In terms of program improvement, our seven year Self Studies and External Review Reports are our key long term assessment strategy. These programatic studies are used by all administrators and degree program directors for continuous hiring, budgeting and program direction decisions. As a result of various recommendations and self studies, new programs or degrees in Theater Arts, Cybersecurity, Child Life, and a 4+1 BS/MS in Math have been or are being implemented.

Community Based Self Study

During the 2013/2014 academic year local business leaders, politicians and community members began advocating for additional graduate and PhD programs to be developed at the College of Charleston to meet perceived demand for such programs in the Lowcountry. For example, specific initiatives were developed to urge the merger of the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) with CoC to form a new comprehensive Research University (University of Charleston). In the spring legislation was forwarded from our senators to initiate a "University of Charleston". These initiatives were not passed by the state legislature but they are expected to resurface in the 2015 session.

As a part of our new Graduate Education Week on campus and as a consequence of these local initiatives the College of Charleston Committee on Graduate Education, Continuing Education, and Special Programs held a series of Faculty forums to broaden the discussion to include CoC input. The following is the Executive Summary for the open Faculty Forum Meetings.

College of Charleston

Committee on Graduate Education, Continuing Education, and Special Programs

Executive Summary for the open Faculty Forum Meetings

Purpose of the Faculty Forums

Five round-table discussions were held from January 22 - February 11, 2014 to discuss the role and the future of graduate education at the College of Charleston. With organizational assistance from the Graduate School, the Graduate Committee sought input from the College faculty: those who have taught graduate courses and/or who worked with graduate students as well as those not participating in graduate education. Although the potential growth of graduate programs has been part of the College’s planning for some time, recent and well-publicized suggestions for change -- from a merger with the Medical University of South Carolina, to a purchase of the Charleston School of Law, and to the need for a comprehensive university in Charleston -- have played an important role in triggering the forums. The CoC academic community had not previously aired different perspectives on graduate education as it had done extensively with general education and with the College's identity. This document summarizes key points from these discussions. However, as the issues are complex and cannot be fully captured in an executive summary, we submit the recorded minutes of these forums in their entirety.

Expanding Master's Programs and Adding Doctoral Programs

There is general faculty interest in expanding and developing new master’s programs at the College when it can be demonstrated that it is advantageous for the institution to do so. Possible advantages of program expansions include servicing specific employment needs within the Lowcountry community, taking advantage of the increased marketability of certain disciplines, using untapped expertise among College faculty in developing new programs, and finding collaborative opportunities both within the institution and with other local universities that could be used in developing new programs. Beyond master’s programs, there is also interest in developing a small number of targeted doctoral programs. Faculty interest in such programs is currently limited to academic areas such as Education in which there is a specific hiring need and in which the need for additional resources is minimal. However, it should
be noted that EdD discussions have not thus far been successful.

The expansion of existing graduate programs and the development of new programs is not without concerns. Faculty want expanded graduate programs to be strong, vibrant, and competitive. In order for this to happen they want any expansion to be a bottom-up process rather than an externally-imposed process, they do not want this expansion to harm the College’s strong undergraduate programs, and they do not want expansion to occur without adequate funding, infrastructure, and other support.

Caveats and Concerns in Expanding Graduate Programs

1) Bottom-up Approach

Faculty members are concerned with the possibility of unplanned, unsupported growth of graduate programs. Their general expectation is that such programs will be developed in a bottom-up approach that makes use of as much existing programmatic support facilities and personnel as possible, such that the programs are being developed in response to internal ideas and opportunities rather than external pressures. The possibility of a forced merger with MUSC is seen as the opposite of a bottom-up approach: external forces are driving the discussion rather than faculty.

2) New Graduate Programs Should Not Harm Undergraduate Programs

The faculty generally see the College of Charleston’s identity as that of an undergraduate institution dedicated to the liberal arts and sciences model. There is great concern that putting an increased emphasis on graduate programs could change the academic culture of the institution, and therefore its identity. It is generally agreed that a large-scale expansion of graduate programs is not likely to work if it harms undergraduate programs, and if it is thus done in a way competitive to undergraduate program development.

3) Program Expansion Needs Financial Support to Succeed

To be successful, expanded graduate programs need to attract and retain high-quality students in a competitive regional and national market. Graduate students currently receive minimal financial support, and South Carolina does not even allow them to receive tuition waivers. Without significant improvement in financial support, the College will have difficulty competing with other educational institutions for graduate students.

Similarly, blindly adding doctoral programs without properly testing the market for such programs is undesirable, and could potentially contribute to what is already a glut on the market of PhDs. There are concerns that increasing the number of graduate students at the College could change the College’s status with grant agencies, which would disqualify the institution for many of the grants that are received as an undergraduate institution. Furthermore, the College currently does not have the infrastructure to support many doctoral programs. This is particularly true in the sciences (e.g. Biology and Chemistry, which have supplied individual department, where research programs capable of producing competitive advanced students require expensive equipment, significantly increased and sustainable student financial support, additional space, increased staff support, and new faculty lines.

Conclusions

These forums have indicated that graduate education already plays an important part in education at the College of Charleston, and that it can play a more important role in the future. The College is at a crossroads, and faculty support exists for expanding involvement in graduate programs and for making the College into an institution in which graduate programs augment existing undergraduate strengths. However, expansion and improvement of graduate programs should be done thoughtfully, with foresight, and with adequate financial support. The Faculty Committee on Graduate Education, Continuing Education, and Special Programs urges the faculty, the administration, the Board of Trustees, business leaders, and politicians to continue discussion on these issues in ways that take these concerns into consideration.