

JUDSON COLLEGE

**Strategic Facilitation Project
Report**

February 16, 2021



FULLER
HIGHER ED SOLUTIONS



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Executive Summary

At a time when many colleges are facing challenges, including the ongoing search for distinction in a landscape of similar options, Judson College is nearly a unicorn with at least three distinct characteristics:

- It is a college for women
- It is a Baptist college for women
- It is a Baptist college for women in rural Alabama

On the surface these three characteristics ought to be enough to attract enough students, and yet the college has struggled to maintain its enrollment.

Judson College's December financial crisis announcement was jarring to many and evidence of the challenging circumstances the college is facing. Financial challenges like these are not unique to Judson and did not happen overnight; they are the result of sliding enrollment, accumulated deferred maintenance, decisions by the previous administration, and gaps in data shared with the board about the college's condition. The pandemic contributed by increasing the pace of the impact, but the college was already in a difficult financial condition prior to March 2020 when the pandemic changed the way residential colleges function.

Judson College is facing serious headwinds as it tries to build a sustainable path forward out of the current crisis. These headwinds include:

- The ongoing pandemic
- Diminishing interest in single gender institutions. According to the Women's College Coalition, in 1960 there were 230 colleges for women in North America; today there are 36.
- The perceptions about the college created by the public nature of the December announcement and the potential impact on interest from potential students, donors, and those who influence either.
- Demographics – projections for high school graduates from the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) show some challenges with the supply side of potential students. Between now and 2037 the number of [high school graduates in Alabama](#) will decline slightly but the white portion of this group will decline more substantially, the black portion will decline slightly, and the only growing portion will come from Hispanic students. Border states face similar patterns of decline and diversity.
- Changing perception of Christian colleges – in a time of post-denominationalism and a generation (Z or the i-Gen) that is less interested in formal church formats, Christian colleges face some unusual challenges, creating the need to make clear what Christian college means to daily life in and out of the classroom with marketing and messaging to support this reality.

There are several options the college could consider at this time including:

- Closing – overcoming these challenges and headwinds will require focus, discipline, and an ongoing infusion of cash through donor support and other means to do the turnaround necessary for Judson to move from surviving to thriving. The board, leadership team, and faculty/staff must commit to this challenging task and find substantive financial support.



Without a willingness to follow this challenging set of steps, closing may be the only option as Judson slowly runs out of operating cash.

- Merging – in Judson’ situation a merger may be best described as an absorption. Judson has some resources (endowment), a small cadre of students, SACS accreditation, the support of the Alabama Baptist Convention, and 182 years of tradition and history. It also has debt and a campus with significant deferred maintenance. While merger should be pursued as an option, care must be taken to ensure Judson is not merely swallowed up.
- Moving – there are challenges with the college’s rural location in terms of local gaps in infrastructure, employment options for college employee family members, desired amusements, and available amenities. Moving would also require an infusion of cash and it seems unlikely there would be a significant return on the sale of the current campus given the economic climate in the region.
- Expanding to include men – many of the former members of the Women’s College Coalition are now co-ed. This has the potential of nearly doubling the number of students who could consider Judson, but would require significant changes in infrastructure, staffing, programming, and marketing. In addition, there are already two other co-ed campuses directly or historically connected with the Convention (U of Mobile and Samford) in the state.
- Investing in a turnaround – clearly the college cannot continue its current trajectory and simply “work harder and smarter.” A turnaround, supported by a well-funded strategic plan that creates stability and provides seed money for investment in key elements of a new and improved Judson, is another option the board could pursue. This is the choice the participants in the alumnae focus groups from across the generations support with enthusiasm and a willingness to help fund it.

For reasons outlined in the balance of this report, the Fuller HES team believes the college has two primary options to consider, either closing with dignity or investing in a turnaround. We believe there is something unique and valuable at Judson, worth the investment, especially after nearly two centuries of educating Christian women as leaders and key contributors to their professions, physical and faith communities, and family situations. However, this turnaround will require focused work on fund-raising, challenging decisions about what Judson should be going forward, and a multi-year commitment from a critical mass of board members, leaders at all levels, and a mobilized alumnae base to accomplish.



