

Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina  
Quality Enhancement Plan Executive Summary

QEP Title: ***Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences***

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As an historic women's institution, Converse College was founded on an ideal of providing an environment of tolerance, pluralism, and informed social engagement. The "Founder's Ideal," a statement of guiding purpose adopted by trustees in 1899, expresses a commitment to cultivating in students the ability to "act justly," to participate in the well-being of their country, and to embrace differences "liberally and tolerantly." In this spirit – and inspired by the institutional core values of diversity, exploration, and community – Converse's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*, focuses on enhancing student learning by fostering the skills to understand, dialogue about, and engage at a personal level with diverse cultures and perspectives. In this way, *Converse Across Boundaries* equips graduates with the ability both to "converse" (i.e. communicate) across boundaries, and to appreciate what may be the "converse" to their own background (in the sense of seeing something as a difference which is complementary).

*Converse Across Boundaries* represents an integration of existing and new initiatives and programs. It supports course development for an existing non-western general education requirement as well as new curricula relating to non-mainstream or marginalized perspectives within western societies. In addition, the QEP inaugurates a new minor track in Interfaith Studies, aimed at cultivating appreciative knowledge of diverse faiths and worldviews and the roles they play in real-world arenas such as health care and counseling. The QEP also supports a new "diversity" category as part of an existing graduation requirement for extra-curricular activity. Finally, the QEP expands an existing study-abroad program and supports both a new domestic study-travel program and approved internships that deal substantively with the QEP theme; all as powerful ways of encountering diverse perspectives at a personal level outside the classroom.

The QEP topic and goals were developed as part of a year-long process involving students, staff, and faculty and including regular consultation with trustees. Assessment of the educational and social environment of Converse revealed that while significant diversity already exists in some respects within the college community, particular constituencies and identities are too often balkanized and a number of students lack curricular or personal exposure to different perspectives. In this way, *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*, integrates specifically diversity-related themes with approaches drawn from experiential learning initiatives. Converse has embraced a culture of broadening personal and social boundaries that will develop graduates who are better equipped to constructively navigate a pluralistic world.