and all I could do at the time was advise the grounds crew on what I felt we needed to do. I began a regular spraying program for the roses, but I figured it would take me about 3 years to bring the rose garden up to where I wanted it to be, and it’s been a joy seeing the transformation. Now, students and faculty will stop and tell me how much they enjoy the roses, so that makes me want to keep doing it.

Q: What goes into caring for the Converse Rose Garden?

Well, I come to Converse about every two weeks to spray the roses, and I also go around and cut off the dead heads of the flowers, so that they keep blooming all through the growing season. Sometimes I will make a special trip to campus to put out fertilizer or plant a new rose bush. It takes quite a bit of time to go around and maintain the plants, but if you enjoy doing it, it's not work. I guess I'm just really going overboard on my hobby, but I enjoy it, and that's also why I became a rosarian.

Q: What is the best part about being a rosarian and caring for roses?

A big joy of mine is just giving them away. I have a garden at home that is about as big as the one at Converse, and I spend about the same amount of time on my own roses. However, I cut a lot of the ones at home and put them into vases to take to people who are sick or need some encouragement. If I am there working in the garden at Converse, and some students come by and ask if they could have a rose, I say, "Yes, what's your favorite color?" And then I go find one that is their favorite color and give it to them. But, that's not an everyday thing, just on special occasions, and if they ask me for one."

Q: What is your favorite type of rose?

Hybrid Tea Roses are my favorite. They have a classical shape, are the ones you would normally see at a florist or places like The Fresh Market. I guess if I could only have one rose though, it would be a Double Delight—that's a Hybrid Tea that is both red and white, and has a wonderful fragrance. The older I get, the more I like the ones with a lot of fragrance. There are a couple of Double Delights in the garden at Converse. All of the bushes I have planted at Converse have a label, so you can read what they are called. The bushes without a label in the garden were there when I first started. There's an eclectic variety of roses in the Converse garden, and some of them might be at least 15 or 20 years old. I think that's just kind of amazing. I have one in my garden at home that I've had since 1990.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of caring for the Converse Rose Garden?

Really, it's a joy for me. I was honored to be asked to do it, and it's been a pleasure to be there and see my vision of

what I had in mind for the garden come to life after three or four years from when I began. Hearing students and faculty say—"Oh, we love the roses," "they're so pretty," "I sure do like them," "thank you for what you do"—makes me feel good.

My granddaughter was a student at Converse for four years, and sometimes I would cut some roses for her, and she had a little vase to put them in her dorm room. There have been several occasions when students stopped by because they wanted a rose. The year before last, there was a group of about three to four students that shared the same suite. Every time I came to campus, they would be able to spot me somehow. Just about every time, they would come over looking for a rose. They would even dig through the wheelbarrow I use to put the dead heads in, and pick through the ones they wanted, and that was funny. I'm always going to give a student or staff member a rose if they want one, and I'll keep caring for the roses as long as I am able to.

To this day, Mr. Burch is faithfully giving of his time and talent to Converse, taking care of the beautiful, historic rose garden for everyone to enjoy. And now, one of the Burch's four sons, Joey, has even begun assisting his dad in caring for the rose garden. If you're lucky and visit the garden on a day when Mr. Burch is there, you might even get to meet him and take home a rose.



Margaret and Leland Burch's granddaughter, Emery K. Burch '19, sitting in Converse's rose garden while wearing her Margaret's historic college blazer.

Farewell from Krista L. Newkirk



As I reflect upon my time at Converse, I consider first her long history and those who served her and sacrificed for her over its many years. An institution of higher education is the sum of its history, its mission, and those who come together to lead, serve, attend and support it—all to accomplish its primary goal: educating students while building their character so that they may go forth into the world and find greater personal joy and fulfillment, forge an ideal life for themselves; and make the world a better place for the next generation. In addition to these institutional pillars, Converse’s distinctive charter included a focus on education and equality for women. More than 130 years later, that mission holds true today and has expanded to provide equity in education for all.

Converse’s success does not rise and fall upon her president. The continuation and growth of a university is a team effort with many contributors. I have tremendous gratitude for our Trustees, our leadership team, the faculty, each staff member, the students, and our community. Each person plays a valuable role in our accomplishments, and I have benefited greatly from their counsel and the care they showed with each step and challenge.