Introduction and Methodology

Since Fuller Higher Ed Solutions was formally engaged by President Mark Tew on December 16, 2020, this project has moved with dispatch toward creation of this report. The challenging situation in which the college finds itself called for urgency. The FHES team consisted of:

- Tim Fuller, Founder of Fuller HES
- Jeff Spear, Senior Financial Affiliate Consultant and Founder of CFO Colleague, a higher education consulting firm focused on independent college financial health
- Roger Kieffer, Senior Affiliate Consultant
- Jeff Babbitt, Data Analyst

During the past two months the following steps were carried out:

- Developed, shared, gathered, and studied the results of an information request sent to President Tew and the college's executive leadership. The information consisted of enrollment and financial data along with other key college documents and data.
- Studied information from The Women's College Coalition including relevant research and the history of the women's college movement.
- Developed a profile spreadsheet for Coalition members with key data points such as endowment, enrollment, and retention.
- Visited the Marion campus - Tim Fuller spent 1 ½ days on the Judson campus (January 5-6), meeting with the president and the college's executive leadership for a day and Pastor John Nicholson from Siloam Baptist and President Tew on the following day.
- Communicated by phone and email as a project team to analyze data, share recommendations, and compile this report whose primary author is Tim Fuller.
- Interviewed Dr. Rick Lance, Executive Director of the Alabama Baptist Convention.
- Working with President Tew, conducted 24 one-hour focus group meetings with nearly 170 alumnae, current students, faculty, staff, administration, and board members. The results of these conversations were summarized and analyzed for common themes, ideas to help the college, and specific concerns or questions. Tim Fuller conducted each group with Roger Kieffer participating live in the board meeting and listening to recordings of many of the other sessions.
- Conducted a Zoom briefing with preliminary findings for President Tew the college's executive leadership team (February 11).

Once this report is delivered to President Tew for sharing with the board, the remaining steps include a one-hour session with the board to review highlights and answer questions as well as conduct a final follow-up session with President Tew and the college's executive leadership.

The time allotted for this project made primary survey research with current students and alumnae impossible, so the focus groups were designed to gather qualitative insights from these important populations. The project did not include a detailed analysis of decisions by past college leaders or board members, nor did it include a detailed analysis of facilities, deferred maintenance, administrative efficiency and effectiveness, enrollment/marketing/fund-raising strategy, or the



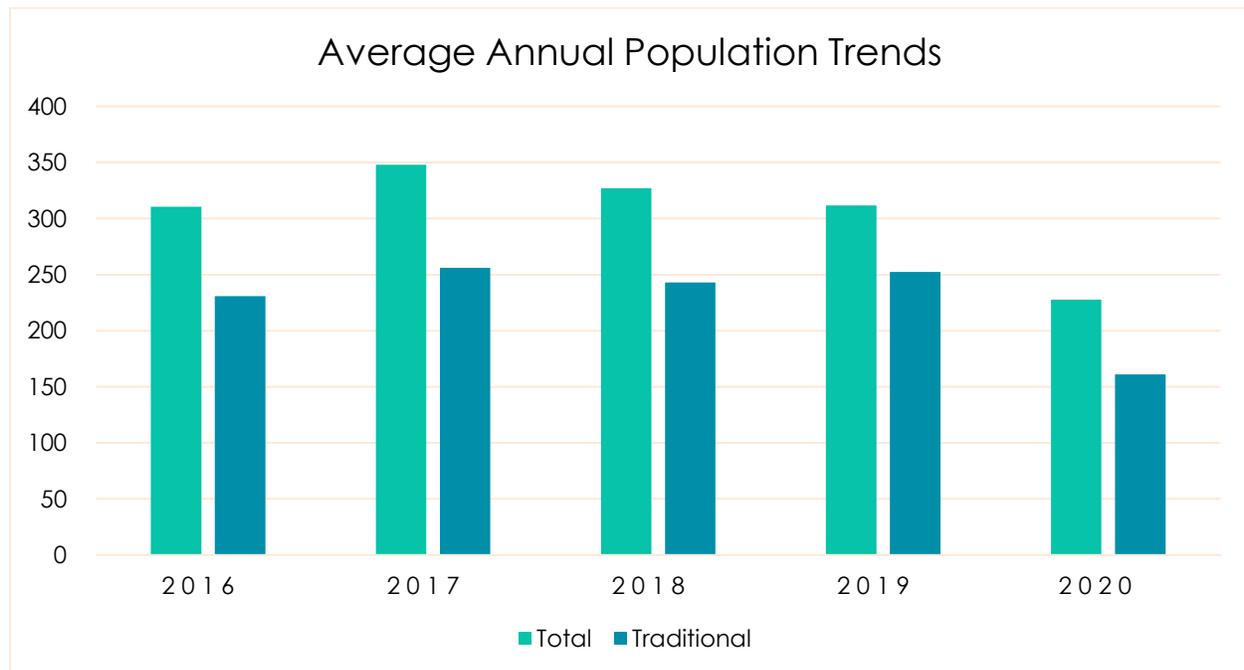
college’s strategic plan. These important steps should be part of a turnaround plan if the board chooses a path forward.

