

December 23, 1975

TO: THE SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION
FROM: THE COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS
SUBJECT: A PROPOSAL

While plans are being formulated for the development of a master plan for higher education in South Carolina, the Council of Presidents wishes to emphasize to the Commission on Higher Education its interest in the project and its sincere concern that the task be carried out as expeditiously as possible and with the broadest possible involvement of the informed citizenry of the State.

No group is more aware of the progress made in public higher education in our State in the last decade than are the presidents of its public colleges and universities. With faculty and staff members of their respective institutions they have labored for years to narrow the gap between the higher education opportunities available for South Carolina's youth and those greater opportunities available in most of the other states of the nation. We view the programs now offered by our institutions of higher education as achievements for which all who have been associated with higher education in our State during the last decade can be justly proud.

The members of the Council of Presidents are well aware of the financial stress our state government faces and fully recognize the fact that spending for higher education must suffer curtailment if the state's economy cannot

bear its present financial burden. However, the Presidents are also aware that the State of South Carolina has only very recently provided a level of funding for its colleges and universities sufficient to nurture excellence in programs and sufficient to begin to offer access to higher education to as many of South Carolina's citizens as can benefit from it. Although statistics indicate that South Carolina is now supporting higher education at a higher level than many other Southern States, this level of funding resulted from the hard work of legislators and citizens who judged it to be essential in order to provide the educational programs needed for our social, cultural and economic development. It would be tragic if we retreated from these high goals at this point in our history.

The many current proposals to limit, to alter, and to reconstitute higher education which are being advanced with some regularity must be viewed with alarm by the many who have worked so hard to give the citizens of South Carolina a system of higher education equivalent to that available in other parts of the nation.

This is not to imply that the Council of Presidents does not recognize that the public concern over these matters is reasonable, right, and proper, but we feel it to be essential that any action affecting higher education in South Carolina be based on a careful and dispassionate study of all the facts.

The Council believes that our best efforts to improve, strengthen, and defend higher education can only be made if we bring into the information

and planning channels legislators and others who are directly or indirectly involved in our mission. If legislators are not regularly provided with sound information, if they are not aware of studies being made of higher education and if they remain uninvolved in the planning process, we fear that CHE recommendations, the 1202 Commission's master plan, and reports and proposals from the Colleges and Universities will either remain unread, or at best, be read but not accepted because of the suspicion that such documents only reflect the narrow interests of a few people.

The Council of Presidents, therefore, urges the Commission on Higher Education and the 1202 Commission to reexamine their initial efforts to draw up a Master Plan for Higher Education in South Carolina. In particular, it urges the 1202 Commission not to develop a Master Plan in the absence of constant legislative input and involvement. It urges the 1202 Commission to reconstitute its study and planning groups so that the legislature, college and university presidents, others on the campuses, and the general public are well represented. A master plan can only be accepted if those who must live by it can be involved in its formulation.

Finally, the Council of Presidents is concerned that while we talk about planning, members of the legislature, feeling a sense of urgency about these matters, will move rapidly with plans to change or restrict state agencies or in various ways pursue the quest for accountability in State government, and these actions, taken while we talk about a Master Plan, will so affect the welfare of higher education that any Master Plan developed by

the 1202 Commission will be too little and too late. Therefore, we urge the Commission on Higher Education and the 1202 Commission to pursue an active educational role this year and to take a most vigorous and active stand in urging the legislature to defer actions of considerable consequence relating to higher education until the Master Plan is complete and to delete the colleges and universities from bills affecting state agencies whenever the content of those bills are matters better left for study and careful consideration as the Master Plan develops.

The Council of Presidents strongly urge the General Assembly and the Commission on Higher Education to place a moratorium on the development of any additional college parallel programs at any TEC college and the creation of any additional four-year state-supported colleges until the Master Plan is completed.

It is the opinion of members of the Council of Presidents that the times are now such that the Commission on Higher Education must become a most vigorous voice and defender of higher education and, should it not accept this role and move forward with great zeal, much of the progress we have made stands to be lost. If this happens, South Carolina's young people will be the major losers.

LAJ:csb