An effective leader can be a catalyst for change when the situation requires it. This is especially true if the leader has the benefit of a great archivists and scholars, like Drs. Willis and McDaniels, who bless that leader with the wisdom that can be found by studying the institution's long history. Converse's strong and energetic academic scholars also contributed inspiration and guidance as we worked together on the future of Converse; and, committed Trustees, who noted that, absent evolution, an institution can become extinct and that not changing is also a decision, the downside of which people often fail to contemplate.

Each president of Converse has and will face challenges during their tenures. Throughout my first few months, I spent time observing our campus, its culture, and its history and, above all, listening. By engaging with the community and researching the context of changes in higher education, I developed four overarching goals:

1. Take Converse from an institution that was surviving to one that was thriving and financially sustainable.
2. Improve our campus community through diversity and inclusiveness.
3. Expand enrollment through the addition of desirable academic programs, strategic locations, online/hybrid offerings, and improved retention.



Move-in Day

4. Strengthen relationships with local industries and the community to enhance experiential learning opportunities, support the community, and drive economic development in the region.

With these objectives serving as a compass, Converse took its first steps towards reimagining its future.

We Will Thrive

To move forward, we had to first assess where we were. During my first year at Converse, we were undergoing our ten-year reaffirmation of the accreditation process. That review required us to quickly address the operational budget of the college. Converse had been operating with little to no operational revenue margin for years after the recession as the College worked to recover. Also, our accreditor had made a change that required Converse to have a balanced budget that included depreciation and debt service—a goal Converse could not meet without serious and sustained enrollment growth. In addition, Converse was heavily reliant upon

its line of credit each year. Serious financial changes were needed. To begin correcting these issues and to demonstrate to our accreditor that we were making the necessary changes we:

- made tough budget cuts on top of difficult but necessary reductions made before I came to Converse;
- launched the Trustee Challenge, doubling the annual fund contribution in one year;
- recruited the largest incoming class that Converse had seen in decades;
- added an Acrobatics & Tumbling Team and brought back field hockey after a long hiatus;
- started Rock the Tower, our annual day of giving, to much acclaim and continued growth each year since;
- reduced our annual draw from the endowment with an ongoing goal to endeavor to reduce that percent each year;
- capitalized on Converse's momentum of growing international enrollment and saw a significant gain in international students;

- grew undergraduate and graduate program offerings; and
- opened the instruction site at the University Center of Greenville in January 2018.

With tremendous effort, we balanced the budget that year, closing a historic 15% budget deficit. Despite Converse’s efforts to add new programs and increase enrollment, additional annual revenue was still needed to close the gap and secure a sustainable future for our Converse community. With that in mind, Converse:

- added undergraduate and graduate degree programs in healthcare administration, as well as degree completion programs;
- started a Data Science program and developed a Data Analytics Laboratory through funding by Bank of America;
- introduced virtual reality for STEM programs and interior design, making us the 6th private institution in the country to include VR in the classroom;
- developed a degree completion programs in business and child and family studies;
- added the first autism certificate program in the state of South Carolina for educators;
- started the Valkyrie Middle College to provide a pipeline for high school students to begin coursework toward an education degree and a teaching position in Spartanburg County District 7 schools;



2021 Undergraduate and Graduate Commencement Ceremony

- added the Converse Guarantee that students will graduate within four years and find a job or be enrolled in graduate school within six months of graduation; and
- made Converse a doctorate-granting institution and added Converse’s first doctorate-degree program in professional leadership, with our first cohort being double what we anticipated and with enrollment now at 86 students in only two years.

With the additional graduate programs and the instruction site at the University Center at Greenville, Converse’s graduate revenue has grown by forty percent in the last five years—a tremendous accomplishment. In addition, Converse has been able to operate for the last two years without utilizing its line of credit.