Situation Analysis

The report covers financial, enrollment, and programmatic aspects facing the college at present and into the near future. Each section builds off a combination of analysis of data provided by the college (including copies of recent audits), knowledge of trends impacting higher education in general and unique colleges like Judson in particular, interview notes from conversations with Judson leaders, and Fuller HES team conversations.

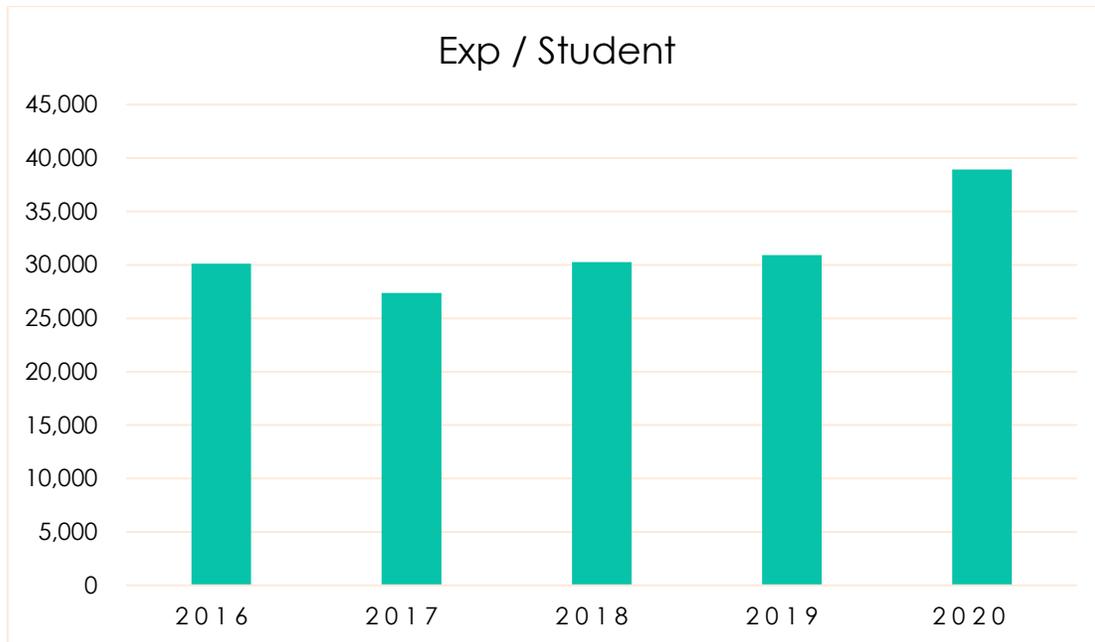
Financial Factors

The next three charts tell the story of Judson. First, consider the past five full fiscal years of enrollment. While it could be argued that overall student numbers remained steady for most of the time, the experience of the past year has put the institution in a difficult position.



