

# CONVERSE

---

Fall 2022

## Building a World-Class University



# Opening Doors to New Opportunities





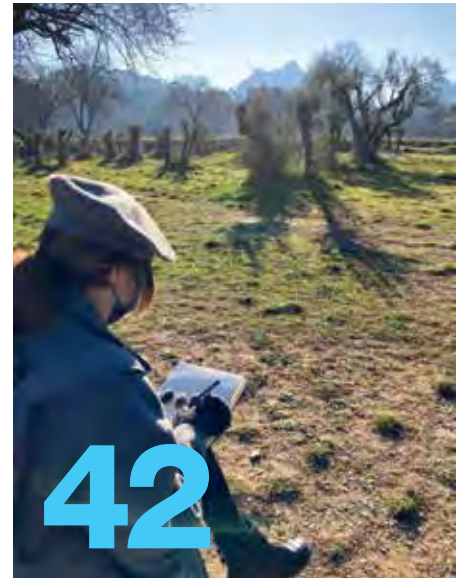
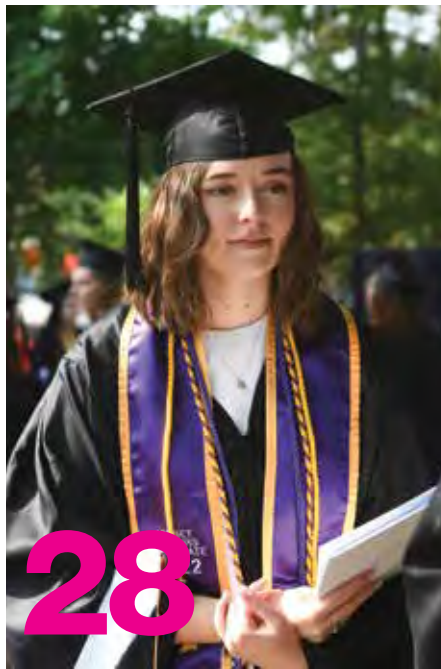
This May, Converse recognized 172 seniors who received their undergraduate degrees and 134 students who graduated with their advanced degrees—including our second cohort of 36 doctorate students who graduated with an EdD in Professional Leadership and our inaugural cohort to graduate from the Masters in Management program. Discover more about this dynamic group of graduates on page 28!



# CONTENTS

---

**Fall 2022**



**6** A Letter from the President

**8** Setting the Stage:  
Converse Introduces  
12th President

**14** The Building of a  
World-Class University

**20** Game-Changers

**28** The Class of 2022

**36** Converse College for  
Women

**40** A Vision for Cudd

**42** Capturing the Moment:  
An Immersive Travel-  
Sketching Experience

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.



**46** Making HIStory

**50** Lawson Academy



**54** Turning Two Passions Into a Profession

**56** Spring Events on Campus Photo Gallery

## CONVERSE

### EDITOR

Leah Anderson

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Azalea Acevedo '21

Rachel Black '23

Kelly Ferguson '21

John Jeter

Allison Reini

Leah Anderson

Holly Duncan

Janae N. O'Shields '07, MA '09

Deb Peluso '15

### PHOTOGRAPHY

John Byrum Photography

Seth Media LLC

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jack DelGado

Converse Magazine is published by the Office of Communications, Converse University, 580 East Main Street, Spartanburg, SC 29302, 864.596.9000.

Converse University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex national or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability or any other characteristic protected by law.

2022, Volume 131, No. 1

Copyright © 2022

Converse University



# A Letter from President





One of my favorite places on our historic campus is the welcoming and grand front porch of Wilson Hall. The front porch of any home is a special place. It is where our family meets and greets the community. The front door is where we hang ribbons when new babies arrive, where we display wreaths to mark special holidays, and where we leave notes of condolence when loved ones pass away.

Converse's porch stands as a physical marker of the warmth and hospitality that we hope everyone feels when they come to campus. Whenever I have a break between meetings, I enjoy walking out to the front porch to get some fresh air. As I take that moment on the swings, I often think about what has transpired across time on these very same steps. I envision the students who were dropped off at the porte cochere from horse drawn carriages with their large trunks. They must have felt such excitement being away from home for the first time! I think about the many students who once got permission from Miss Gee to meet with their dates on that porch—some of which led to life-long marriages. How romantic our front porch must be for those couples! I also often think about our current students who proudly pose in front of our large oak doors beneath the Converse name, decked in their full regalia for their senior and graduate photos. I take great joy in the doors of opportunity that they have opened for themselves by completing their Converse degree.

The front porch for Converse is an exceptional place because it gives us a vital space of connection where our community meets itself, a bridge between our past and our future where faculty and staff meet parents and where our alumni meet new students. We need those connections to one another, to Converse, and to our shared future.

As we embark on a new academic year, I look forward to the exciting opportunities we have to be one Converse community. Whether joining us at one of the stops on the President's Alumni Tour or coming to campus for inauguration on Friday, April 21, 2023—you will help campus pride flourish and experience the joy of reconnecting with Converse.

Converse needs more "front porch" moments and experiences for future generations to enjoy. We need to continue pursuing our dreams for this beloved institution—and we need your support to make it a reality. Read on to learn more about how you can get involved through the Converse Annual Fund or capital projects, like the revitalization of Cudd Hall.

When I look at so many new homes being built in Spartanburg county, I am struck by the changes in design. The back patio, large deck, and fenced backyard have replaced the grand porches of historic homes. At Converse, we believe in a culture of inclusion and care, a culture of front porch connections where everyone is welcome and where we can share ideas in community with others who may have different perspectives and who may come from different backgrounds than our own.

I look forward to meeting you on the front porch of Wilson Hall soon and to learning about your vision for the future of Converse.

Together, WE WILL.

*Boone J. Hopkins*

*Promotional photo for Theatre Converse's presentation  
of Will Eno's Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)*



His roles, among many, have included characters who couldn't be more different: Pappy Yokum, a work-averse hillbilly, and Thom Pain, a sardonic navel-gazer whose angsty-funny ramblings reveal a man who grew up ignored by the world.

It's safe to say that neither comes close to resembling Dr. Boone Hopkins, who this year was named Converse University's 12th president.

Of the "Pain" character, the dramatic irony here is that the play is a one-man show. That's especially curious because, as Boone says about himself and as others will tell you about him, the 41-year-old actor/director/scholar is all about collaboration.

"Being an actor gives him the ability to communicate well, to tell a story, to know his audience, to be empathetic with an audience," says Dr. Chandra Owenby Hopkins, the Dean of Converse College for Women and Associate Professor of Theatre. "Because he's a director, he can collaborate, and he can motivate everybody toward a common goal."

Anushka Senanyake '14 saw those same qualities in him when she was among his first students after Boone arrived at Converse College in 2012; she was part of the ensemble in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, which Boone directed for Theatre Converse in 2014.



*Boone Hopkins helping Anushka and classmates  
prepare for a performance*



“He is an excellent director,” she says over Zoom from her home in Sri Lanka, where she is the founding artistic director of her own theatre company. “He’s really good at creating the right space so that everybody feels like they can excel.”

Now Boone takes on his biggest professional role: directing the institution that he loves and where he started on the faculty a decade ago, alongside his wife of 17 years, Chandra.

They married when she was 23 and he was 24. They met in a moment when a scene almost fell apart—as in, an actual piece of stage scenery. More specifically, a wall.

At the time, Boone was a sophomore at Brenau University in his hometown of Gainesville, Georgia, where Chandra was a freshman. She recalls that afternoon when the lanky, high-energy young man burst into her advising session with a theatre professor, requesting immediate assistance with “an emergency situation in the scene shop.”

Ten minutes later—crisis averted—an assistant technical director introduced the two.

“I held out my hand, and he said, ‘Chandra. What kind of name is Chandra?’ And I said, ‘Boone! What kind of name is Boone?’” The rest was history.

Now they have two sons, Owen, 8, and Jack, 6. The couple collaborates plenty at work, but at home they keep their shop talk to a minimum, both say.

Still, he says, “I don’t know anything else in my current professional career besides collaborating with my wife. She is a large key to the success that I’ve been able to find and as a theatre artist: I do my best thinking out loud, in partnership with others.”

That, in fact, helps make the couple an ideal leading man and leading lady for Converse now, says Sandra Morelli ’78 who chairs the University’s Board of Trustees.

“We obviously didn’t make a hiring decision for Boone based on Chandra, but she is the icing on the cake; I think that pairing is really just amazing,” she says. “And I think students will look at the two of them and say, ‘That’s me. That’s me sometime in the future.’”



*The Hopkins family at the entrance to Wilson Hall*

For now, as the curtain rises on Boone’s—and Converse’s—future, the new president says he adheres to one of the most critical lines in the University’s current script:

“Our motto is a beautiful distillation of our mission, and I take it very seriously, that ‘Together, We Will,’” he says. “That’s always how I’ve directed plays, and that’s how I’ve always tried to work in my administrative roles, as collaboratively as possible.”



*The 2021 State of the University address during Family & Friends Weekend*

You can even trace that “Hopkins Method” back to Gainesville High School and his first role: Lucifer Ornamental “Pappy” Yokum, the ne’er-do-well, dimwit father in *Li’l Abner*, the 1956 musical based on the long-running comic strip.

“I was a freshman, and I absolutely fell in love with making the audience laugh and with the systematic collective processes of theatre-making,” says Boone, who in high school was also a champion 103-pound wrestler and was once honored as Gainesville’s “Mayor for a Day.”

After earning his MFA in Acting & Directing Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2007, he went on to the University of Kansas for his Ph.D. in Theatre Studies. There, he directed the likes of Tennessee Williams’ good girl/bad boy love story, *Summer and Smoke* in which Chandra appeared among other productions.

Of the show, *The University Daily Kansan* in 2012 quoted the then-doctoral student as saying, “These students bring such great energy because they’re just so hungry to work on characters that are this complex.”

If nothing else, that sounds very much like the dialogue Boone delivers today.

“It fundamentally comes down to working with people,” says Krista Newkirk, his predecessor. “And Boone has done that. He’s done it with faculty, he’s certainly done it well with students, and I think he’s done it well in the community.”

It’s no surprise that one might wonder what role Boone might be leading at any given moment.

“Every one of them is uniquely and authentically an expression of me, none of them are disingenuous. I believe in every role that I play,” he says. “The way I talk



*President Hopkins pops into a class to speak with students*



to a student is inevitably going to be very different from the way I talked to a trustee, but both are very honest and genuine expressions of me and my care for them.”

He takes those same sensibilities down to, let’s call it, the costume. For an interview outside Spill the Beans in downtown Spartanburg, he wears a beige suit, white dress shirt, and, yes, his signature bow tie in, naturally, Converse purple, with white stripes.

And so he mentions an encounter during his yearlong stint as interim president when he was told he needed to reconsider his choice of neckwear; the bow tie didn’t “look professional” at “certain meetings,” he says of a critique from someone he now considers a close friend.

“That made a great impression on me because I thought, yeah, I need to be flexible enough,” he says. “I don’t need to be so tied to my image that one little thing is going to keep me from connecting to somebody.”

Anushka, for one, describes what a connection with Boone looked like for her and her peers during their Converse days: “I think we all immediately connected with his energy and met him on the same kind of frequency that he was radiating out.”

She says she still mentally checks in with Hopkins to see if she’s meeting standards he sets for his cast and crew: “The one thing he said — kind of incessantly — to me was, ‘The way you do anything is the way you do everything,’ and that has stayed with me.”

