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

Converse University Announces Appointment of Boone J. Hopkins as Twelfth President

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (February 25, 2022) - Today the Converse University Board of Trustees announced the selection of Boone J. Hopkins, PhD, as the University's twelfth president. Hopkins was introduced during an all-campus meeting on February 25, and will begin his tenure on March 1, 2022.

Advised by a search committee that included trustees, alumni, students, faculty, and staff, the Board of Trustees unanimously approved Hopkins' appointment. Hopkins served as Interim President of Converse upon the sudden death of Converse's eleventh President Jeffrey H. Barker on July 21, 2021. Barker was Converse's President in the weeks following President Krista Newkirk's appointment as President of the University of Redlands. Newkirk served as Converse's tenth President for five years.

A comprehensive, nationwide search for the twelfth President of Converse was conducted from August 2021 through February 2022 by executive search consultants at Buffkin/Baker, who received extensive interest from a highly qualified, diverse, and outstanding field of candidates holding positions of Provost, Deans of Schools, Senior Vice Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Interim Presidents at both large public universities and impressive private colleges across the United States.

Out of an initial list of more than 900, the consultants at Buffkin/Baker narrowed down the field to 82 interested candidates, from which 18 were selected with input from both the search consultants and search committee for an in-depth review with Buffkin/Baker consultants on experience and qualifications. Ten diverse candidates from the field of 18 had in-person interviews with the search committee. Four finalists from the field of 10 were brought to Spartanburg for an on-campus visit; stakeholder roundtables consisting of trustees, alumni, students, faculty, staff, and donors; and second-round interviews with the search committee. From these 4 finalists, the search committee reviewed all feedback from the stakeholders and unanimously selected Hopkins as the best candidate to serve as Converse University's next president.

Sandra Shearouse Morelli '78, chair of the Converse Board of Trustees said, “Strong presidents boldly navigate change and manage transitions with grace in transformative moments. In this work, a leader is entrusted to make decisions: shifting priorities to address the most urgent needs; establishing policies to keep a campus healthy and safe; supporting employees with a focus on compensation, work-life balance, and benefits; and evolving operations to keep the university’s mission focused, with the student experience anchored at its heart. During his tenure as Interim President, Dr. Hopkins demonstrated these qualities and authentically led Converse toward a brighter future through tenacity, curiosity, and joy.”

Morelli continued, “With the work that has been done and the achievements of the last five years, Converse has positive momentum and a strong foundation for the academic advancement and organizational strength of Converse for both today and for future generations. Dr. Hopkins’ experience and success as a campus leader and champion for Converse has prepared him well to advance the mission of the institution and to chart a vibrant, secure future for the university. He closely listens to his community, and regularly incorporates feedback from staff and faculty with a students-first approach toward improvement. As an empathetic leader, Dr. Hopkins brings to the Office of the President the passion, vision, and commitment that Converse needs at this time.”

Prior to his appointment as Interim President, Hopkins served as the Senior Associate Provost for Student Success, Dean of the School of the Arts, and Chair of the Department of Theatre & Dance at Converse. As Associate Provost, Hopkins worked closely with colleagues in Student Life, Career Development, and Academic Advising to build a cohesive Division of Student Development & Success. Together with his colleagues, Hopkins made particular advances in retaining students through new staff hires, process improvements, and keen attention to necessary revisions to policies and procedures. During his tenure as Associate Provost, his department intentionally improved campus culture through the creation of an Office of Diversity and Inclusion, predicated on listening to students and aligning resources to best serve Converse’s campus population.

“I am humbled, deeply honored, and excited to be selected as Converse University’s twelfth President,” said Hopkins. “My personal mission as a leader is to remain passionate, responsive, and succinct as I listen well, celebrate successes, embrace new ideas with enthusiasm and curiosity, make visible the incredible work of our students, faculty, and staff to outside stakeholders, and build engaging, consistent relationships with donors, trustees, and alumni.”

In addition to his administrative role at Converse, Hopkins regularly taught courses in directing, theatre history, pedagogy, and performance studies in the Department of Theatre & Dance. In his six years as Dean of the School of the Arts, Hopkins and his colleagues increased enrollments in all areas of the School, cultivated unique collaborations with community partners, and developed new programs and courses, including the faculty-led “Creativity that Works” integrated arts

entrepreneurship program with an emphasis on career skills and critical competencies for emerging artists.

Hopkins' involvement in theatre at Converse included directing *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe, one of the first college productions of the Pulitzer Prize finalist, as well as directing Theatre Converse students and guest artists in *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Godspell*, *Hamletmachine*, *Twelfth Night*, *F2M*, *Cabaret*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, and *Legally Blonde: the Musical*. While at Converse, Hopkins played Caliban in *The Tempest* directed by Melissa Owens and Darren Nash, and performed the solo piece *Thom Pain: based on nothing* by Will Eno.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Brenau University, Hopkins received his MFA in Directing and Acting Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University and his Ph.D. in Theatre and Performance Studies from the University of Kansas. At Virginia Commonwealth University, Hopkins was co-founder and executive director of the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre (SALT) and won the Theatre Department Leadership Award. At University of Kansas, Hopkins was honored twice with the Ethel Hines Burch Award for Outstanding Graduate Teaching and received the theatre department's highest award, the Kilty Kane, for his production work with the University Theatre. Hopkins is a member of the Board of the Chapman Cultural Center, the Downtown Rotary Club, and Trinity United Methodist Church in Spartanburg.

Hopkins credits developing his skills of empathy during his time as an undergraduate student at Brenau, the Gainesville, Georgia private university founded as a women's college. His wife, Dr. Chandra Owenby Hopkins, serves as the inaugural Dean for the Converse College for Women, a post to which she was appointed in May 2020 by President Krista Newkirk. Together, the Hopkins are leading Converse to fully realize the transformative power that Converse's new co-educational model offers and the vital importance of Converse's historic heart as a women's college through the Converse College for Women. The Hopkins proudly live in Spartanburg with their two elementary school-age sons.

About Converse University

Converse University empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. The University encompasses the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Business; the School of the Arts; the School of Education and Graduate Studies; and the Converse College for Women. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers.

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