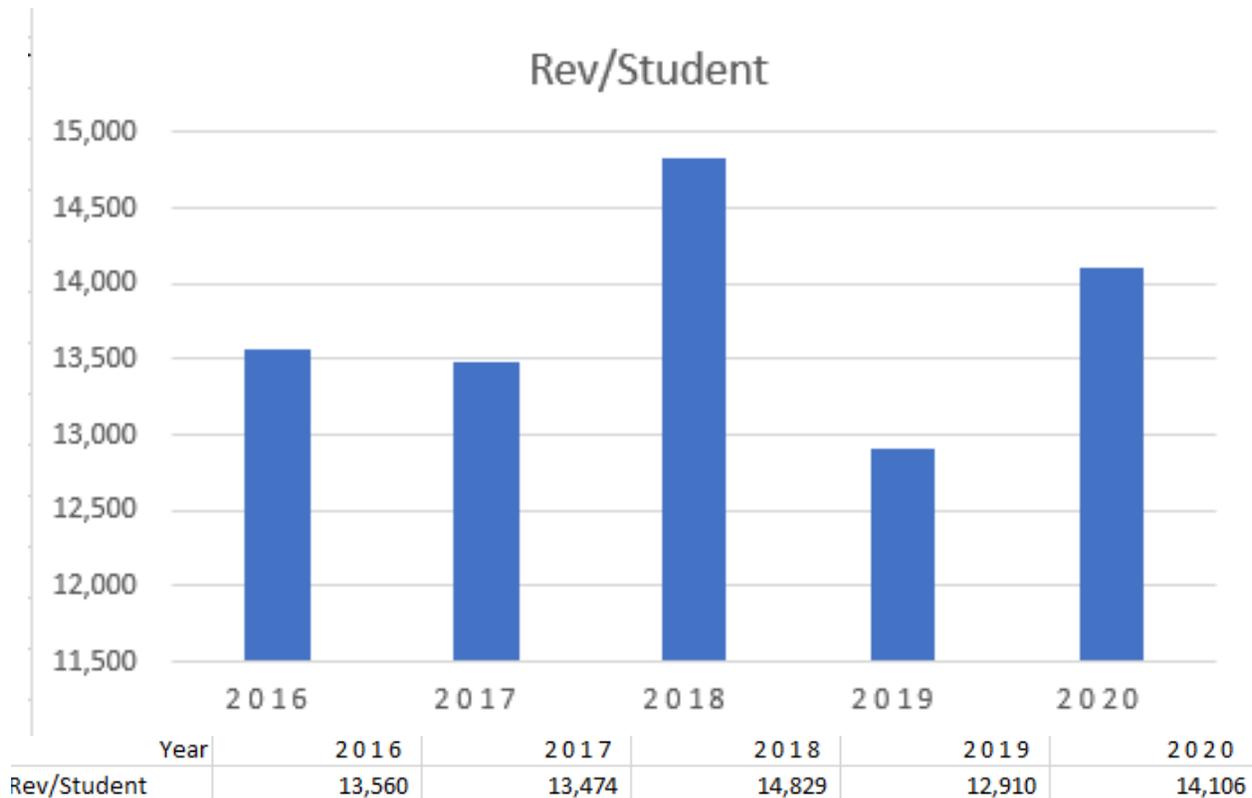
| Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total | 311 | 348 | 327 | 312 | 228 |
| Traditional | 231 | 256 | 243 | 253 | 161 |

The decline from 2019 to 2020 of 92 traditional students represents -36%. It can be understood that the College would have found it impossible to reduce spending in a commensurate rate.



As the above chart shows, the college expends nearly \$40,000 per student each year. As populations decline, with expenses declining at a much lesser rate, expenses expressed on a per-student basis will continue to grow.