She continues referring to him as her mentor — as Boone considered himself a protégé of Dr. Jeff Barker, who was to serve as Converse’s president; his sudden death last year thrust Boone into the role.



*Dr. Jeff Barker leading the Legally Blonde cast in a conga line*

Not only did Jeff hire the young theatre professor in 2012, he went on to perform under Boone’s direction in *Cabaret* (as a Nazi) and in *Legally Blonde* (typecast as a college dean).

Jeff’s wife, Jan, says that when she dropped into rehearsals, she noticed Boone’s attentiveness, his keen ability to listen, and his conspicuous leadership skills: “As a director, you’re making all kinds of decisions along with your team.”

After all, she says, any production must ultimately serve the audience: “What your vision is for how this production will look are what the results will be.”

Which then begs the question: what does Dr. Boone Hopkins envision for Converse University?

Here, he has an abundance of ideas; to name a few: sprucing up what he calls “our aging beauty, the campus”; focusing on the student experience through more real-world experiences; and in every decision, as he puts it, putting the student first.

He goes on to make yet another theatre reference, this one he picked up from a former artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

“He would always say that plays grow into the questions we ask of them,” Boone says. “The mistake a lot of people make about directing is they think it’s just coming in and making a lot of decisions when, in fact, it’s asking a lot of questions — which is where I really see a parallel between the work I did on the stage and the work I do leading this institution: I think Converse will grow into the questions we ask of it.”

Among others who’ve watched him grow over the years, Krista says she believes he has the chops to perform in the job she held for five years before becoming president of University of Redlands in California.

“It requires a high degree of emotional intelligence, and I think Boone has that in spades,” she says. “But I also think he’s got the analytical skills to do well in this.”

Sandra says she saw those virtues in him early on at Converse — along with what she calls his passion and his dedication to the institution.

Years before she introduced him as the new president on the Twichell Auditorium stage Feb. 25, she remembers watching him as a professor.

“And I don’t think I was seeing an actor. I was seeing who he was, he wasn’t acting for anything; there wasn’t anything to act for,” she says. “I believed — I believe — that he has a heart for the future of Converse, and I don’t think you can act that way all the time.”

For her part, Anushka sounds as if Boone had been preparing for a role she could see him play as far back as her senior year.

“I think the University is in really, really capable hands,” she says, “and I’m excited to see what happens.”



*Students applaud and cheer for Dr. Boone Hopkins following the announcement of his presidency*





*Dr. Boone Hopkins walking with his boys,  
Owen and Jack, across campus*

# Five Things You Probably Didn't Know About Boone Hopkins

*Dr. Chandra Owenby Hopkins shares the following about her husband:*

- He's a great dancer, and he has some very signature dance moves.
- Boone loves camping. He has a state park map of South Carolina, and he's putting blue or green stars on every state park that he's either hiked in or camped in with the boys. His goal is to do all the state parks in South Carolina.
- He's a pun king and just can't resist cracking a good joke based on word play.
- He plays golf, shoots basketball, and competes with no small enthusiasm in tug-of-war contests on campus. Says Chandra, "He's annoyingly really good at anything sporty."
- He's quite the woodworker (likely thanks to his experience in scene shops.) He built the family's dining room table of heart pine reclaimed from an old mill in Laurens, South Carolina. He also built the boys a backyard playhouse.



Follow President Hopkins at  
**@PresidentBoone**



# CONVERSE'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS:

## HOW CREATIVITY, INNOVATION, AND TRANSFORMATION IS OPENING DOORS ACROSS CAMPUS

**We will open doors.** It's a small phrase but a mighty promise supported by a 133-year history of achieving excellence through bold, thoughtful innovation.

This, coupled with the institution's positive momentum amid campus-wide changes to expand enrollment and preserve a sustainable future at Converse, have positioned the University for continued success.

From the process of the co-educational model change also emerged a streamlined, more easily recitable mission: **Converse empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.**

A vision for Converse, a statement of inspiring hope and optimism for the ultimate fulfillment of the mission and where we see ourselves in the future was minted during the model change process as well: **Converse advances a culture of belonging and collaboration that ignites creativity, innovation, and transformation.**

### **POISED FOR SUCCESS: THE STRATEGIC VISION PLAN**

On March 1, 2022, Dr. Boone J. Hopkins officially stepped into the role of Converse's twelfth president. As the focus of his first 100 days, Boone embarked on the development of a three-year

strategic vision plan designed around:

- enriching Converse's **programs**;
- enhancing Converse's **places**; and
- empowering Converse's **people**.

During the initial planning process, a Strategic Vision Planning Committee was established to guide the plan's development. In the spring, the Planning Committee launched a campus-wide engagement survey, collecting responses from 221 participants and over 1200 unique comments to help shape the development of the plan. Later that summer, the Planning Committee, alongside campus leadership and other key stakeholders, incorporated



campus feedback while working on resource planning, goal prioritization, and measures for success.

The 2023-2026 Strategic Vision Plan was approved by Converse University's Board of Trustees during their September Board meeting. The plan sets Converse on a track towards realizing its long-term vision, which includes:

- Building a premier institution that becomes the first choice for learning;
- Positioning Converse to respond rapidly to a changing world;
- Becoming an engaged and equal partner with our alumni, local, and national communities;
- Growing our resources to create financial resiliency and a capacity for continued innovation and growth
- and Exemplifying systemic dedication to inclusion, diversity, and equity.

## Phases of the Strategic Vision Plan

Three progressive phases of the 2023-2026 strategic vision plan align with the core tenets of Converse's mission as we grow and transform together:

### Phase 1:

We will demonstrate our commitment and position ourselves for change by:

- aligning our teams for success;
- conducting programmatic evaluations and self study; and
- reinforcing the brand, vision, and core values.

### Phase 2:

We will build capabilities and capacities to support change by:

- launching a comprehensive fundraising campaign;

- investing in critical infrastructure; and
- forging relationships to support the changes.

### Phase 3:

We will pilot change strategies and scale what works by:

- addressing the resources needed for campus growth;
- implementing efficient processes and solutions; and
- maintaining an infrastructure that is flexible, reliable, and scalable.

## Priorities and Themes of the Strategic Vision Plan Programs, Places, and People

help define and shape the future of Converse as the campus embarks on our collective future together:

Program Focus Areas Include:

- scholarships;
- academic programs;
- experiential learning opportunities;
- career readiness; and
- the student experience.



Places Focus Areas Include:

- space utilization;
- accessibility;
- engaging spaces;
- policies and processes; and
- future-ready infrastructure.

People Focus Areas Include:

- compensation and total rewards;
- diversity hiring and retention;
- performance culture; and
- professional enhancement.

In addition to the above, **Financial Resiliency** and **Inclusive Excellence** are the two overarching themes that serve as interwoven priorities throughout the entire plan.

**Financial Resiliency:** As a campus, we will be financial stewards—managing resources to ensure the ongoing viability of delivering our mission. In addition, additional fundraising strategies will help build capacity and energy to prepare Converse for the unexpected, protect our assets, and enable innovation and growth.

**Inclusive Excellence:** We will foster an inclusive, safe, and vibrant campus community through our commitment to recognize, include, and value each person equally; foster sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect; and encourage and support everyone to strive to reach their own potential.

## Discover More

Please visit [converse.edu/SVP](https://converse.edu/SVP) to get the latest news and updates.

# THE STRATEGIC VISION PLANNING COMMITTEE

---

## Strategic Vision Planning Committee Membership Co-Chairs

**Boone Hopkins**, *President*

**Kristin Lacey**, *Vice President for Operations and Strategic Planning*

## Programs Committee

**Rhonda Mingo**, *Dean of Students (Team Lead)*

**Erin Templeton**, *Dean of the School of Humanities, Sciences and Business; Professor of English (Team Lead)*

**Matt Cash**, *Director of Admission*

**Neval Erturk**, *Associate Provost of Research and Engagement; Professor of Biology*

**Lee Givins**, *Assistant Professor of Education; Director of Professional Leadership Program; Associate Dean of Graduate Studies*

**Tori Good**, *Director of Career Development and Employer Relations*

**Chandra Hopkins**, *Dean of Converse College for Women*

**JW Kellam**, *Associate Vice President for Student Financial Services*

**Danielle Stone**, *Chief Inclusion Excellence Officer and Title IX Coordinator*

**Kendra Woodson**, *Registrar*

## Places Committee

**Zach Corbitt**, *Chief Information Officer (Team Lead)*

**Gladden Smoke**, *Director of Facilities (Team Lead)*

**Neval Erturk**, *Associate Provost of Research and Engagement; Professor of Biology*

**Larry Jones**, *Director of Campus Safety*

**Sher-Ron Laud**, *Director of Residential Life*

**Randy Loggins**, *Deputy Director of Athletics*

**Rebecca Parrish**, *Director of Institutional Grants*

**Evan Thomas**, *Assistant Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy; Chair and Director of Marriage and Family Program*

**Debbi Thompson**, *Director of Event Services*

**Chris Vaneman**, *Dean of the School of the Arts; Associate Professor of Flute*

**Wade Woodward**, *Director of Mickel Library*

## People Committee

**Claire Gregg**, *Director of Human Resources (Team Lead)*

**Margaret Moore**, *Faculty Senate President; Associate Professor of Physical Education (Team Lead)*

**Kristina Pisano**, *Director of Annual Giving and Staff Council President (Team Lead)*

**Doug Busch**, *Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies*

**Daphnie Glenn**, *Director of First-Generation Student Programs*

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

**Emily Harbin**, *Associate Professor of English; Chair of the English Department*

**Beverly Lowrance**, *Associate Director of Student Financial Services*

**Jeff Martin**, *Assistant Professor of Education and Assistant Professor of Professional Leadership*

**Rob Miller**, *Head Coach Men's Soccer*

**Eliza Smith**, *University Chaplain*

**Danielle Stone**, *Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion; Title IX Coordinator*

**Lexi Stoneburner**, *Director of New Student Experiences*

## Student Advisors

**Angela Brobson**, *Class of 2023, SGA President*

**Maddie Buisch**, *Class of 2022, SGA Vice President*

**Karen Mims**, *Class of 2022, SGA President*

## Administration

**Jenn Bell**, *Director of Intercollegiate Athletics*

**Will Case**, *Associate Provost for Student Success; Associate Professor of Chemistry; Co-Director of Nisbet Honors Program*

**Dianne Crocker**, *Vice President for Finance and Business*

**Holly Duncan**, *Vice President for Marketing and Communications*

**Jamie Grant**, *Vice President for Enrollment Management*

**Lienne Medford**, *Interim Provost; Dean of Education and Graduate Studies*



# Building On Today For a Vibrant Future

Converse continues to boldly move forward with transformative plans and partnerships that bolster the student experience. Whether it's revitalizing our learning-living environments, like the Williams Hall common area renovation, made possible by a generous gift from Padrica Hopkins-Menchion '85, or community-focused leadership development programming, like the DiversiTea virtual event featuring the Honorable Stinson Woodward Ferguson '07, Converse creates a myriad of opportunities for our students through a personalized education. Read on to learn about some of the exciting happenings that took place this past spring:



## *RISE (Research, Internship, and ArtS Experiential Learning) Symposium*

Converse held the inaugural RISE (Research, Internship, and ArtS Experiential Learning) Symposium. This year's symposium, which was made possible by a 2020 Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment Grant, featured 50 internships and research studies completed by Converse students. Open to all undergraduates, graduates, and Converse II students, the RISE Symposium empowers students to share their ideas, discoveries, and artistic work with the Converse campus and local community within a professional setting.