As we continued working together towards greater operational financial sustainability, our research revealed that there would be a 14.5% decline in high school graduates beginning in 2026. We had to prepare for a new normal,

and we knew that we needed to start planning now if Converse was to survive this upcoming dramatic shift. We also had to acknowledge that less than 2% of female, college-bound high school students who took the SAT indicated that they would even consider a single-gender education, and for the ACT that number was less than 1%. Cultural shifts, population trends, and different expectations for student engagement prompted Converse to proactively address these new developments in enrollment. We partnered with a higher education firm to embark on a capital campaign feasibility study. The information they obtained from donors and alumni verified that Converse would be unable to raise the money necessary to cover its operational needs.

At that point, we engaged with you, our Converse family, to outline a plan to study a potential model change and an exciting new chapter in the story of Converse. The idea was to change the name of Converse College to Converse University, recognizing that it had been a university for over 50 years and

highlighting it now offers doctorate-degree programs, and to add a coeducational residential program alongside our women's college.

Converse engaged in a transparent and open process of research. We solicited and reviewed feedback from our full community, met with many alumni across the Southeast and through webinars to talk about this potential change, and provided continuous updates. Most importantly, the Board formed an investigatory committee led by Trustee Laura Bauknight ('87) and comprised of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members, to thoroughly study this proposal.

That group read every single survey response and email, asked probing questions, did deep research, interviewed institutions that had made similar changes, and even traveled to two women's colleges that had made the change. The committee determined that a co-educational structure would expand upon our tradition of academic excellence and work to ensure a sustainable future for Converse. On February 9, 2020, the Converse College Board of Trustees accepted the committee's recommendations and announced this dynamic new change: changing the name to Converse University, establishing the Converse College for Women, and adding residential undergraduate males, all beginning July 1, 2021. When the decision was announced in Twichell, which was filled with

the campus community, the campus responded with a standing ovation in support of the decision.

While this decision was met by many with excitement for the future, it also came with trepidation and sadness—emotions which I too felt. I came to Converse because I felt called by its mission and loved the sisterhood it developed. I cannot begin to express the grief I felt in leading this change, knowing it would be my legacy. It was, however, the responsible and necessary thing to do, and my sorrow was tempered by hope for a sustainable future.

From the very beginning as we contemplated this potential model change, every single person was committed to keeping a women's college and continuing the powerful sisterhood experience that our alumnae and students credit as one of the fundamental transformative experiences and joys of their life. We had heard from many students and alumni that, even though they didn't want to attend a women's college, they later found the experience to be indispensable and deeply meaningful. With that input, we developed our current model.

The culmination of this model change process and other work will be this fall when Converse welcomes its largest incoming class in its history: an estimated 370 new students, including 250 new student-athletes. The Converse College for Women will include nearly 300 students. This enrollment will fill the

campus with energy and put us on a path to fully utilizing our capital, allowing us to run more efficiently. In short, it will put us on a path to a thriving future.

We Will Celebrate Diversity and Community

When I came to Converse, I promised to do my very best for each student. As I met with members of the Converse community, I heard from students and alumni who did not feel welcomed or accepted at Converse. The lack of diversity, particularly within the faculty, and the lack of appreciation for diversity caused students to struggle to find role models with whom they connected and to feel like they belonged. Their experiences stood in stark contrast to the experiences I heard from many alumnae of how they felt from their first day that they belonged and that their years at Converse were the best years of their lives. The disparity



Proposed Model Change Town Hall

of those experiences spoke to the hurt that each person feels when excluded. It was clear that Converse needed a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion. If we were to empower students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly, Converse must be a model of respect for diversity and the power of love and community.

We quickly began to initiate cultural shifts on campus centered around diversity and inclusion that included:

- launching Converse’s Quality Enhancement Plan entitled, “Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences,” and devoting the Creative, Community, and Cultural Enrichment (C3) grants to support the plan;
- celebrating the 50th anniversary of Converse’s enrollment of African-American students in a year-long celebration during the 2017-2018 school year; and
- establishing the Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC) and began work on Converse’s Diversity Strategic Plan.

The importance of this work came to the forefront yet again with the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Converse responded to the national tragedy with a call to action and the publication of its diversity strategic plan, the development of which had begun in 2017. The need for real conversations, additional programming, and a gathering space on campus for people to address

these topics was a priority. Converse completed each action item listed in that original message and has made significant progress on its strategic plan. However, our work is not done until we can without a doubt state that Converse is a safe and supportive campus environment that encourages achievement and success for all.

educational level and thus avoid the long-term negative impacts that being underemployed can cause.