Revenues from students representing net tuition and auxiliary revenues have remained relatively strong. The data in the following chart shows a consistent level over the past five years:



A comparison of expense per student and revenue per student indicates that the college is spending approximately \$24,000 more per student than it receives in student revenue. This student revenue gap results in the college needing to generate 60% of revenues from non-student, philanthropic source; generating two thirds of revenues from donations on an annual basis is not realistic.

CFO Colleague’s work with more than 120 independent, mostly faith-based colleges and universities over the last five years suggests a standard expectation is for net tuition revenue to be around \$14,000, with auxiliaries delivering around \$6,000 after direct costs. One can quickly conclude that there is a pricing deficiency in operation at the College. And even if student revenues increased by 50%, it would still be too little to offset what is a structural deficit. The enrollment or volume deficiency magnifies the challenge, given the recent plunge in enrollment. Both pricing and volume thus combine to create an unsustainable student revenue stream.

What is not reported in the numbers is another set of deficiencies. These are comprised of deferred maintenance and what is likely to be a less than ideal pay structure. In other words, though expenses do not match revenues, they are also not high enough to cover basic needs. While the administration is submitting a budget which includes deletion of several programs and other reductions, a reduction approaching two thirds would be needed to rebalance the spending/revenue equation. You cannot cut what you are already not spending.



A final observation relates to stewardship. There is a \$25,000 deficit when comparing student net revenues with expenses per student (roughly \$40,000 in expenses per student minus \$15,000 per student in revenue. If donations can make up the 60% of costs that students do not pay, it represents a subsidy that the Baptist Convention and other donors are providing. Imagine any institution receiving donations to the tune of \$25,000 per head. Most would be able to run their operations without charging any tuition at all. For Judson, those amounts would merely evaporate each year, with the need to find the funds again next year. And the facility and salary deficiencies remain outstanding.

The Fuller HES team has seen no data which supports the continuation of the college without a serious infusion of cash to address the ongoing deficit, deal with deferred maintenance, and create “seed money” to invest in elements of a turnaround. The cash positive position which extends through March 2022 provides some time for a turnaround but is against the framework of a deficit budget again for next year. Judson’s unrestricted net assets are negative and little unrestricted endowment remains available to the trustees. Meanwhile, enrollment continues to decline and now faces the additional headwinds created by media coverage of the December announcement and continued recruitment challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

We estimate the path to a turnaround would require the following funded initiatives for at least five years, assuming enrollment turns around and grows to the 350 full-time level estimated as a healthy baseline by college leaders:

- \$5 million/year (including current giving and counting on continued support from the Alabama Baptist Convention at current levels) to close the operating deficit
- Assuming the figure of \$10 million to address glaring deferred maintenance needs is correct, \$2 million/year as part of a five-year plan to revive the college’s buildings and infrastructure
- \$1 million/year for “seed money” to be invested in priorities such as marketing/recruiting strategy, a new website, a strategic plan, program development, and other priorities.

Without this kind of infusion of cash through support and/or other sources of funding, accompanied by a clear plan for the turnaround, there is no path toward a sustainable operation that the Fuller HES team can glean.

Enrollment Factors

A study of admission funnel data for the past five years gives insights into Judson’s new student enrollment strategy. Judson is unique, so exploring interest from other states was pursued. The inquiry pool includes potential interest from as many as 40 states, but 80-90% of the enrolled students each year are from Alabama and typically only 4 – 11 other states are represented. For the Fuller HES team this reinforces the importance of owning Alabama first, especially in a time where the pandemic has caused students to consider staying closer to home. Out of state strategies should focus on mobilizing alumnae rather than mass strategies such as direct mail or college fair attendance.

A solid increase in applications and admits for fall 2020 contributed to the biggest new student class since fall 2016. In general, more applications only works when they are generated from students for



whom Judson is a good fit. In other words, the point is not to get more applications, but to enroll more students. In this case it worked out for Judson, a tribute to the work of the admission team and perhaps the partnership with Clark Higher Education.

When asked about the level of total full-time enrollment necessary to provide a sustainable financial model, the number 350 was shared by several college leaders. It assumes a reasonable discount rate, continued solid or improving retention, and the right strategies to make this level of enrollment sustainable. It was not clear whether this estimate was the result of a careful study or not, so accurate modeling will be necessary to determine optimum enrollment for breakeven.