RISE



*Spartanburg Community College Agreement*

## *Spartanburg Community College Agreement*

Converse announced a transfer agreement that offers Spartanburg Community College graduates who successfully complete an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree the opportunity to enroll in Converse University toward the completion of a bachelor's degree. Existing transfer agreements with other Upstate institutions include Spartanburg Methodist College and Greenville Technical College.

## *Southeast Regional Model Arab League Conference*

In March, Converse hosted the Southeast Regional Model Arab League conference. This year marked the first year the event has been held in person since 2019 due to the pandemic. Delegates role play one of 22 nations that are members of the official Arab League founded in Cairo, Egypt in 1945.



*Southeast Regional Model Arab League Conference*

### ***\$2 Million Milliken Gift***

At the end of 2021, the Milliken & Company Charitable Foundation committed to a \$2 million gift, one of the first multi-million dollar gifts of the newly-formed foundation. The commitment is the lead gift to help launch phase one of a \$7 million renovation project of the Milliken Fine Arts building, with renovation project details to be shared at a later date.

incoming and current Converse students who identify as one whose parent or guardian has not received a four-year U.S. bachelor's degree, and provides a smooth transition to college for first-generation students through mentorship networks as well as academic and social resources. Roughly 40% of Converse undergraduate students identify as the first in their family to attend a college or university.



*\$2 Million Milliken Gift*

### ***25K Grant for First Gen Mentors Program***

Power:Ed awarded \$25,000 to Converse's first generation programming, First Gen Mentors, formerly known as the Trailblazer Program. The program serves



*First Gen Mentors Program Grant*

### ***Faculty Tenure and Two Arts Endowed Professorships***

Converse's Board of Trustees has recently promoted and awarded tenure to the following faculty members:

- Dr. Doug Bush,  
*Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies*
- Dr. Angela Elder,  
*Associate Professor of History*
- Dr. Emily Harbin,  
*Associate Professor of English; Chair of the English Department*
- Dr. Shannon Martin,  
*Associate Professor of Psychology*
- Dr. Sheri Strickland,  
*Professor of Chemistry; Associate Chair for the Department of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics*
- Professor Jena Thomas,  
*Associate Professor of Art*

In addition, the President's Office announced the recipients of two endowed professorships in Fine Arts. Dr. Kelly McElrath Vaneman has received the Mary Reynolds Babcock Distinguished Professorship, awarded to a faculty member for excellence in music. Meirav Goldhour has received the Carrie Cathcart Owings '33 Endowed Professorship, awarded to an accomplished professor in interior design.

**The support of alumni, donors, and friends helps Converse to grow and thrive. That continued commitment has shaped the University into the renowned institution it is today. Throughout the pages of this magazine you'll meet some of Converse's game-changers and discover more transformative experiences happening across campus.**





# EVERY GIFT COUNTS

**SCHOLARSHIPS | CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALS  
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT | CAMPUS PRESERVATION**

**Every gift to the Converse Annual Fund,  
no matter the amount, makes a difference.  
Your support today empowers students to  
confidently take on the future.**

**CONVERSE**  
Annual Fund

**GIVE TODAY!**

**[converse.edu/give](https://converse.edu/give) | 864.577.2045 | Enclosed Envelope**

# game chang·er

\ˈgāme chān-jər\

by Azalea Acevedo '21

## noun

1. an event, idea, or procedure that effects a significant shift in the current manner of doing or thinking about something.

*Converse is a small University with a mighty vision. A place of hope and opportunity, creativity and innovation. We will be a place that opens doors—a place of transformation for our students. The experiences, opportunities, and interactions Converse provides are intentionally designed to spark innovation, open doors, and provide a rich educational experience to all. Read on to discover how the Converse Community is taking the lead, on campus, in the classroom, and in their professions.*



# Dr. Amanda Mangum

*Assistant Professor of Mathematics and Data Science*



Dr. Amanda Mangum's Quantitative Consulting class allowed students to work on a real data science project. Partnered with the Upstate Family Resource Center, students had access to client data from 2020 and 2021, which they used to create data-driven solutions for the organization.

Allowing students to learn through experiences and with mentorship is the culmination of Amanda's teaching approach.

"There's research that shows that students retain and learn material better if they can really interact with it themselves," she says.

Students in the Quantitative Consulting class not only learned how to interpret real data, they also had opportunities to present their findings. The class presented to the board of the Upstate Family Resource Center. Students like Jovana Mitic '23, Angela Brobson '23, and Chloe Griffin '22 were able to attend and

present at the Nebraska Conference for Undergraduate Women in Mathematics. The class will also be attending MathFest, a national conference, in the summer.

This is yet another area in which Amanda sought to guide her students.

"We spent some time talking about 'what's your elevator pitch?' We actually practiced that in class," she says.

"What's great is it also turns out that is their abstract that they then submit for the conference."

Their assignments were also preparation: a paper, a presentation, and a poster. By the time students finished, they had all the tools they needed to present on their own.

"I think this class gives them skills in communication, technical skills in Python and Excel, and skills in working in a diverse team... I think all of those skills transfer really well."



# María Belén Vendrell '22

As the second student-athlete in Converse history to win Conference Carolina's Murphy Osborne Scholar-Athlete Award, María Belén Vendrell is a leader both in the classroom and on the field.

María is on the tennis team, double-majoring in Business with a concentration in International Business and Economics. A tennis player since the age of five, María had not considered studying in the United States until a scout approached her after a tournament in her home country of Argentina. She says the small community, academic programs, and athletics were what attracted her to Converse.

"My family always prioritized education over everything, so I wanted to go to a school that had a good business program, where I could get a good business degree but also play tennis at the same time," says María.

She credits the supportive community and mentorship she found as vital in her academic pursuits. One professor who has been influential is Dr. Madelyn Young, who is María's advisor.

"She has always been there for me. You know, being an international student is not easy," says María.

She says Dr. Young has been instrumental in guiding her through research and finding internship opportunities.

One such research opportunity focused on the future of higher education, which she, along with Converse trustee Christopher Dorrance, presented to the Board of Trustees.

María has also presented another research project titled, "Compassionate Capitalism's Contribution to Robert Putnam's Upswing" at the South Carolina Political Science Association's meeting, held at Winthrop University.

"It was an amazing experience to be able to go to another university and present your hard work, your project to other people that are interested," says María.

While these are major accomplishments, María says she did not realize how much she had done and how many people impacted her during her education until she was nominated for the Murphy Osborn Scholar Athlete Award.

"I think that [award] represents what a student-athlete is here at Converse—caring about not only excelling at a sport but also excelling in the classroom."





# Dr. Sherrie L. Jeffries, EdD '22



Sherrie Jeffries, who in May 2022 graduated with an EdD in Professional Leadership, has dedicated her life to advancing education. As a public-school teacher for two decades, and a reading interventionist, she knows how important leadership is in ensuring positive outcomes for children struggling with reading in schools.

During the three years of her doctoral program at Converse, she has demonstrated just the kind of leadership she champions. In conjunction with her church, New Day Baptist of Spartanburg, and the Spartanburg Academic Movement, she cofounded Students and Parents Advancing Reading Knowledge (SPARK) with Rev. Audrey Hailstock.

The program focuses on equipping Black families to lead reading time at home. The first round of monthly workshops provided teaching strategies, picture and

chapter books focused on Black characters, activity ideas to make reading fun, and tools such as crayons in diverse skin colors and puppets to promote engagement. Sherrie says feedback from the parents was positive, and she hopes to gather funding to continue the program for more students and parents.

Sherrie says the supportive faculty and tight-knit cohort is what drew her to Converse. She loved the nurturing environment at Furman University, where she received her BA in Elementary Education and a MA in Elementary Education with concentrations in Reading and Literacy. Jeffries wanted the same for her doctoral program.

“[At Furman], all of my professors knew me by name. There are still professors that I keep in contact with 20-something years after graduating,” Sherrie says.

At Converse, she found a similar environment.

“From day one [the professors] let us know that they were there for us and they wanted all of us to complete the program – which is unique for a doctorate program,” Sherrie says.

She also credits the model used in Converse’s doctoral program as being very supportive. Sherrie noted that her dissertation was completed alongside her classes, so her classroom learning complemented her experiential work. When comparing her experience to acquaintances and friends in programs where dissertations are completed after classroom learning, she says their experiences did not go as smoothly without the support from mentors and peers that she had.

Sherrie’s dissertation focused on representation of Black male characters in classroom picture books. She surveyed elementary school teachers on the kind of books in their classrooms, and how many of them included Black male characters. Her research also noted a positive behavior change among Black male students when teachers read books to the class that had Black male characters in them.

Sherrie’s findings demonstrated the importance of mirror texts in reading development, the role teachers play as “on the ground leaders,” and that reading coaches are best equipped to lead professional development in this field.

For Sherrie, it all comes down to one thing: creating a better future for children.

“All children are deserving of a great education,” says Sherrie.

# Making An Impact

Students pursuing their Doctorate in Professional Leadership (EdD) at Converse learn to become leaders and strategists through their dissertation, which explores a targeted area of interest and addresses organizational challenges. Some of this year’s dissertation topics include:

- *The Intersection Of Visual Arts Practice And Adaptive Leadership Theory In Education: A Phenomenological Study* by Catharine Bergman Cassell, 2022  
Thomas McDaniel Award recipient for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation
- *The Influence of the Induction Program on Novice Teacher Retention* by Melissa Kate Winstead Colwell
- *LEA Representatives’ Leadership And Perceived Fit Of Leadership Style As Reported By Special Education Practitioners: An Application Of Situational Leadership® II During IEP Team Meetings* by Amanda Lauren Holliday, 2022  
Thomas McDaniel Award recipient for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation
- *Administrative Strategies to Enhance Teacher Morale Based on Kelley’s Followership Model* by Amanda Yarborough Presley, 2022  
Thomas McDaniel Award recipient for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation
- *Leading From Within: A Case Study of Relational Leadership Emergence Within Undergraduate Stem Departments Adopting Evidence-Based Teaching Practices* by Loretta DeAngelis Ramey

Learn more! [converse.edu/EdD](https://converse.edu/EdD)



# Delaney Leslie '22

Majoring in politics, minoring in English and music, and certification in Music Technology and Music Business, Delaney Leslie, Class of 2022, is what some may call a Renaissance woman.

Since enrolling at Converse in 2018, Delaney has become involved in diverse aspects of student life and academics. She is active in SGA, the Model Arab League, Wind Ensemble, and Alpha Lambda Delta. She has also been in May Court and was elected Class of 2022 President.

As if that was not enough, she was the head delegate for the model programs, Secretary General of Model NATO and Southeast Model Arab League, and Assistant Secretary General at the National University Model Arab League in Washington, DC in 2022.

Delaney credits the mentorship and support at Converse with helping her pursue her interests on and off campus. One of the major influences in her time at Converse is Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Chair of History and Politics.

“He’s definitely become sort of a father-figure to me, always pushing me to do great things,” says Delaney.

“Whenever I’m thinking of giving up, or I’m not sure about something, he’s always there to inspire confidence in me,” she says.

While Dr. Dunn inspires her intellectual and political leadership, Leslie also credits Dr. Kelly Vaneman and Professor John Jeter with nurturing her creative side.

“Kelly [taught] me to love the oboe again, and John Jeter [taught] me the drive to manage music artists and tours,” says Delaney.

