

2002 Strategic Plan for Higher Education in South Carolina

In the spring of 2001, the Commission initiated the process of revising the South Carolina's strategic plan for public higher education. Through a series of meetings of the Planning Advisory Council, and with input from all areas of higher education, the Council of Presidents and the Commission, a plan was developed and refined. The plan was approved by the Commission on January 10, 2002. The text of the approved plan follows.

Vision

South Carolina's system of public and private higher education will address the needs of the state by

- Creating a well-educated citizenry,
- Raising the standard of living of South Carolinians,
- Improving the quality of life,
- Meeting changing work force needs,
- Creating economic development opportunities,
- Positioning the state to be competitive in a global economy, and
- Fashioning a new generation of public sector and private sector leaders.

Introduction

During the last decade, the state has made significant strides in improving the quality of and access to higher education. The technical colleges have earned a well-deserved reputation for the excellence of their technical and occupational programs and for their responsiveness to the needs of business. They have also positioned themselves to serve as an entry point into higher education for increasing numbers of students. The state's technical colleges and two-year regional campuses have provided greater access to a wide array of university programs at sites across the state. The four-year institutions have developed new programs and strengthened their academic offerings. The state's research universities have expanded their graduate and high technology offerings, increased their admission criteria, and garnered greater external support for research and technology.

Yet the growth in state support for higher education has been at best modest, straining public college and university resources. All of South Carolina's higher education institutions, both public and private, have struggled to achieve greater efficiencies and have shifted increasing percentages of their spending to support academic programs. As a result, they operate on lean administrative budgets that are well below national averages for per-student expenditures.

Even so, colleges and universities have had to raise tuition and fees, causing students and their parents to pay a higher price for higher education. Tuition charges for the state's

public colleges and universities are consistently among the highest in the sixteen-state southeast region.

Help has come from the state in the form of dramatic increases in scholarship assistance for those students who qualify. Those who do not qualify, however, face a widening gap between costs and their ability to pay. The prospect of tuition assistance for students enrolled at two-year institutions can provide an avenue into higher education for many of these students but poses problems for the two-year institutions in meeting potential enrollment increases. Tuition covers only 25% of the operational cost per student. With projected enrollment increases of up to 20%, long-term funding for the two-year campuses must take the gap between tuition and costs into account.

Adding to the enrollment pressure is a projected increase in the number of high school graduates and an increase in the percentage of these graduates who will be prepared for college. More traditional and non-traditional students will expect to matriculate in the state's colleges and universities. This projected enrollment growth also increases the pressure for additional capital projects to accommodate the greater number of students.

Faced with greater demand for services and fewer state resources, the state's colleges and universities are finding it difficult to compete with the best institutions in other states. South Carolina's best college teachers are tempted to leave the state for higher paying positions in more supportive environments. The best researchers are attracted to research universities in other states that provide better equipment and facilities and greater opportunities to collaborate on cutting-edge projects.

Clearly, in South Carolina more state resources are needed for higher education. At the same time, state budget projections point to several years of belt-tightening, with possible reductions in allocations for state colleges and universities. Even after this period of budget adjustments, the state will face continued competing demands for limited resources. Social services, early childhood education, K-12 education, health care, prisons, roads, and other needs will crowd the legislative agenda. As a result, in South Carolina the prospects for adequate state funding for colleges and universities are not good.

In this environment of constricted resources and increasing demands, higher education in South Carolina finds itself at a crossroads. If the state is to compete nationally and globally, it must have a well-educated citizenry capable of working productively and sustaining and enjoying a higher quality of life. Yet, South Carolina is a small state and a comparatively poor one. If it is to provide high quality higher education opportunities, it has significant challenges to overcome.

Adversity can lead to positive outcomes. South Carolina can meet its challenges in higher education, but to do so it must marshal its resources and launch a concerted and collaborative effort to focus those resources strategically.