At Fuller HES there are five keys to strategic enrollment health (enough of the right students) including:

- Practices – are we carrying out the right tactics and strategies day after day to attract enough of the right students?
- Programs – do our programs, both academic and co-curricular, serve to attract students to enroll initially and then compel them to persist to graduation?
- People – do we have enough of the right people in the right seats in the admission office? Have we mobilized the rest of the campus to do their part to recruit students?
- Price – while this fits with the alliteration, value is a better descriptor. No matter what we charge and what aid we award, why is Judson worth choosing and how are we making the case effectively for doing so?
- Place – how does our physical (and virtual for online programs) location create a sense of welcome, quality, and interest?

This project did not include a deep dive into recruitment practices to inform any recommendations relative to Judson's future, but the continuing slide in enrollment would suggest the need for close examination. The next section looks at current and potential programs in detail. The Fuller HES team did not meet members of the recruitment team or other functions other than during focus groups, so no opinions were formed from these brief encounters for a different purpose. Judson's discount rate is not out of line with the NACUBO average, but the website, the most important recruitment tool, needs substantial work. Deferred maintenance issues impact Judson's sense of place with warm, friendly, caring, capable people needing to overcome some tough first impressions of the campus and the setting. During the focus groups a lot of feedback was given about the perception of a lack of responsiveness and follow-through by admission team members on referrals, which may suggest the need for a closer look into practices and processes.

Regarding the denominational backgrounds of entering students, it is interesting to note that those who left this question blank for fall 2020 were second only to the Baptist enrollment when all "flavors" of Baptists are combined. To this point, 39 of the 87 new students (44.8%) came from Baptist churches while 33 of 87 (37.9%) left this question blank. This could mean they did not see their home church's denomination on the list, they go to a community church and do not know whether it is denominational, or they are not connected to a church at all. This latter group has been welcomed at Judson for years, so this is not a surprise. No other denominational group made double figures for fall 2020.



Program Factors

Academic programs serve as the primary attraction point for potential students. “Do you have my major” is the most common questions students ask at a college fair and the most common starting point on a college website. As a small college, Judson’s mix of offerings is not as broad as much larger colleges of any type, but the college offers a lot of majors, minors, and pre-professional tracks to less than 200 students. Fuller HES works with several Bible colleges with a similar enrollment to Judson, and these colleges offer less than half the number of majors Judson does at present. The data suggests a hard look at current majors is to ensure viability and potential before any new majors are considered.

The Fuller HES team considered academic programs at several levels. First, what are potential students who might be interested in a Christian college for women in Alabama thinking about in terms of potential majors? Second, how does Judson’ current mix of programs compare to student interest, and is Judson capturing its fair share of market interest? Third, what does Judson’s enrollment by program suggest as part of the path forward in terms of programs with potential to grow and those which the data indicates will continue to face challenges?

A Fuller HES partnership with [The Christian Connector](#), a potential student database focused on interest in Christian colleges, provided summary data for high school juniors and seniors from Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi and informed thinking about majors in general. Christian Connector (CC) builds their database through surveys and other promotional outreach, targeting students who are interested in Christian colleges specifically. With recent changes to both The College Board and ACT/NRCCUA databases which make finding students with a strong faith commitment more challenging, the CC database offers the best, most focused lens on such students and their intended majors. In the experience of the Fuller HES team Christian students are interested in the same mix of majors as general students, other than some degree of interest in ministry and missions not found outside of the faith community.

Since exploring the pros and cons of going coed was part of the original charge, the database included men from these three states as well. A summary of the data and relevant findings follows.

Quantity

There are 6,727 juniors and seniors from the three states selected who expressed specific interest in Christian colleges within the CC database. Breakdowns of this group include:

- Women – 5,076
 - Seniors – 3,924
 - Juniors – 1,152
- Men – 1,651
 - Seniors – 1,355
 - Juniors – 296

This relative dearth of men cast early doubt on the viability of going coed as part of a productive path forward for Judson.