Her creative education has reinforced her leadership abilities. One experience that impacted her is a branding class she took with Jeter.

“I’ve learned to portray myself as a confident, well-spoken, and highly ambitious and driven woman, and how I can use that in order to get opportunities and boost other people up as well,” she says.





Delaney has already used her leadership to create positive change as Head Delegate in the Model program.

"I had the ability to build and create a different culture on the team that enhanced our intellectualism, and also optimism and enthusiasm about the most nerdy things you can think about on campus," she says.

"This year we really highlighted our friend making," Delaney says.

She points to their recent trip to DC as an example.

"I've never heard that much laughing on the bus ever in my four years of doing it. The community that we have on the team is stronger than ever," says Delaney.

As she approaches her future, Delaney sees many paths to pursue. She is considering working in an international NGO, NATO or the UN. On another path, she sees being a band or venue manager. What she does know is she wants to travel.

"I came to Converse in order to try to get an idea of what to do with my life and only got more confused because I fell in love with more and more things, and that's why we love a liberal arts education," says Delaney.

This past March, 100 philosophers from across the country descended on Converse for the Philosophy Symposium for the South Carolina and North Carolina Philosophy Associations.

"One of the cool things was that Converse students—philosophy majors as well as interested students—not only were they able to attend, but they were able to participate," says Dr. Kevin DeLapp, the Dr. Harold E. Fleming Chair of Philosophy and Department of Religion and Philosophy Chair.

The conference allowed students to see philosophy outside of the classroom, and participate in dialogue with professionals in the field.

"[Dialogue] is essential not just for the discipline of philosophy, but for life in general. Talking with other people is how we develop our own thoughts," says Kevin.

This fact can be seen in Kevin's own work. He is the author of *Moral Realism* (2013) and *Partial Values: A Comparative Study in the Limits of Objectivity* (2018) and the co-editor of *Lying and*



*Truthfulness* (2016). He is one of the credited editors of *Portraits of Confucius: The Reception of Confucianism, 1560-1960* (2022). Often, what is discussed in his seminar-style classes helps inform his research interests.

“The classroom experience really shapes the kind of research projects I undertake, and my research experience trickles back and affects the classroom experience,” he says.

He often shares findings from both his current research and already published work with students so they can see the process in real time.

“It helps them [the students] see that philosophy is current, it is an ongoing field.”

Through these classroom discussions, the students are able to participate in a community in which all are learning together.

“They get to see their professor is working on ideas right alongside of them, in concert with them, as opposed to the illusion the professor already has all the answers.”

The Senior capstone is the culmination of this ideal. The seminar is student-led and made up of majors who by this time know each other well. They are able to articulate and explore their own ideas, and through group discussion shape their final projects.

While Kevin points out that Converse students who majored in philosophy are accepted into competitive graduate programs, he says the value of philosophy training affects more than those who have chosen a career in the discipline.

“The value of the training isn’t to prepare you necessarily just to be a philosopher—it’s to prepare you to be a human.”



# **FORGING AHEAD:**

## **Converse Undergraduate Class of 2022**

by Kelly Ferguson '21





**Four unique individuals all walk into a school—Converse University—and four years later they all emerge with their own distinctive undergraduate degrees and experiences: Maddie Buisch (B.A. Special Education: Learning Disabilities), Terra Pettit-Bacovin (B.S. Chemistry), Mary Catherine Horton (B.A. Healthcare Administration, minor in Business Administration), and Ahdiayah Horton (B.M. Performance). Though their specializations vary across the academic spectrum, they unite as a community, collectively pursuing the excellence of our school values. These bright young graduates reflect on their time at Converse University.**

### **Personal Paths:**

Each student followed their own path to Converse, whether their journey started over ten years ago or that Converse was always in the cards for them. **Ahdiayah Horton** (Performance), despite being a Spartanburg native, had never heard of Converse. It wasn't until a teacher recommended Converse that she decided to tour the campus. The abounding springtime blossoms drew her in, but it was the violin professor's encouraging presence that sealed the deal. Transitioning from a high school class of over 1,000 people to small classes where a student feels connected to their instructors and classmates was a welcome change.

Converse II student, **Terra Pettit-Bacovin** (Chemistry), returned to Converse at 31. She first attended at the age of 18 in 2006 as a fine arts student, but didn't have the resources she needed to be successful at the time. After taking courses at other institutions, attending fashion school in New York City, and working in the service industry for 12 years, she decided it was time for a career change. Inspired by gastronomy and a burgeoning interest in perfume alchemy, she wanted to challenge herself with a new type of creative outlet through chemistry at Converse.

Students **Mary Catherine Horton** (Healthcare) and **Maddie Buisch** (Education) knew their general direction, but Converse helped streamline their career paths. Maddie was aimed toward non-profit work, until her clinical assignment at a local school won her heart for a career in education. Her time teaching high schoolers with learning disabilities inspired her to pursue a career where she could seize the opportunity to shape young adults into thoughtful and well-intentioned people. Mary Catherine was inspired in freshman year by an internship presentation of a student's experience at the local hospital. Hearing the positive experiences of her fellow "Connie" and having professors who worked as healthcare professionals served as the impetus for Horton to shift from business to healthcare. Each of these women found their niche eventually, taking their own paths, which allowed exploration into different fields to find what suited them best.

### **Ascending to Leadership:**

Converse provided these students with opportunities like leadership positions, the Nisbet Honors Program, in-field studies, and independent research so they could take the reins of their careers. Maddie Buisch (Education) grabbed on tightly to these opportunities, serving as the Student Government

Association (SGA) Vice President, a presidential student ambassador, student worker for the annual fund, and orientation leader. She is proud to have implemented new legislation during her time at Converse, like granting 24-hour access to certain buildings and lobbying for new water fountains where there were none. Not only does the SGA foster community involvement, but it teaches real-world problem solving, as any change must be aided by research experience and self-advocacy. Maddie found it wonderful to see students take action for positive change, caring for the posterity of Converse, even if they may graduate before the improvements are fully realized.

Terra Pettit-Bacovin (Chemistry) credits the small, intimate environment at Converse as a major contribution to her thriving personal growth. Her mentor suggested that she undertake an independent research project, although at first Terra was unsure of her capability to complete a project on her own. She sharpened her focus on quantitative and instrumental analysis after taking a class that analyzed the water quality of local Lake Greenwood. With grant money she earned, Terra studied the water quality of the Waccamaw River in Myrtle Beach, SC. Her goal is to provide clean water for South Carolina's future generations. Terra mused that as a teenager, she would never have believed that she would be pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry at 35. She owes it all to the Converse II program's flexibility and support. Terra hopes to seize her educational opportunity to the best of her ability and make her school proud.

The most impactful aspect of Mary Catherine's (Healthcare) education was her internship with Eden Terrace of Spartanburg, an assisted living and memory care facility. There she applied the knowledge she learned in the classroom by working in the marketing department, giving tours of the facility, facilities networking, and care coordination with hospice. She also worked in Converse's Center for Career Development, which exposed her to professionalism, the value of connecting with people, and developing leadership skills. While at Converse, Mary Catherine served as a career peer, an advocate on the Nisbet Honors Program student advisory board, and as the yearbook photographer and editor.

Ahdiayah Horton (Performance), alongside her rigorous viola practicing, took on responsibilities as the graphic designer for the Black Student Union, following a new passion for visual art. Horton also created the Black at Converse Instagram page in 2020 to share the stories of African American students. Through this page, she hoped to promote a more diverse and respectful environment for students of color at Converse. Just as she poured herself into her community, it lifted her up as well, through associations like the Nisbet Honors Program (NHP). The NHP served as an important tool for finding the right graduate school, making professional connections, and sponsoring funding. She also gained valuable musical experience through her honors capstone, performing in more than three recitals this year, including the Converse Baccalaureate ceremony. These opportunities, provided by Converse,



prepared Ahdiayah, Mary Catherine, Maddie, and Terra for their lives post-grad.

### **Converse Community Support:**

Amongst these students, each praised the support they received from the community resources, which assisted their personal journeys. Mary Catherine Horton's role as a career peer supported her in ways she didn't anticipate. The Center for Career Development promotes resources like job fairs, resume workshops, and internships. She quickly learned to network early, which led to finding a job before graduating from college. She met a recruiter in her freshman year at a Lunch and Learn College Town event, and built a relationship with them over several years. In her final semester, they told her about a discovery position that allows new associates to explore the different

branches of their company. Mary Catherine wouldn't have made this connection if not for the support and influence of the Career Center.

Maddie joined the Converse College for Women (CCW), which hosts events like gender equity panels and thought-provoking trips to cultural institutions. She is devoted to fostering leadership, mentorship, and service in both Converse and her future students.

Through the CCW, students collected items for women in need at a local high school and for expecting mothers at the Birth Matters doula center. These were enriching opportunities to expand her knowledge and mentality of the local community.

Terra found support from faculty as well as fellow classmates. Despite the age gap, she found her classmates to be mature, relatable, and down to earth because they were also responsible academics, striving towards bright futures. She stressed the importance of feeling comfortable failing in front of your professors, as room for error means room for growth. Her professors knew when to assist and when to let students dust themselves off after a mistake, all for the purpose of becoming better in their field.



### Overcoming Adversity:

The past four years have been especially tumultuous, and Converse experienced its fair share of adversity. Students forged their own paths to adapt to the situation, finding creative ways to connect with others. Ahdiayah found that music and Zoom were an especially discordant combination during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown. There was a loss of connection amongst the musicians as they were isolated from the valuable experience of playing together. Ahdiayah appreciated the brave face her professors put on, to set the students at ease, even though she acknowledged the uncertainty they experienced as well.

Mary Catherine also found online classes difficult, but e-learning wasn't the only pandemic struggle. It was a lonely existence to be the only person in a dorm meant for three, so she became a Community Advisor (CA) to interact with her

fellow "Connies." As a CA, she tried to help the freshmen connect with each other to capture the environment of her freshman year while maintaining COVID-19 protocols. She knew how important it was to build a sense of community in your first semester away at school.

For Maddie, plugging into service positions like the SGA allowed her to escape isolation, saying if it weren't for the pandemic, she probably wouldn't have been motivated to get involved in the community. Maddie's seven semesters of clinicals were another integral, although challenging, part of her education, where she was able to receive feedback from other teachers. There she learned adaptability by virtual teaching second graders during the age of social distancing. Neither she nor her mentors had experienced a situation like the pandemic, so together they discovered the importance of learning from mistakes together. Ultimately, this strengthened their teaching through learning new lessons themselves.

### Institutional and Personal Growth:

Out of the four graduates, Terra has witnessed the most change over time at Converse. During her first stint at the school, she felt there was a preconceived notion of what



*Maddie Buisch '22*

a Converse lady should be, which she didn't align with. But once she came back, after she had matured, she felt the campus had as well. The school felt much more inclusive, more welcoming, and diverse. Terra was immediately welcomed by classmates and professors alike. She also felt confident to ask for help when she needed support, something when she arrived in 2006 that she didn't even know where to start. She appreciates the systems in place to keep students from falling, like the health clinic, mental health outreach, dedicated communication, and the thoughtful way they handled the pandemic. Terra felt safe at Converse in times of uncertainty, knowing she was amongst a community where they could trust each other to act responsibly in consideration of the other students. The campus became her home.



