

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022

<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 52

Growing the Coalition If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org.

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Coker University



Coker University is dedicated to providing every student with an academic curriculum based upon a uniformly excellent liberal arts core that enhances the structured development of key personal skills, including analytical and creative thinking. Founded in 1908, Coker is located in Hartsville, South Carolina, in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The University offers bachelor's and master's degrees in business, education, the humanities, nursing, sciences, and visual and performing arts. Coker creates an academic environment where students engage on deep levels with faculty and staff. Coker University is a charter member of the Yes We Must Coalition.

Experiences both in and out of the classroom are focused on active student involvement and the practical application of academic knowledge that leads to lifelong learning. Coker measures its success by the personal and professional accomplishments enjoyed by all members of the academic community. Students find an atmosphere of support as they navigate their college journey at Coker. Through faculty mentors, guidance from staff, and enriching relationships with students unlike themselves, Coker students develop knowledge and skills that they can apply in their communities and make an impact.



Coker University serves a diverse group of students, including first-generation students and many students who are Pell-eligible. Scholarships — academic, athletic, and performance — are available to all students, lowering the average cost of tuition. For the past four years, tuition has remained the same to ensure Coker students can focus on their education and worry less about how they will pay. Every first-year student at our Hartsville campus is given an iPad® and Apple Pencil® as a part of the University's commitment to putting cutting edge technology in the hands of students while they are preparing for new careers.

Coker students define leadership through their everyday activities in the classroom, around campus, on their athletic teams, or on stage. Our 24 athletic teams compete at the NCAA Division II level and are ranked first in community service hours compared to other programs. The School of Visual and Performing Arts produces multiple plays, concerts, and exhibitions throughout the year. Faculty focus on undergraduate research for students and find ways to expand the traditional definition of research. Coker students are involved in lab research, community projects, and internships where they discover new ideas and new ways to accomplish tasks and achieve goals.

Examples of this immersive research include student participation in the Pee Dee Idea Challenge (a new venture pitching competition), National Science Foundation grant-funded scholarships for STEM students to create a pipeline of well-prepared graduates for the emerging science-based industries in our region, and internships or community service within the Pee Dee region.

For more information about Coker University, please contact Dr. Susan Daniels Henderson, Provost, at shenderson@coker.edu.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Equity Moves: Free Books and Free Rides

Villa Maria College (NY) has made access and equity top priorities of the student-centered education it offers. The process began under the leadership of President Matthew Giordano with the identification of barriers to success that commonly prevent students from completing their programs of study and graduating.

The College took steps, both large and small, to improve access — implementing a debt forgiveness plan, instituting creative degree completion options, expanding the College's food pantry, and creating a student emergency fund. Two recent initiatives go even further. Villa Maria has eliminated the cost of books and supplies and provided students with two new transportation options.

The free books and supplies initiative removes a significant added expense for all students. Now books needed for classes are automatically available to students through the College's learning management system and through a centralized office in the library. This means that students no longer spend valuable time shopping around for and spending their own money on textbooks and supplies, including texts and supplies for courses in the arts and health sciences that are typically quite expensive. In fact, many books are now delivered electronically and can be read online on computers, tablets, and phones. Physical textbooks and supplies are still offered and made available for students to pick up at the start of each semester, often the week before a semester begins, so there is no delay in students having what they need to start the semester strong.

Villa Maria College has the distinction of being the first institution of higher education in western New York to make this historic move, and the College Board estimates that the change saves students and their families an average of \$1240 in out-of-pocket costs per year. The free books and supplies program represents an immediate success, as it allows students to focus on their studies from the first day of classes rather than diverting any of their time and attention to searching for best prices, trying to share books and supplies with another student, or deciding not to purchase supplies needed for their classes at all.

Lack of dependable transportation to and from campus was identified as another significant barrier to success for Villa Maria students. To help address this challenge, the College created the Viking Ride Program, a strategic partnership between Villa Maria and the rideshare company, Lyft. At the start of each month, every Villa student receives a \$40 credit to use to get to the College and back home via Lyft. The money can be used only for Lyft transportation to and from campus. In addition, College leadership worked with locally elected officials to have Villa Maria added as a new stop along several bus routes. By bringing the Metro Bus service to campus, students now have another reliable method of transportation to and from the school, and the new bus stop also benefits residents who live in the local community.

The free books and supplies program and the Viking Ride Program are just the beginning. The Villa community continues to work together to identify and overcome roadblocks that limit accessibility. For more information, please contact Kristen Schober, Director of Marketing and Communications at kschober@villa.edu.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org.