Policy makers need to establish priorities and work to have them funded. Institutions need to “work smart” to make up for what they lack in resources. The state must make smart choices for the future of its citizens.

In this environment, the following strategic plan sets forth the strategic directions for higher education in South Carolina.

Environmental Factors

As South Carolina moves resolutely through the first decade of the twenty-first century, it must be prepared to negotiate the following demographic and environmental realities that will affect higher education:

- South Carolina’s population increased by 15.1% for 1990-2000, compared to the national percentage change of 13.2%, which will cause increased demands for access to higher education;
- The college-going rate for South Carolina high school graduates has increased from 51.9% in 1989 to 61.8% in 1999, adding to the increased population of college-bound students;
- Minorities represent only 26% of the population attending college in South Carolina, compared to 33% of the total population of the state, and receive less than 15% of the state scholarship dollars, underscoring disparities in college attendance rates and scholarship support;
- The state lottery is projected to cover the cost of tuition at the state’s two-year colleges, providing opportunities for students but also straining campus resources;
- State funding for higher education has declined from 16.5% of the state’s budget in 1990 to 15.3% in 2000, and shortfalls in revenue projections and competing demands for state resources make it likely this figure will decline further;
- Workforce shortages are increasing in such fields as information technology, manufacturing technology, nursing, and teaching, suggesting the need to target educational resources to meet workforce demands;
- While the state population will continue to increase, growth will be uneven, leaving predominantly rural areas of the state without the benefit of economic development and exacerbating the gap between local tax revenues and local needs for services; and,
- Despite economic gains, South Carolina (82.5%) ranks last among its neighboring states of North Carolina (91.1%), Virginia (104.4%), Georgia (95.8%), and Florida (97.3%) in percentage of national average per capita income.

These and other demographic and environmental factors make it clear that South Carolina must act promptly and strategically to strengthen key aspects of its higher education system.

Strategic Goals

To meet the challenges to higher education in South Carolina, the state's public and private colleges and universities and the Commission on Higher Education need to join forces to advance a common agenda. The needs of the state will not be met by fragmented or redundant efforts.

The following three strategic initiatives—to increase access to higher education, to develop a nationally competitive research agenda, and to create collaborative partnerships—provide common ground upon which the state's colleges and universities can address the state's needs.

1. Expand Educational Opportunities for South Carolina Citizens

As South Carolina takes steps to increase the number high school graduates who are prepared for college, the higher education community needs to develop strategies to accommodate an increased number of students. Particular emphasis should be placed on meeting the needs of traditionally under-served populations including first generation college students, minorities, students from low-income families, and adult learners. Students who have not traditionally thought of attending college should be encouraged to do so. All qualified students should feel empowered to enroll in college, to upgrade their skills and increase their knowledge, to progress from two-year colleges to four-year colleges and universities if they have the ability and desire, and to access continuing educational opportunities throughout their lives. The following goals are identified to provide increased educational opportunities for South Carolina's citizens:

- A. Expand services and promote innovative approaches to reach traditionally underserved populations, including adult learners and minority students;
- B. Promote development of distance education courses and programs and virtual library resources to reach students who may not be able to access traditional educational programs;
- C. Increase need-based grants and other scholarship resources to provide increased opportunities for lower income students; and
- D. Improve articulation of two-year and four-year programs to facilitate transfer of students and increase access to baccalaureate programs.

2. Invest in Research for Economic Development and a Better Quality of Life

A cornerstone of economic development is high-level, globally competitive research. Investments in cutting edge research in engineering, health sciences, physical sciences, information systems, environmental sciences, and similar fields yield dividends many times over. Top quality research activity attracts top caliber faculty, who in turn attract funded support from federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation as well as private research support from industries ranging from pharmaceuticals to software and e-business firms to state-of-the-art manufacturing. New and expanding industries locate in states where research is taking place, creating jobs and stimulating higher educational levels in the population. Much as the Research Triangle has stimulated economic development in North Carolina, so too can research investment in South Carolina spur greater economic growth and benefit the people of the state. Such development takes conscious planning and strategic implementation and should be reflected in the state's strategic plan for higher education.