*Mary Catherine Horton '22*

Maddie sees positives in the changes that were not easily accepted, like how the pandemic allowed for flexible courses to be adopted. She believes that Converse now exists in a unique age that impacts both the campus and our larger role in society. The care she has seen from the alum network, staff, faculty, students, and Spartanburg has been heartwarming. Mary Catherine likewise recognized a growing campus pride with the commencement of the model change and students sharing in the identity of being a Valkyrie. Though it is never easy at the start, overcoming challenges brings people together to find solutions.

Ahdiayah hopes that Converse will maintain its roots while advocating for positive improvements to the school's environment of respect and inclusion. Change isn't always on the institutional scale, though, as Ahdiayah experienced it in her personal trajectory. She arrived at Converse with the intention of studying violin, but after the devastating departure of her favorite violin professor, she decided to try viola as a joke, but soon realized that this new instrument was her true calling. After playing the first note, she knew that she wanted to change from the violin, which she had played for the last seven years, to the viola, as well as switch from Music Education to Music Performance. She faced some hesitancy from her professors, as changing your instrument is not a common occurrence. It wasn't the easy path to teach herself a new instrument in her sophomore year of college, but she desired to become a professor, where musicians are allowed more educational creativity.

### Next Steps:

After their full careers at Converse, these women continue striving to achieve their goals by taking a dive into new careers or continuing education. Ahdiayah Horton's next steps include attending Florida State University for her Master of Music, then perhaps on to a doctorate or a Fulbright. With the Fulbright student program, she intends to travel to Cambodia and Thailand to delve into her Cambodian-Thai heritage. She will study classical Cambodian music there and hopes to eventually expand access to the cultural tradition in the United States.

Maddie Buisch will continue her work at Burnes Freshman Academy full time, where she will teach the high school academic seminar. This valuable addition to students' education teaches transitional life skills, prepares students for professional presentation, and largely helps them navigate deciding their life goals. Maddie anticipates mentoring students with learning disabilities, who can sometimes focus too hard on school and forget that high school is the time to explore who they want to be as well.

Mary Catherine Horton will undertake her new position at TD Synnex in Greenville, SC. TD Synnex is a technology wholesaler company, which Mary Catherine has built a relationship with during her time at Converse. She will join a first-year associate program that allows her to work in each of the company's departments to find which suits her career goals best.

For her Ph.D., Terra Pettit-Bascovin will attend Clemson University, where she will study environmental sciences and water resource management. She acknowledges that sitting at a desk and analyzing samples may not seem fashionable, but it is the best way she can serve her community to help provide clean water for future generations.

### Parting Words:

In her parting advice as a graduate, Ahdiayah Horton encourages students to view their professors as valuable resources who are willing to help them and guide them towards success. She encourages younger students not to settle for something they think will make other people happy or is the safest route, but to pursue their passions. Mary Catherine Horton reminds students to go to the events and be engaged on campus, as that's how she determined her career goals and found her job. Terra Pettit-Bascovin anticipates the growth of the Converse II program, as she highly values access to education for women at an older age. She looks forward to seeing how the school thrives and changes and hopes that everyone who comes onto the campus feels and respects the soul of the school. Maddie Buisch reminds students that community is at the heart of their college experience and beyond. She suggests combating boredom or sadness by finding ways to give back and help others.





This May, the inaugural **Master in Management (MiM) in Professional Leadership** cohort graduated from Converse. This program launched in direct response to industry professionals in the Greenville/Spartanburg area requesting an online program that was designed for individuals seeking to enhance their leadership skills and advance in their careers. The MiM program focuses on the application of leadership in a variety of contexts, and is appropriate for individuals in a broad range of professional roles.

## In Their Own Words

Hear from 2022 MiM graduates how the program provided transformative opportunities for growth and workplace improvement.



*"Throughout my studies for the Master's in Management program, I am reminded of the worth of community relations and strengthening your network."*

Emily Lausier, Employer Relations Manager,  
Spartanburg Methodist College

*"Converse's MiM program was the perfect fit for me—a working professional in the nonprofit industry who wanted to obtain a Master's degree to grow in her career and find her voice as a leader. The structure of the program provided me with the ability to examine real-life current themes and issues within my industry, while learning how to implement effective, personally authentic leadership to thrive in such situations."*

Katelyn Johnson, Donor Engagement Manager,  
Charlotte Ballet

*"I have been fortunate enough to be a member of the MiM in Professional Leadership program's inaugural cohort. From the first class to the last, my time in the program has been nothing less than transformative. The connections, experiences, and knowledge gained will serve me indefinitely."*

Stephon Williams, Graduate Assistant Coach,  
Converse University

*"I am proud of the many ways I have grown, developed, and surprised myself personally and professionally over the last two years in this program. I've proven to myself that I truly can do hard things and that I am more than capable. I can work full-time and be a grad student; I can also balance being a wife, dog mom, friend, daughter, and sister."*

Lexi Stoneburner, Director of New Student  
Experiences and Transitions, Converse University

*"The Masters in Management program's flexibility appealed to me. The MiM program's broader focus on professional leadership encouraged applicants from different industries. I'm very appreciative of this because not only was I able to learn from great faculty but also the diverse personal and professional perspectives of my fellow cohort members."*

Arsenio Parks, Associate Director, Diversity  
Recruitment and Initiatives Coordinator,  
Wofford College

**Learn more! [converse.edu/MiM](https://converse.edu/MiM)**





# Undergraduate Commencement





# Sights & Sounds from Commencement

On May 21, Converse celebrated the Class of 2022, a group of dynamic graduates, who faced many challenges, but despite it all pursued passions, attained academic excellence, and developed as individuals who are now pursuing careers and supporting their communities.



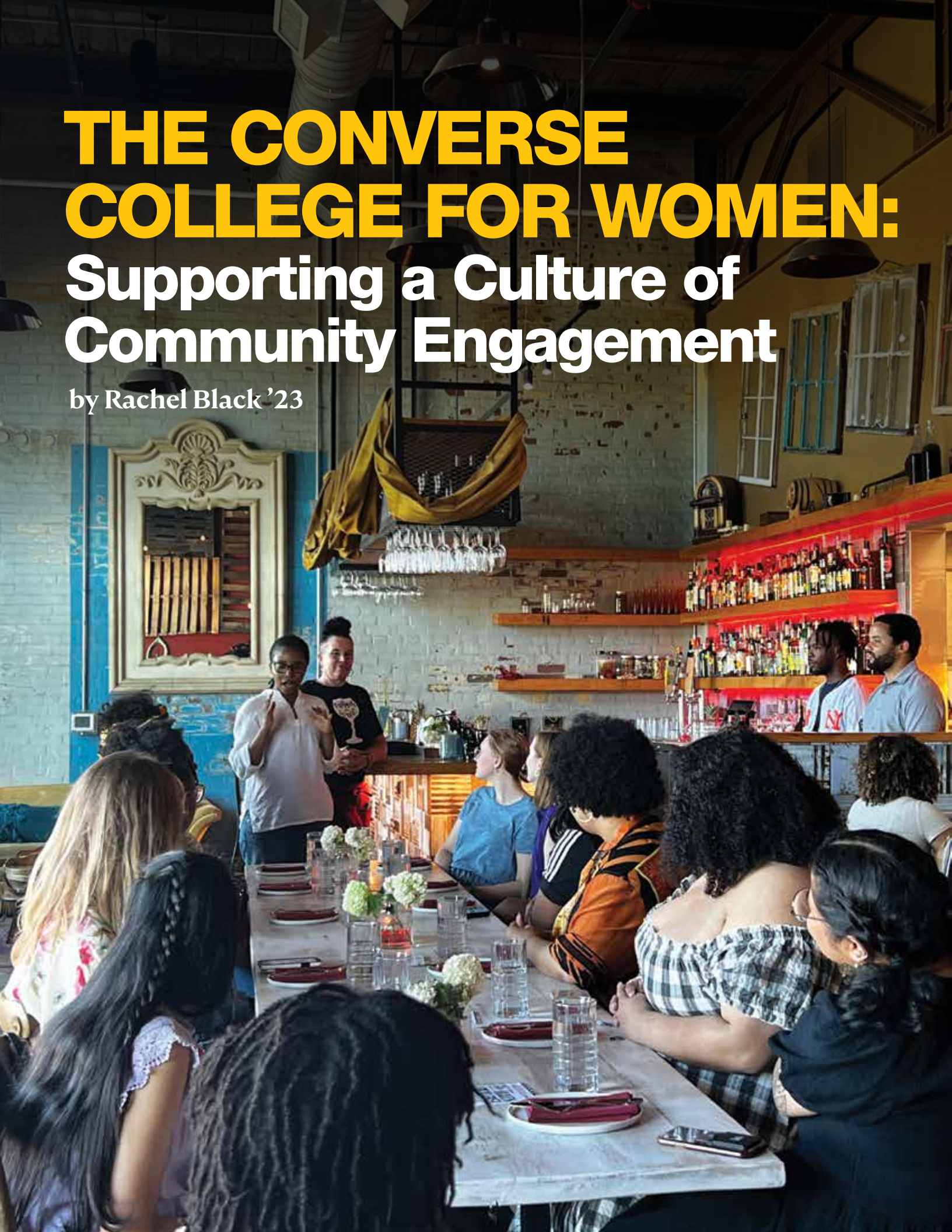
## Graduate Commencement





# THE CONVERSE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN: Supporting a Culture of Community Engagement

by Rachel Black '23





Since the Converse College for Women (CCW) was founded under the umbrella of the newly coed Converse University in 2020, its dedication to dynamic programming and civic-centered initiatives have solidified Converse's distinctive reputation as an empowering living-learning community. This commitment to fostering an environment that celebrates the rich diversity of Converse aligns with the CCW's vision of enabling students to become the next generation of transformative leaders in their professions and in their communities.

The recent Power and Purpose series perfectly exemplified how Converse students and community members can come together to learn, lead, and serve. The three-part initiative, which was fully funded by the newly established Dr. Kay Woodward Endowment, focused on leadership development, community engagement, and cultural expression.

The CCW kicked off the spring 2022 series with a day trip to the Gantt Center for African American Arts & Culture in Charlotte, North Carolina, complete with dinner at

Leah & Louise, a southern inspired juke joint. During the meal, students met with restaurant management and staff who discussed African American food history and the diverse backgrounds of their team. Keyanna Williams '22, Diversity Initiative Chair, who attended the day trip, stated that Danielle Stone (Chief Inclusion Excellence Officer and Title IX Coordinator), Daphnie

Glenn (Director of First-Generation Student Programs & Student Recreation/Assistant Director of Residential Life), Rhonda Mingo (Dean of Students), and Dr. Chandra Hopkins (Dean of the CCW), who attended with the students, "made sure to ask our opinions and

thoughts on the artwork, what it may represent or how it made us feel. They initiated a conversation about the experience."

From Converse student leaders to the community-at-large, the essential discussion of unique cultural experiences expanded through the second part of the Power and Purpose series. In April, the CCW hosted Black Converse alumni and community leaders in Twichell Auditorium to share their journeys of finding personal and professional success. Dr. Addie Watson '13, who returned to Converse as a professor in the Deaf Education program in fall 2021, was among the panelists. She emphasized the importance of representation and diversity, especially in a university setting. "Be mindful that being Black is important....it means something to the students who are going

to see you walk in at opening convocation," she said. "I'm excited to be a representation for people who look like me, and for people who don't look like me."

