TO: Graduate Council

Rob Young, Interim Dean of the Graduate College

FROM: Daniel J. Ennis, Provost

RE: The Future of Graduate Study at Coastal Carolina University

DATE: January 20, 2020

With this memo I am charging the Graduate Council to study and make recommendation on the future of graduate study at Coastal Carolina University. I request those recommendations be made, in the form of a report, by May 1, 2020. Please keep in mind the following factors:

**The Budgetary Impact of Graduate Study.** For most of its history, Coastal Carolina University has funded new initiatives by means of growth in undergraduate enrollment. As more undergraduates matriculated each year, the institution was able to draw upon surplus tuition revenues to fund new programs. That growth leveled off in 2017, saw a slight decline in 2018, and another decline in 2019. These declines are expected to continue for the next 4-6 years, despite mitigation efforts. Anecdotal claims that graduate study is a “cash cow” or even cost neutral are not supported by data. Of the 20 graduate degrees offered by CCU, seven cost more to offer that they generate in revenue. Overall, for masters programs, CCU spends $1.12 for every $1.00 in tuition paid. This is not a sustainable model.

**State and Regional Needs for Graduate Study:** Despite budget concerns, we can create new graduate programs that would be assets to our institution, but there are complications. Because of state oversight, new programs must be justified and undergo a series of hearings. In all of these hearings, CCU is expected to explain A) Why a new program is needed in South Carolina, and B) How a new program does not duplicate existing programs in South Carolina. Under these conditions, identifying a national or regional need is not sufficient justification for a new graduate program. As such, new graduate program proposals must thread a needle in that they serve our students, can attract new students, can offer social or economic benefits to South Carolina, and do not threaten the enrollment of competing programs already housed in other institutions. The call in the 2016-2021 CCU Strategic Plan for our graduate student FTE population to reach "18 percent of the student population" by 2019 appears to have discounted this challenge.
**Strategic Planning:** The College of Graduate Study came into being without the benefit of strategic planning. By contrast, the HTC Honors College was carefully planned, with a yearlong study process that took into account best practices, and a proposal that was shared widely on campus. In consequence, the HTC College has leadership, scope, and support appropriate for its mission. I do not offer this as a criticism. Institutional circumstances sometimes require quick decisions. But I am now proposing we “step back” and engage in the thinking, discussion, and writing necessary to create conditions for long-term graduate success. The Committee is encouraged to review the HTC College whitepaper to see the level of preparation and research necessary to soundly establish a new college on this campus.

**Potential Outcomes:** I do not want to circumscribe your conversations, but my reflection on this matters leads me to three scenarios; there are surely more.

1. An ambitious proposal that will clarify the role and scope of graduate study on this campus, with an active College of Graduate Study re-established on fiscally sustainable grounds. Such a plan would envision the expansion of graduate programs on this campus and the active identification of areas of need. Should I find this proposal to be viable, I would seek to search for a permanent Dean of Graduate Study during the 2020-2021 academic year.

2. A moderate proposal that will scale back graduate planning, even to the extent of revising the administrative profile of graduate study to a director level. In this scenario, more autonomy would be ceded to the academic colleges, but with a modest growth strategy coordinated by a director and the Graduate Council in conjunction with my office. This path would likely preclude rapid expansion of graduate study in favor of selective new programs and a review of existing programs to address areas of concern.

3. A cautious proposal that calls for the scaling back of graduate study so as to strengthen the self-sustaining programs and reduce the number of subsidized programs. In this scenario, the oversight of graduate study would shift to the departments and colleges, with a small central office to ensure compliance with CHE and SACS guidelines.

I invite you to determine if your current committee will take on this task as a whole, or if an ad hoc committee is a more appropriate forum for discussion. Whatever process you adopt, I would expect your report to be endorsed by the Graduate Council by vote. The administrative support of my office and research support provided by the Office of Institutional Research should ease this task. I intend to present our new President with a plan for graduate study that enjoys both your support and my confidence.