It also takes a commitment to invest the state's resources in ways that will benefit the state exponentially in years to come. The following strategic goals are identified to strengthen the state's investment in higher education research for economic development and a better quality of life:

- A. Create a state incentive system to encourage institutions to recruit nationally recognized faculty who can develop and/or strengthen graduate research programs.
- B. Designate focus areas for research and graduate program excellence and provide funding incentives for them to attain national and international standing.
- C. Support and develop research directed at the economic, social and educational infrastructure of the state drawing from shared data sources and collaborative efforts with other state agencies and private entities.
- D. Create programs to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning as the foundation for the state's future scholars and researchers.

3. Increase Cooperation and Collaboration for Efficiency and Quality

At one time higher education might have taken place in an "ivory tower" divorced from other institutions and other concerns. That clearly is no longer the case. In an age of rapidly increasing needs for a more highly educated citizenry, and in an age, too, when there are strong competing demands for the state's resources and real limits on available state funding, it is incumbent on higher education to seek and to expand cooperative relationships. Greater cooperation and coordination between preK-12 education and higher education can lead to shared use of resources, more closely meshed educational planning, better trained teachers and administrators, more closely linked academic

programs, better prepared students entering colleges, and the development of effective data bases to track student progress and assess the effectiveness of education in meeting the state's needs. Likewise, enhanced collaboration with business and industry can insure that economic development needs are met, that educational programs remain on the cutting edge of technological advances, and that education is grounded in real world experiences for students and faculty. Finally, increased cooperation among colleges, universities, state agencies, and non-profit entities can result in demonstrable efficiencies and increased quality. The following strategic goals provide an agenda of increased collaborative activity for higher education in South Carolina:

- A. Develop collaborative programs with the business community, state agencies, and non-profit corporations to enhance economic development and the quality of life.
- B. Increase both the use of and the technology for sharing data and systems among higher education institutions and with other state agencies and the private sector.
- C. Form partnerships with school districts and state agencies to enhance the preparation and continuing training of teachers, the quality of education in the state's public schools, the preparation for school of the state's children, and the support available to students while they are in K-12 schools.
- D. Collaborate with local communities and state and local governments to improve the training of health and social service professionals and the delivery of public health and welfare programs.

Implementation

No plan is effective without an implementation strategy. The Strategic Plan for Higher Education in South Carolina provides a broad outline of strategic goals, but does not attempt to define specific objectives and timelines for achieving them. Given the rapidly changing nature of the environment, implementation of those goals should not follow such a rigid pattern, but instead should be organic and flexible in order to account for environmental changes, to recognize false steps, and to allow for corrections. What is needed is a process that provides for mechanisms to be established to ensure effective implementation.

The proposed process calls for establishing a representative Strategic Planning Implementation Task Force that will report to the Commission on Higher Education and represent and coordinate with the state's public and private colleges and universities and other interested partners. The task force would establish strategic objectives, priorities, and timelines for achieving the strategic goals set forth in the plan and would monitor progress toward achieving the strategic goals.

The Commission on Higher Education will appoint members who will serve on the task force. They would include representatives of the Commission on Higher Education, the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education, the different sectors of public higher education, private higher education, the business community, the State Department of Education, state agencies, and other interested parties. In order to provide continuity in the planning process, it is suggested that the task force include some representatives who served on the Strategic Planning Advisory Council.

A task force will be appointed by the Commission and will meet at least twice each year. The initial meeting, to be held early in 2002, would focus on priorities and strategic goals, with subsequent meetings devoted to establishing time lines, assigning responsibilities, monitoring progress, and refining objectives and strategies. The task force would report to the Commission on Higher Education at least annually and would coordinate with and seek input from appropriate entities such as the Business Advisory Council to ensure coordination.