Other panelists included alumnae Addie Ledbetter '17, a nurse with Spartanburg Regional Medical System; Ashley Page Bookhart '13, program coordinator for



*Day trip to Gantt Center for African American Arts & Culture*



*Black Alumni & Community Leaders Panel*

UofSC's SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education); Dawn Davis Deck '99, executive director at LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation); and community leader Mary Thomas, chief operations officer at the Spartanburg County Foundation and executive director of the Robert Hett Chapman III Center for Philanthropy.

The CCW encourages students to grow in confidence of their abilities, to be proud of their individuality and cultures, and to envision and pursue a bright future. After the panel, it was only natural that a student-led event would follow. The Power and Purpose Open Mic Night, in collaboration with the University's Diversity & Inclusion Initiative, was the perfect opportunity for students to reflect on themselves and their own stories based on what was discussed at the panel. Keyanna also helped to organize the event, saying that as this year's Diversity Initiative Chair, this was one of many events that demonstrated her own strengths to her: that she is a "capable leader" who has been "empowered to move forward in other leadership roles." Each student performer celebrated their individuality, struggles, and

triumphs through various mediums, including a stunning performance of The Color Purple's "I'm Here" by Anier Colon Flores '25; spoken word poetry; and even an impromptu hula performance by Karen Mims '22, to complete the evening.

In addition to providing an environment that welcomes and honors the wisdom of a richly diverse community, the CCW also surrounds its students with experiences that drive transformation. This spring, in celebration of International Women's Day, the College hosted the Women's Leadership Speaker Series. Featured alumna speaker Miya Walker '12 (Director of Admission at Agnes Scott College), and keynote speaker Dr. Emerald Archer (Director of the Women's College Coalition and Assistant Professor of Political Science at Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles) gave inspiring speeches and discussed with Dean Chandra Hopkins the importance of women (and specifically women of color) in leadership, gender equity, and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women in the U.S. workforce.

Kerry Easler '96, returned to campus to attend the Women's Leadership Speaker Series event. As the president of the Spartanburg chapter of the Homeless Period Project and the Program Coordinator in the Community Development Department at Spartanburg County, Kerry knows firsthand how, in her words, "Converse develops leadership on all levels." Walker also



*CCW Open Mic Night*





*Women's Leadership Speaker Series*

expressed similar sentiments, stating that her time at Converse prepared her for her current position and amplified her passion for diversity initiatives. In fact, Miya helped create the Diversity Initiatives Chair position during her time as a student here, and (with the mentorship of Kerry Tucker '03) later created Leadership Converse, an on-campus summer program for rising high school juniors and seniors. Walker is enthusiastic about the importance of “[teaching] people about leadership in the communities they live in”, to instill awareness and confidence. “Sometimes you have to create that community and support,” Walker stated. “And it starts [now].”

Dean Hopkins expressed that her hope in coordinating these recent CCW events was “to create spaces where community members and current students feel seen, heard, and empowered to have important conversations while learning and growing together.” Thanks to the cooperation, open minds, and mutual support within the Converse community, it is clear that these hopes were not in vain. These recent events were the first of many CCW initiatives to come to encourage, inspire, and equip Converse students.



## Power and Purpose made possible by funding from The Dr. Kay Woodward Endowment

The Power and Purpose series was made possible by funding from The Dr. Kay Woodward Endowment, which was established in 2021 by former Chair of the Board of Trustees, Phyllis Perrin Harris '82. Harris funded the endowment specifically for programmatic support within the Converse College for Women to address leadership and the disparities of Black women who enter the workforce. Dr. Woodward, one of Converse's first African American professors, arrived at Converse shortly after the college's integration, and taught psychology until the failing health of her parents obliged her to take over the family's business, J.W. Woodward Funeral Home, in 1985. The funeral home has faithfully served the Spartanburg African American community since 1916, and Dr. Woodward still thrives there in a presidential role today. It's not difficult to see why Dr. Woodward, a source of inspiration and representation for African Americans in academia (especially Black students), was also the inspiration for the event series.

# VISION FOR CUDD HALL

Once the beloved site of the annual senior class photo, Cudd is quintessential Converse. Formerly the Gwyn School, a preparatory school for girls, Converse purchased the building in the early 1900s and transformed it into a residence hall. It was named Cudd Memorial Hall in memory of Allene Cudd Cantrell, Class of 1912, who was the daughter of Converse Trustee John Cudd, cousin of Mary Sue Cudd, Class of 1927, and Perrin Cudd Eidson, Class of 1931. Its distinctive Southern architecture has made for a cozy home-away-from-home for generations of Converse's upperclassmen.

"One of my favorite memories was "The 21 salute" in Cudd," Dorris Callicott Douglass, Class of 1963 shared in her 50th Reunion Memory Book. "One night we started on the top floor and each slammed their door in order all the way down to and through the basement."

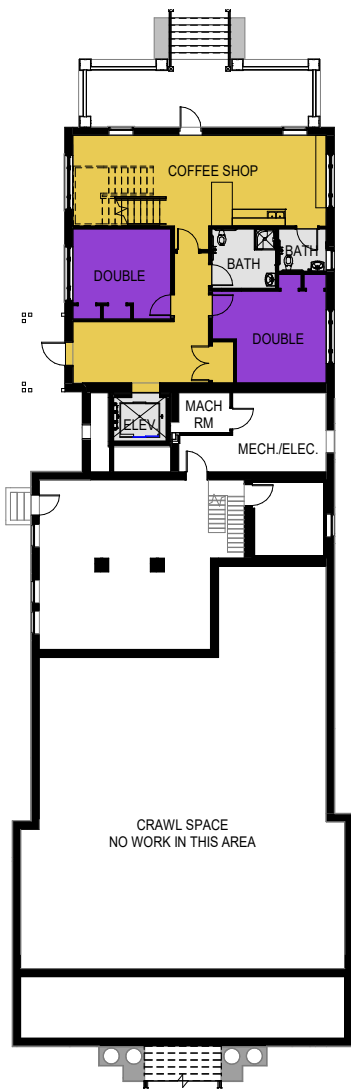
As Converse continues to experience tremendous growth, it is essential that we have all available space to house our students. The \$4.75 million revitalization of Cudd Hall is scheduled to be complete in fall 2023. Projected enhancements include:

- Renovation to approximately 46 residential rooms and 2 CA rooms
- Expansion of ADA accessible rooms and entry access
- An elevator addition
- Redesigned flow to support community, accessibility and safety
- Expansion of community areas including kitchen, laundry, study rooms and open spaces
- Rebuilding of the infamous three-level porch
- Replacement of the roof, electrical, mechanical, and sprinkler systems
- Renovation to all exterior and interior finishes



*Cudd Hall Side View Rendering*





The momentum of Converse is tangible. As we continue to grow, the University seeks to create, innovate, and transform residential spaces on campus. Photo renderings, provided by McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture, showcase Converse's vision for Cudd – to preserve the building's historic character while breathing new life into one of the most iconic residential halls on campus.

Places matter, they map out lives and connect us back to memories of another time. By focusing on the student experience, the renovation would create a learning and living environment that supports student success for generations to come.

"Many, many hours were spent our senior year sitting in the hallway of Cudd Hall talking and laughing with our forever friends," shared Beth Woods Sessums '87. "We laughed until our stomachs hurt!"



Discover how you can support the revitalization of Cudd Hall! Sign up to learn more by using the QR code or by visiting [converse.edu/CuddCampaign](https://converse.edu/CuddCampaign).



*"Decorating Cudd for 1889 Week and celebrating our senior victory from the balconies was one of my best memories. GO Red Devils! Cudd was a home away from home in the truest sense, different from a dorm. The design of Cudd fostered a "family" environment. We welcomed dates in the parlor before a night out, all piled into one room to watch Days of our Lives, and capped off many a day with late night pizza all gathered in the hallway outside our rooms—like sisters in one big family. I treasure the friends I made at Converse and credit our time together in Cudd as fostering bonds we still hold dear to this day."*



Donna Mason Burnside '87

# CAPTURING THE MOMENT:

## An Immersive Travel-Sketching Experience

Converse's 2022 Jan term course, Sketching and Watercolor in France, led by Converse faculty Dr. Jennifer Hawk (Chemistry) and Professor Jena Thomas (Art) took the students on an immersive study-travel trip throughout France, where artistic and scientific innovation make up the cultural fabric.

The group meandered from the ancient, cobbled streets of Paris to the culinary capital of Lyon and finally into the enchanting Southern countryside of St. Rémy de Provence and La Couvertorade.

In the weeks prior to the trip, students examined the travel sketches of artists like John Singer Sargent and Eugéné Delacroix, who traveled around the world sketching and painting along their journeys. Professor Thomas said, "We looked closely at how they arranged their sketchbooks, the things that inspired them, and how these were translated into larger works."



Students studied how fine artists documented their sketches and reinterpreted them for more advanced finished pieces. Students were encouraged to see how personal expression and documentation are critical components of the drawing process.

*"This is a watercolor painting I did of the Pont-du-Gard in southern France. I was able to sit by the still river and paint without any pressure. Before painting, I took a moment to look and appreciate the architecture and think about how much time and effort must've gone into building such a dynamic structure."*  
Kailee Huggins '22





*“The cultural and historical significance of this area inspired me. The Van Gogh trail was filled with the same cypress trees that influence Vincent himself—and the cicadas can be seen everywhere as they are a symbol of good luck!”*

Piper Grant '23

Upon returning home, the students used their sketches from France as a starting point to create longer, more finished works of art. The sketchbooks gave students a chance to capture quick “drafts” that serve as memories of a particular moment in time. Professor Thomas said, “We have discovered that travel sketching is a wonderful way to experience a place. Unlike taking snapshots, you are much less caught up in the act of recording and instead able to fully immerse yourself in the culture.”

The sketchbooks, which captured each student’s unique and specific perspective, became part of an exhibition at the Spartanburg Headquarters Library. ‘Bonjour et Merci: Travel Sketching and Watercolor in France’ allowed the community to get a behind-the-scenes look at the sketches that led to finished works of art.

Students carried sketchbooks throughout their trip to maintain a visual journal of their journey. This extraordinary adventure took the travelers to the Museum of Eugene Delacroix, a well-known “travel sketcher,” the Louvre and Musée d’Orsay.

Students had the opportunity to hone their craft in a more pastoral setting as they traversed the pristine alpine landscape of the French Alps and walked in the fabled footsteps of artist Vincent Van Gogh in St. Rémy de Provence.

The group took a break from the Parisian museums and flaky croissants and headed through the Burgundy region to Lyon, where they explored the city’s winding streets and experienced its rich history and reputation for gastronomy. They visited the ancient walled town of La Couvertorade, sampled “the cheese of popes” in the Roquefort-sur-Soulzon area, and visited the famed Roquefort Cheese Caves.



# FROM CHEESE TO GRAFFITI: TWO STUDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

*Anna King '22 (Art Education) and Haley Nitz '22 (Biochemistry, Nisbet Honors) may be pursuing majors on opposite ends of the spectrum, but their experience during a two-week travel study course to France left them both in awe of the captivating country.*

*Haley Nitz chronicled her time in France. Discover her leap into the unknown and even her experience with fromage (cheese) as she shares her captivating journey with fellow travelers.*



"I have wanted to do a study-travel program with Converse for my entire college career, but with the pandemic and the tight travel restrictions, it seemed like my dream was never going to come true. Until Dr. Hawk explained her course for Jan term that coincided with a travel trip to France. Study abroad for two weeks in the winter of France with one of my favorite professors? I could not pass this opportunity up. I did not know a single student going on this trip. It was scary going into it blind, but I met some amazing people not only in the group but also touring the country.