Converse already engaged in some of the best practices for deep learning, such as requiring writing-intensive courses; requiring a capstone project; providing affordable, schedule-friendly



Celebrating Courage: A Panel Discussion with Black Alumnae

We Will Open Doors to Opportunity

Deep learning is one of the most life-changing opportunities we can provide students. It entails a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way students act, think, or feel. Research has shown that students who engage in this type of learning are more likely to persist and graduate, feel prepared for their career, and strive for a job that is appropriate to their

study abroad programs; offering community-based learning courses; and engaging with the community to provide internship opportunities. However, the fact remained that students who desired internships were still struggling to find them, and when they did find them, the unpaid internship model created affordability barriers.

To address some of these issues, Converse stopped charging students

to receive the credit hours for summer internships. We then created an on-campus internship program where students can work paid internships in their field of study to gain credit hours—increasing internship opportunities for students.

Part of the Spartanburg Chamber's (now OneSpartanburg's) strategic plan was developing a better pipeline for college students to connect to Spartanburg employers. This would keep those talented and educated students here, develop a strong workforce to boost economic development, and provide students with experience to help them decide their true interests and find a good job upon graduation. I co-chaired this taskforce and worked directly with local businesses to develop a timeline that connects businesses and their strategic planning process with colleges and their educational cycle to provide early job shadowing and internship opportunities for students. Although the pandemic somewhat disrupted the progress of this plan, I hope we will see it fully implemented soon. In addition, by connecting with local businesses, we further expanded internship opportunities and have seen better post-graduation employment rates.

We Will Drive Vibrant Transformation

One of the most important things we have accomplished during my tenure is telling the Converse story.

This started with a comprehensive marketing study, which was the foundation for a branding refresh and the development of a marketing plan that was formed by the Office of Communications. With feedback from the Board and our model change committees, we also revitalized Converse's mission and vision to make them crisp and concise. This bright and honest marketing campaign is gaining tremendous momentum and the attention of prospective students as well as the community.

We Will Together

In my inauguration address I focused on the following section of the Founder's Ideal: that our students learn to "be faithful to truth and duty, so their influence may be characterized by purity and power." I highlighted that we must remain true to our goal of providing the highest quality liberal arts education for students, one that prepares them for the jobs of today and the jobs of the future that have not yet been invented. The liberal arts cultivates a lifelong curiosity and quest for truth, asking that we tell the truth even when it is hard or unpopular. We must cultivate in students a sense of civic duty by expanding their engagement in the community through experiential learning and service. It is imperative that we develop in our students a strong sense of humanity and set an example of compassion, love, kindness and empathy that includes a focus on diversity. And, that we teach students purity and



Inauguration of Krista Newkirk as Converse's 10th President

power by fostering an environment where students feel free to speak up and speak out, even—and perhaps especially—when they are challenging us.

As you read on to learn more about the work we've accomplished, I hope you feel a deep sense of pride in your beloved institution. I am honored to say that through our collective efforts, we have begun real and sustainable change with each one of these goals. I am deeply indebted to my leadership team for their talent, wisdom, and enthusiasm, and to Dr. Barker for his unfailing support, honesty, and counsel. I leave with confidence in Converse's future because I know the strong team and Board that are leading Converse. With them at the helm, Converse will have to continue to innovate, communicate its value, and prove itself through continued outstanding student experiences and outcomes.

The key takeaway is this. The heart of Converse remains the same.

We are a small but mighty university that provides one of the best academic and developmental experiences available. Converse has adapted many times over the years as the world around it has transformed and it must continue to do so, for we are living in a time of rapid change. This is your Converse and she needs you. Schools like Converse will only survive the coming challenges if every single person cares and makes Converse a priority in their lives and in their philanthropic endeavors. The work I have done as president is part of a collective legacy—a strong foundation built by the trailblazers who came before me to be bolstered by those who will succeed me.



MLK Day of Service



Silver Soiree and Dexter Edgar Converse Award Presentation

Thank you, Converse, for the honor of serving this institution that has for over a century made the world a better place.



The Unveiling of the Zimmerli Performance Center



President's Leadership Forum



Inauguration Celebration on the Quad



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