

**Concordia University System:
A Blessed Past, an Inspiring Future**

“Concordia University System is one of the most powerful and far-reaching tools the Lord of the Church has given The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod to take the Good News of life in Jesus Christ to a world desperately in need of hearing and believing in Him,” says a supporter of Lutheran higher education.¹ The growth and development of CUS is one of the most remarkable stories in all of U. S. higher education.

CUS is a network of ten colleges and universities affiliated with The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Though CUS was formed in 1992 as a subsidiary corporate entity of the Synod, the roots of the member institutions run much deeper. The oldest, Concordia University Chicago, was founded in 1864. The newest, Concordia University Irvine, was established in 1976. Most of the others have histories that go back a century or more.

Institution	Year Founded	Location
Concordia College Alabama	1922	Selma, Alabama
Concordia College New York	1881	Bronxville, New York
Concordia University Chicago	1864	River Forest, Illinois
Concordia University Irvine	1976	Irvine, California
Concordia University Nebraska	1894	Seward, Nebraska
Concordia University Portland	1905	Portland Oregon
Concordia University Saint Paul	1893	St. Paul, Minnesota
Concordia University Texas	1926	Austin, Texas
Concordia University Wisconsin	1881	Mequon, Wisconsin
Concordia University Wisconsin	1963	Ann Arbor, Michigan

The earliest of these institutions were designed around the concept of the German *gymnasium*; six-year schools structured as four years of high school and two years of college. These early schools were founded primarily – though not exclusively - to provide pre-seminary education and preparation of teachers for the congregations of the Synod. Since then, the

schools have been remarkably innovative in reinventing themselves to meet the changing needs of church and society. All have evolved into institutions offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and most have adopted a university structure housing three or more colleges. A number offer doctoral programs and two host professional programs – a school of law at Concordia Portland and a school of pharmacy at Concordia Wisconsin. Many academic programs are offered via online or other alternative delivery methods. Combined, the ten CUS institutions offer over 160 undergraduate and 50 graduate programs.² Enrollment throughout the system has grown from just over 6,000 students in 1986, to nearly 36,000 students in 2016.³ For nearly two decades the institutions have operated independently financially, receiving no direct financial support from The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

Enrollments today are richly multicultural, with students from many races, creeds, colors, ethnic backgrounds, Christian denominations, and countries.⁴ Over-one-thousand military veterans and active duty military are enrolled. Students range in age from as young as sixteen to as old as the seventies. The majority of students are women and in FY2016, for the first time, graduate school enrollments system-wide exceeded undergraduate.

The institutions' collective witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and commitment to their Lutheran identity are palpable. All undergraduate students, regardless of major, take courses in biblical studies. Graduate students pursue their studies with the Lutheran notion of vocation as a centerpiece of their programs. At Concordia St. Paul, for example, doctor of physical therapy (DPT) students are invited to: *Follow in the Footsteps of the Greatest Healer the World Has Ever Known*. Through seminars and one-on-one mentoring, theology faculty encourage DPT students to pursue their profession as a calling from God. On every campus,

profound dialogues take place each day among non-Christian and Christian students, and campus ministries are vibrant.

Some 1,400 students system-wide are preparing for vocations as pastors, teachers, directors of Christian Education, Christian outreach, and parish music, lay ministers, parish nurses, and other ministry callings. The climate for church vocation preparation in the twenty-first century is ideal on the CUS campuses, which are shaped by a caring Christian community committed to the Word of God and an exposure to widely diverse communities and individuals.

Greatest Need for Help from the Church

The greatest need for help from the church at the Concordia institutions today is a change in the governance model, specifically the formation and responsibilities of the boards of regents. Each institution is governed by its own board of regents, which has policy and fiduciary responsibility, appoints all tenure-track faculty, and makes the final election of the president from a pre-qualified slate of candidates.

Current Model

The Synod in convention has periodically made modifications to the governance model, notably in 1986, when the number of regents was raised to eleven with two of the positions to be appointed by the board itself. From this “base,” other modifications have been made at subsequent conventions, until arriving at the current model, under which the number of regents for each institution is fixed at eighteen. Regents come to each board through one of four avenues: four are elected by the Synod meeting in convention, four are elected by the LCMS District in which each institution resides, one is the President of the geographical LCMS district within which the institution is located and, since the 2015 LCMS Convention, one is appointed

by the LCMS *praesidium*. Regents are eligible to serve a total of three consecutive three-year terms.

Proposed Model

In 2012, the Presidents of the ten institutions and the chairs of their boards of regents crafted the following proposed changes to the governance model and began presenting them to the leadership of the Synod.

1. Remove the cap on the number of regents and allow each institution to identify the number of regents that it needs.
2. Empower the board of each institutions to identify and appoint the regents it needs from within The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.
3. Establish a system through which various other governing bodies of the Synod (for example, the Synodical *praesidium*, the Synod's Board of Directors, and the geographic district's board of directors) appoint one or two liaison regents with full voting rights to each institution's board.

Approval by the Synod in convention is needed to implement this new model. It is the unanimous opinion of the presidents and board chairs who drafted these proposed changes that they are of the utmost importance to strengthening the colleges and universities' capacity to operate effectively and continue their distinctly confessional Lutheran identity. Expanding the number of regents will bring additional individuals with the widely diverse skill sets needed to oversee the effective operation of each institution. The latitude for the board itself to identify a greater number of its regents will enhance each institution's capacity to advocate for its Lutheran identity in the region within which it is located. The goal of this proposed change is stronger institutions proclaiming with power the great joy of knowing Christ and making him known. And the appointment of liaison regents by various synodical governing agencies will ameliorate

the politicization of regent selection that now often occurs at conventions, and stabilize the jarring turnover in board makeup which frequently occurs through the election process.

1. www.CUS.edu (retrieved October 25, 2017)
2. Ibid
3. Concordia University System Enrollment Report FY2017
4. Students from seventeen countries were enrolled at Concordia University St. Paul alone in FY2017.