Immediately after landing, we began touring Paris and exploring the big city. Over the next few days, we explored the incredible city, including the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame and the Louvre. You could spend a few hours at the Louvre every day for several months and still have only seen less than half of what it offers.

Lyon was the second city we visited and by far my favorite destination. This city is considered the gastronomy

capital of the world so we were able to try several different traditional French dishes (including a Praline tart) and discover the beauty between the food and the culture. The food was rich, fresh, flavorful, and downright delicious.

The monuments and cathedrals scattered across Lyon were absolutely stunning. You could immediately tell that there was so much history in this city, and the citizens were proud to be a part of it. We visited a small dairy farm out in Les Orres and even had the opportunity to milk some of the cows!

Farther south, we visited the Roquefort Blue Cheese caves; we saw rows upon rows of shelves and tables used to store and age the cheese to make it into the authentic Roquefort Blue Cheese.

We visited one of the last cities Van Gogh lived in and attended an immersive experience within a cave. It was super cold, but it was incredible to see the artwork projected upon the rocky walls.

I never expected to be going to France, but I hope to one day go back and be able to dive deeper into the history of each city. I learned a great deal while I was there, not only from the professors or the tour guides, but from the friendships I made along the way. It showed me that it's okay to jump in blind sometimes and not know what you're getting yourself into. New things in general can be scary, but this trip taught me how to let go and just enjoy the moments or connections that are there."





*Anna King didn't let a language barrier stop her from taking her first trip abroad. Read about her adventures in France, from trying new foods to riding the Metro, to her new appreciation for graffiti.*



Musée d'Orsay was a museum that made an impression on me. The detailed human features in the sculptures, paired with a set of hollow eyes, were haunting. Being able to sketch the sculptures for an hour or two while playing music on my headphones was a therapeutic and transformative experience.



When I am in a foreign place, I seek out things that are familiar to me. Graffiti was one of those recognizable comforts. On most streets, you will see graffiti, as well as drawings advertising businesses on the side of the buildings. I took the time to write down

the words I saw frequently on the wall. For example, the word “zat” was written commonly. The word translates to “hey” in English.

“*Salut à tous!!*” This means “hi everyone” if your French skills are as poor as mine. In January 2022, I traveled to France with Converse University. This watercolor and sketching course gave us the tools to draw from observation while enjoying some of the best sights in the world.

It was my first time traveling outside of the U.S.; I now understand why people say taking a trip is one of the best gifts possible. Of course, I picked up a few souvenirs on the way but, the intangible feeling I felt while exploring is what I enjoyed the most.

When I think about France, one of the first things I associate the country with is art. The country is known for everything from the iconic architecture of Notre-Dame to the beautiful works in the Louvre. Our class had the amazing opportunity to see both of these renowned locations in person, taking in the diverse and vast amount of art all around us. There are thousands of museums in France, and many of them are actually free to students. We witnessed many young adults exploring museums for fun.

Inspiration struck when I imagined the overlap between an archaic sculpture placed in the current century. I created a mixed media drawing that combined graffiti and a haunting stone sculpture of a woman. I created an illustration of a sculpture on a large mat board. I ripped



newspaper and a spray adhesive to lock it onto the paper. I finished by using india ink to imitate graffiti letters. I used pastels and gesso to create a chaotic background. Not only was I learning, but I was also inspired throughout my time in France.”

Visit [converse.edu/France2022](https://converse.edu/France2022) to discover more images and artwork from Converse's 2022 study travel trip and the exhibition!

# Making HIStory

The 2021-2022 academic year at Converse University was one for the history books. It brought on new changes to campus life, a renewed energy to the student body, and progress as Converse continues to move forward. Central to the changes in the Converse student body has been the integration of male students into the classroom, the athletic fields, and the community.

While Converse has welcomed male graduate students for many years, welcoming male undergraduate students and even more male graduate students has allowed Converse to embrace new perspectives, forge inaugural athletics teams, and flourish with increased diversity in the student body and greater Converse community.

## Meet Dr. James (JJ) Lies '22

*James is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education and the mentor for Converse's new Call Me MISTER® (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) chapter. He received his EdD in Professional Leadership from Converse in May 2022.*



### *Why did you choose Converse?*

I got involved with Converse when I learned about their doctoral program (EdD in Professional Leadership) and what intrigued me about the program was the emphasis on professional leadership and the challenge to not only focus on educational leadership but to have the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship and leadership in political arenas as well. The idea that I could attend class with colleagues who were from other areas such as healthcare, business, and military, as well as education was an exciting opportunity.

### *What was your doctoral dissertation about?*

I defended my dissertation in March 2022, and it was on the Call Me MISTER® (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role models) program in our region. I studied the attitudes and practices of servant leadership of Call Me MISTER® members.





### ***Why did you choose to research Call Me MISTER® for your dissertation?***

The Call Me MISTER® program that will be launching at Converse has an incredible opportunity to provide a much-needed service to the community of Spartanburg and to increase the pool of diverse male educators in our public school systems. In the program, each future educator or “Mister” undergoes extensive training. One area in training that I’m most passionate about is the servant leadership aspect. “Misters” who are trained to be servant leaders are not only highly effective in the classroom, but they are also highly influential and impactful in the community.

The idea of being a “Mister” is that we want to challenge the stereotype of the Brown and Black male in today’s society. We want to present a counter-narrative, and we want our children to grow up seeing themselves reflected in individuals who have positions

of high regard and responsibility in the community such as teachers, coaches, and school administrators.

The program is really important to support male students at Converse because Call Me MISTER® puts students in the center of a “living-learning community.” A majority of program participants come from an underserved, under-resourced, or economically disadvantaged background, and oftentimes are first-generation college students. So having a community and a network of friends and colleagues you can reach out to is critical to the recruitment and retention of these men in college.

### ***How are you going to be involved with Converse and the Call Me MISTER® program during the 2022-2023 academic year?***

I am very excited to be an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education beginning in the fall of 2023, and the mentor for the Call Me MISTER®

program. I’m most looking forward to building meaningful relationships. I care deeply about the relationships that I’m going to have with many people at Converse. I also have learned through my years as an Assistant Principal in Spartanburg District 6 that my passion is for supporting teachers, and being involved at Converse amplifies my abilities to support future teachers and aid in the development of teachers in our area.

### ***What are you looking forward to as you “make history” at Converse?***

I’m excited to come alongside great educators and be a part of what Converse is doing and has done traditionally for women for so many years. I just want to join in and be a part of it.

**Learn more!**  
**[converse.edu/MISTER](https://converse.edu/MISTER)**



## Meet Sinan Kilincarslan '25

*Sinan is on the men's soccer team and is working towards obtaining a degree in Psychology with a double minor in Marketing and Business.*

At the beginning of the semester, it was an adjustment to the new environment, new culture, and the language of course, but I really enjoyed meeting new people and I felt welcomed here from the first minute I stepped foot at Converse. Everyone from the faculty to my new teammates and other students were very welcoming.

I also enjoyed meeting the other international students and it made me feel more welcome as well.

### ***What has it been like being one of the first male student-athletes at Converse?***

My first year on the soccer team was really good. We reached the playoffs, which was one of our goals, so that was very remarkable and we're looking forward to the next season. The start of the season was kind of difficult because all of the teammates came from different backgrounds and had different experiences in the sport, but we have so many good people with

good character on the team, and our team chemistry is one of the main reasons why we achieved our goals. We have a lot of potential and next year will be even better. My teammates and I have really formed a good bond, and we enjoy doing things together, for example, the Topgolf event Converse hosted for the male students was very fun. We really enjoyed the nice experience that was given to us. We got to talk to President Hopkins and other male professors, and the environment was really fun.

### ***What are you looking forward to as you "make history" at Converse?***

In Europe, it's not very common to see women's colleges, so it was kind of a new thing for me to discover Converse. It's an honor to be part of something that just started and I'm happy to see that we are all welcome. Being part of this, you feel honored to be here and you appreciate starting that new chapter of being co-ed. When you look back in the future you can say, "We started the development of Converse University," and that is a special experience.

### ***What was your first year at Converse like?***

I am originally from Mulheim, Germany and I decided Converse was the right choice for me because the location was great, it was a chance to study abroad and feel comfortable, and I had the opportunity to be part of a first-year athletic program on the soccer team and be able to have a big impact as it began. In my opinion, it's very special to start something new and to be one of the first names of male students at Converse and leave a footprint for the future; that is what makes it feel different from other universities and made me make my decision to come to Converse.



## Meet Donald Medley '25

*Donald is working towards obtaining his Bachelors of Fine Arts (BFA) in Studio Art Major with an emphasis in Visual Media. He also is a student-athlete on the men's track and field team.*



### *What was your first year at Converse like?*

My first year at Converse put me out of my comfort zone. Being away from home with more independence was nice and I think my freshman year at Converse was different from most people's freshman year at college because most of the students around campus are women. I've never had so many female friends before in my life, and that's been a big change for me, and it's been nice. Coming to a college that was previously all women has also helped me make more friends because the men on campus are so close-knit. There are fewer guys on campus, so we bond together.

### *What is your major?*

My major is a BFA in Studio Art. I have a passion for digital art, and I

came to Converse wanting to study art. Taking more studio art classes has shaped me and made me more open to appreciating and growing in other kinds of art like drawing and painting, not just digital art. In the classroom, especially as an art major, I'm one of the only guys in the class. It's just me and one other male student, but I've never minded it, and my classmates feel the same way. I'm excited to finish up my foundational art classes so I can progress and become an even better digital artist.

### *What has it been like being one of the first male student-athletes at Converse?*

The men's track and field team is still continuing to be established, and it's exciting to make history and be one of the first male athletes at Converse. I've been running track

and field since 7th grade, and my high school coach knows the Converse coach and he got me connected with Converse. When I met the coaches at Converse, I knew track and field here was right for me. All of the male athletes on the team were first-year students coming in during fall 2022, so it allowed us to really relate to each other.

### *What are you looking forward to as you "make history" at Converse?*

Sometimes I think about it, and whenever I have kids one day, I'll be able to drive through Spartanburg and drive past Converse and say, "Hey, you know, I was one of the first guys on campus there." And I think that will be a special moment for me.

# LAWSON ACADEMY:

## An Artist's Place to Call Home

Nestled beyond the backstage wings of Zimmerli Performance Center's Twichell Auditorium lies a corner of Converse that opens its doors to students of all ages, from preschoolers to senior adults. While this program is unknown to some on the Converse campus, it has played a key role in the University's community outreach for over 75 years.

The Lawson Academy of the Arts (formerly the Converse Pre-College) began as a lab school for Converse's music students to practice pedagogy on campus. Since its inception in 1944, the program has expanded to offer private instruction in nearly all musical instruments and voice, along with ensembles, group classes, dance classes, and a renowned summer arts day camp. The Lawson Academy is a home not only to the hundreds of local families served here each year, but also to those who choose to return to its open doors later in life.

Many young students experience the Converse campus for the first time through Lawson Academy programs. Converse sophomore Linsey Douthat enrolled as a piano student at Lawson at age seven and continued throughout high school. She also began attending the Fine Arts Day Camp (FADC) each summer, eventually going on to work as a volunteer and then as the camp's dance teacher, ultimately deciding to remain at Converse for her college education. "Because of piano at Lawson and attending







*Linsey Douthat*

FADC, I got to know the campus,” Linsey says. “Going to college on a campus that you already know makes you feel more comfortable, like you’re at home. The connections I made through Lawson also made me feel relaxed here, which made me want to come to Converse.”

