

Presidential Profile

by Katie Hopewell

Going to college is a massive leap to make in life; finally closing the door to your life at home, saying goodbye to childhood friends and transitioning to a higher level of academic rigor all make for a jarring and difficult change for incoming freshmen.

The College of Charleston serves as a particularly anomalous landing for those entering college life; its urban location, coupled with all the peculiarities of Charleston itself, renders it vastly different from the cinematic college experience. As much can be said for the standing President of the College, who took on his position at CofC just before the onset of the novel Coronavirus pandemic.

President Andrew Hsu was inaugurated in the Fall semester of 2019 after a more-than-year-long search for an institutional head.

His election as CofC's President was exceptionally exciting for the campus community at-large, provided that his predecessor was the owner of a Confederate flag mem-

orabilia store and all those before him were of the same canonical leadership demographic: white affluent males.

President Hsu, who immigrated from China shortly following the taking of power by Mao Zedong, made for a refreshing transition for the institution as a whole, and his inauguration embodied all that CofC aims to accomplish: a close-knit, highly reputable campus community that accommodates student success and celebrates diversity.

Without knowing the adversity that was waiting in 2020, his presidency brought hope for substantive growth within the institution. These hopes remained steadfast even as the first warnings of the Coronavirus' pandemic potential became known.

President Hsu was quick to even send out a catered Spotify playlist to the campus community following the College's closing in March 2020; entitled "Spring 2020 - e-Learning Mix/Together, Always," Hsu highlighted the need for

unity and encouragement as we began navigating this unprecedented global event.

President Hsu's uplifting demeanor was unwavering throughout the close of the 2019-2020 academic year and helped carry students through the summer into the 2020-2021 school year, which was fully eclipsed by mask-wearing and socially-distanced courses.

And what better way to become acclimated to life at CofC than through providing governance during an unforeseen pandemic?

Despite the encouraging gestures and tenacity that President Hsu demonstrated over the last academic year, he notes that his biggest challenge was "the two camps that can't seem to agree or even discuss with each other in a meaningful way[...]there's almost no consensus on what's the right thing to do" Hsu said.

"You have faculty, staff, students and parents who say: 'you have to close down the campus right away,' and then you have



photo courtesy of Sophia Barnham

students, parents and even faculty who say: ‘this is nothing, you really shouldn’t be alarmed, you shouldn’t require students to get tested, you shouldn’t require them to wear a mask’” he noted in an interview. Regardless of the divided audience that populates the College, Hsu notes that the 2020-2021 academic year was one of the most successful within the last decade, when considering figures such as student retention rates and overall academic success.

“For the last ten years, we had about 11,000 completed applications every year, and this year we are at 19,000—close to 20,000—completed applications. That shows the strength of the university, and the reputation and success of the university through the pandemic—all of that can be attributed to this popularity” Hsu explained. And for those who are unaware, institutions of higher learning all across the state of South Carolina suffered from an 16% average decrease in enrollment

rates over the 2020-2021 academic year—whereas the College actually demonstrated an increase in the same figures.

In an interview, he admitted, however, that his greatest encouragement over the course of the last academic year was “the perseverance that students showed and their willingness to comply with all of the new rules that we had imposed on campus. They really worked with us to make a very difficult year a success” he noted.

After receiving dozens of emails that so clearly portray his dedication to student success, it has been made blatantly clear that President Hsu has students’ best interest closest to his heart. The same can hardly be said of every President at every institution of higher learning in the country, and even just in the state.

When asked what he wanted to express to incoming freshmen this year, President Hsu stated that: “The College is your new home; we’re all here to help you. If you have any problems, reach out for help and all the faculty and staff here on campus are here to help you. If you can’t find the help you need, reach out to me anytime. My email is president@cofc.edu and anyone can send me a message” and these sentiments are far from hollow. After all, President Hsu had quite the jarring transition into his presidency at CofC and certainly hopes that incoming students feel just as welcomed and heard as he did.