Another Converse sophomore, Aidan O'Donnell, credits the Lawson Academy with opening doors for him to grow into the performer he is today. “Growing up in Lawson, it didn’t take too long for Converse to feel like a home away from home,” Aidan recalls. “As



*Aidan O'Donnell*

I grew older and got into high school, I started to rely on Lawson as a place I knew I could always practice in peace and never disturb anyone.” Aidan has gone on to be one of Converse University’s first male undergraduate students. “The exposure I had to Converse through Lawson was the main reason I decided to apply to the University. My training at Lawson prepared me with the skills I would need as a college-level pianist. The encouragement of the faculty at Lawson played a huge role in giving me the confidence I needed to audition for a music program like the Petrie School of Music.”

Converse alumni throughout the years have returned to campus by way of the Lawson Academy. In fact, over half of Lawson’s instructors hold degrees from Converse. Katherine Woodward Trask '08, who studied violin and voice at the Pre-College before attending Converse to study Vocal Performance, now offers lessons in both areas from her own studio at Lawson. “As a former student of Lawson Academy, I firmly believe that my time here was the jumping-off point for my future career. I would not be the teacher or performer I am today without the instruction I received. That’s why I wanted to teach here,” Katherine explains. “I owe so much to this place, and it makes me happy that I can give some of that back through my teaching.”

Part of the less commonly known beauty of the Lawson experience is its adult program. Adults of all ages, from college students to senior citizens, can enjoy instruction in the arts in a comfortable and encouraging atmosphere



with opportunities for performance and competition. Nancy Osborne '79, a retiree who earned her Master's in Education at Converse, has been a piano student at the Lawson Academy for over thirty years. Nancy enjoys performing in Lawson's adult recitals each semester, as well as at local churches. "I think we all need projects sometimes to keep us going!" she says of her musical studies. Nancy also participates in annual scholarship auditions for adult students and has won several awards. "Winning is always a big milestone in my life. At 70, things like this mean so much to me!"

Music is not the only avenue that has drawn students to the Lawson Academy. Maryanna Caggiano, Lawson's ballet and pointe instructor, developed her passion for ballet in the Pre-College dance program from a young age. "I have grown up on the Twichell stage," says Maryanna, who also studied violin in Lawson's Suzuki program. She went on to perform with Ballet Spartanburg and Carolina Ballet Theatre before returning to Lawson Dance to teach

her own students of all ages and levels. "As we all say here at Lawson," Maryanna adds, "I've practically lived here my whole life."

The Lawson Academy is still creating connections and opening doors for creative students to thrive. Meg Mayley is a volunteer at the Fine Arts Day Camp who grew up attending the camp. "Converse is my second home because of FADC," Meg explains. At age 14, she has already decided that Converse is where she was meant to be. "I want to go to Converse because I've grown up here, every summer since I was five," she adds. "I haven't even thought about any other colleges."

The Lawson Academy continues its strong tradition of instilling a passion for the arts in our community, while helping to create connections and memories for students in an environment that feels like home. "The Lawson Academy has always been a place where we can all share our love for the arts," says Aidan O'Donnell.



Doors are open throughout the year! To discover more about program offerings at Lawson or to register, please visit [converse.edu/lawsonacademy](https://converse.edu/lawsonacademy) or call 864.596.9022.



# Turning Two Passions into a Profession

Sydney Grimes '22 always dreamed of being in front of the camera. At the bright-eyed age of seven, Sydney got her first taste of stardom. With *iCarly*, a 2000s iconic tv sitcom as her inspiration, Sydney began producing videos for *iSyd.com*—her own home-grown production where she would sing and create living room fashion shows for the camera.

with my dad,” Sydney shared. “As I grew older, I fell in love with the game. It’s an individual sport and I learned so many life lessons from playing.”

In Suffolk, Virginia, Sydney was captain for her high school golf team. In 2019, she was named the State Player of the Year and was part of the National Honors Society at Isle of Wight Academy.



As Sydney evolved as a person, so did her interests. Her desire for being center stage took a temporary backseat as she began pursuing golf.

Sydney’s passion for the sport ultimately brought her to Converse as a student-athlete on the women’s golf team. While she was on a forward trajectory athletically, her academic journey had landed in a metaphorical sandpit. Sydney had reached a crossroads and felt it was time to focus on her future.

“The individualized major allows students to design a program of study aligned with their ultimate career or professional aspirations,” said Associate Provost for Student Success, Dr. Will Case. “It’s an excellent option for students like Sydney who are curious, dedicated, and motivated to pursue paths that don’t necessarily fit into the framework of a traditional major.”

“I first fell in love with golf because it was a father-daughter bonding experience. I was 11 when I started to play. During those summers, I would wake up early every morning and spend all day on the course

“When considering coming to Converse, I found out that I could create my own major and I knew that this was a place where I could continue my golf career and create my own professional path,” Sydney explained.

As part of her capstone project, Sydney produced *Inside Valkyries Athletics*, a monthly recorded show focusing on in-season sports and student-athlete spotlights. This experiential learning experience incorporated every discipline in her major—from writing well-structured scripts and interview questions, to employing theatre techniques for public speaking, to marketing the show on social media.

Through the Individualized Major program at Converse, Sydney blazed a unique trail and designed a creative pathway to merge her two passions. Combining English, theatre, and business, Sydney’s proposal for a Sports Communication major was approved. Working closely with a handful of faculty mentors, she began charting her own career path.

“One of the major joys of my position at Converse is the opportunity





to advise students pursuing individualized majors and to celebrate their accomplishments,” explained Case. “Throughout the past academic year Sydney put countless hours into her capstone project, and her work established a new forum for celebrating the successes of our student-athletes. More importantly, her project has created a platform for future students interested in pursuing sports communications, and I look forward to seeing other students continue the work she has started.”

Sydney was able to spotlight a wildly successful season her senior year through Inside Valkyries Athletics with many historic firsts for Converse athletics:

- The women’s field hockey team won their first ever South Atlantic Conference Carolinas Regular Season and Tournament championship.
- The acrobatics and tumbling team earned the No. 8 seed in the NCATA championship field and was crowned the winner in the 6 element acro heat at Nationals.
- The esports Rainbow Six Siege Team was the first team to ever be named the Grand Champion of the Ubisoft Unified Collegiate Championship.

- The men’s soccer team made it to the Conference Carolinas Championship in their inaugural season.
- The women’s tennis team competed in the Conference Carolinas Women’s Tennis Championships for the second consecutive season.
- The men’s tennis team made it to the Conference Carolinas Championship and was nationally ranked in their inaugural season.
- Madison Montgomery finished inside the Top-16 in the Individual Limit Equitation on the Flat Event at the IHSA National Championship—the first Converse rider to have made it to the National Championship since 2015.

“The Valkyries have thrived this year. Whether it’s academically or athletically, our student-athletes continue to rise to the occasion and pursue excellence,” said Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, Jenn Bell. “I am just as excited about our eight consecutive semesters above a 3.0 cumulative GPA, as I am about the success in the sports arena. We also encourage our student-athletes to get involved outside of their sport, as it adds so much to their overall Division II experience. Sydney did just that, and I could not be more proud of her.”

Since receiving her diploma in May, Sydney wants to keep playing collegiate golf with her two remaining years of eligibility while working towards obtaining a master’s degree. As she pursues her dream of becoming an

ESPN reporter, it’s clear that Sydney will forge a distinctive personal and professional path wherever she goes.

“I have received so many opportunities at Converse—both in athletics and academics. Everyone wants you to be successful in all aspects of your life and provides the support to ensure that it happens.”



# The Converse Scene

Take a look at some of the defining moments across campus in spring 2022



## Silver Soirée

On Thursday, April 21, Converse hosted its annual Silver Soirée, celebrating our Lifetime Giving Society members and honoring Marsha H. Gibbs as the Dexter Edgar Converse 2022 award recipient.



# Founder's Day

The campus gathered in Zimmerli Performance Center's Twitchell Auditorium on April 22 to honor the Founder's Ideal to 'see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.'





# Reunion Weekend

Over the weekend, Alumni reconnected with classmates; celebrated the Classes of 1970, 1971, and 1972 for being inducted into the Golden Club; and recognized Converse's 2022 Alumni Achievement Award winners. Mark your calendars for Reunion 2023! It will be held on campus June 2-4, 2023.

**Learn more! [converse.edu/reunion](https://converse.edu/reunion)**









# Celebration Week

After almost two years of modified or canceled events due to the pandemic, the atmosphere on campus was joyful, as faculty, staff, and students enjoyed a myriad of traditions, both old and new, during the week leading up to Commencement.

## Baccalaureate Service



## Hats Off



## May Day





## Freshman Pinning



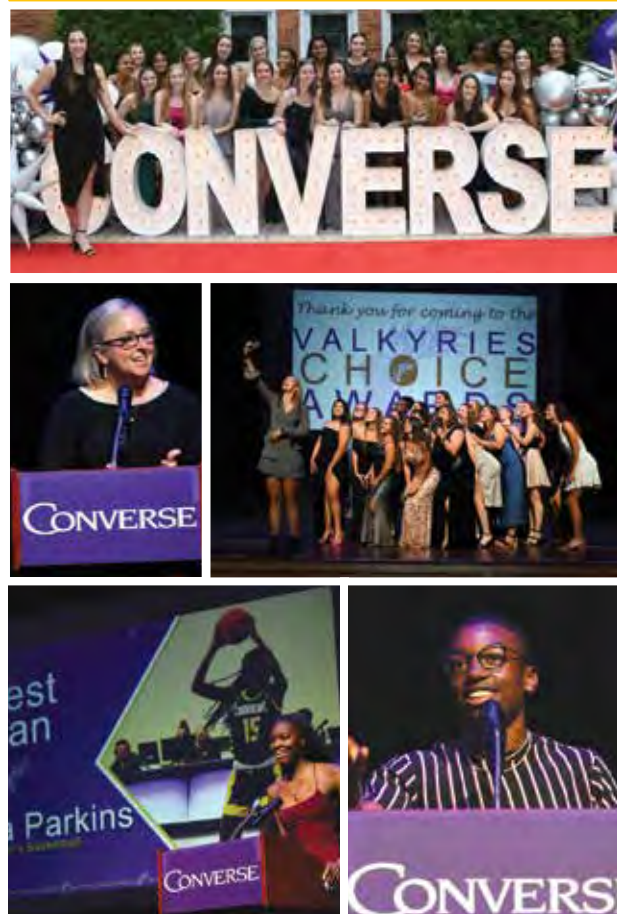
## Trailblazer Dinner



## CCW Senior Candlelight Dinner



## Valkyries Choice Awards



## Junior Ring Ceremony





# Presidential Announcement

The Converse University Board of Trustees announced the selection of Boone J. Hopkins, PhD, as the University's twelfth president during an all-campus meeting on February 25, 2022.





Save The Date  
for the Inauguration of

**Dr. Boone J. Hopkins**

*Twelfth President of Converse University*

**Friday, April 21, 2023  
11:30 a.m.**

Twichell Auditorium,  
Zimmerli Performance Center

For more information, visit  
**[www.converse.edu/inauguration](http://www.converse.edu/inauguration)**



580 East Main Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29302

NON-PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Permit #108  
Spartanburg, SC



# let's stay connected

Share your updated email address with Converse to receive the latest news  
and events from across campus. [www.Converse.edu/KeepUsCurrent](http://www.Converse.edu/KeepUsCurrent)

CONVERSE