Intended Majors

The selection of majors/programs a college offers is a critical element in determining interest from potential students, retaining current students, and creating a sustainable business plan. Magnet majors and programs like health sciences (pre-med and nursing in particular) attract interest from potential students. Other programs such as the humanities can grow over time as the magnet majors lose their magnetic pull and students discover other interests and options, especially when such programs are taught well by capable faculty in the core curriculum. These so-called “landing majors” can make valuable contributions to retention.

Deciding which programs to offer involves several key variables:

- Market potential – do potential students have strong interest? Are current marketing/recruiting efforts capturing a fair share of that interest for the college? If not, what changes must be made to messaging, strategies, tactics, and the programs themselves to attract more students?
- Mission fit and centrality – should a liberal arts college begin offering vocational programs such as the trades, for example? Should a Bible college begin offering “marketplace ministry” programs such as business and health care? Should a Christian liberal arts college function without majors in Bible and theology?
- Cost to deliver – what does it cost, in terms of faculty, facilities, equipment, and marketing/recruiting nuances, to offer this program? What is the program margin (revenue minus expenses)?
- Regional nuances – do particular programs make sense given the college’s location and the unique needs of the region? For example, a college located in an urban area might offer several business programs which build on available internship options and/or urban ministry. The presence of a major donor or foundation might prompt a college to prioritize certain programs (like a college in Indiana leveraging the presence of The Lilly Foundation as a rationale for developing a strong chemistry program). As was suggested in one alumnae focus group, Judson’s rural location lends itself to programs like equestrian studies, sustainable agriculture, or something that plays off the significance of the region to the civil rights movement.
- Internal strengths – does the college have faculty expertise, facilities, and/or a well-earned reputation for excellence in a particular program?
- Critical mass – there are some “chicken and egg” factors in play here. Without enough faculty it is hard to attract enough students to make a program viable. Programs need a critical mass of students to support the faculty and faculty to mentor and teach the students. SACS and other accrediting bodies tend not to approve of majors taught by one faculty member, something which came up in alumnae focus groups.

As Judson considers its options, current programs must be evaluated through a rubric which includes these factors. Potential new programs must also be scrutinized through the same type of filter. For example, small numbers in current programs such as art, music, religious studies, and social work seem inevitable without intervening factors given low levels of interest from potential



female students. Religious studies and related programs in ministry combined only attract 1% of the interest in the region, for example, and all art and design programs combined only 3.6%. Majoring in music only captures the interest of 1.4% of these potential female students. Social work is of interest to less than 1% of these potential female students.

Here are selected insights from the data:

- What are women interested in studying?
 - The following Judson majors/pre-professional programs are of interest to more than 100 juniors and seniors (combined) out of 5,557 majors chosen (students could indicate interest in more than one major), suggesting potential for growth in these areas with the right mix of faculty, high impact learning practices (internships, practicums, service learning, study away, etc.), and intentional recruiting supported by targeted business plans:
 - Business administration (216)
 - Elementary education (133)
 - Secondary education (187)
 - Pre-med (275)
 - Psychology (391)
 - Biology (508)
 - Criminal justice (170)
 - Pre-law (137)

Nursing garners more interest than any of these programs with 618 female students expressing interest. It is not clear from the data whether this interest is in all types of nursing including the associate degree Judson has decided to discontinue after this spring semester, but experience with high school students suggests the interest may be more clearly focused on BSN options.
 - Less than 50 students are interested in studying the following Judson majors/pre-professional programs:
 - Pre-pharmacy (31)
 - Pre-physical therapy (34 – but 50 are interested in a major in physical therapy)
 - English (45)
 - History (19)
 - Spanish (1)
 - Math (23)
 - Church music/music ministry (7)
 - Equine studies (2 – equine science not offered as an option on the CC majors menu)
 - Religion (10)
 - Social work (46)
- What are men interested in studying?



- As noted above, there are far fewer men who expressed interest in Christian colleges from the three-state area, so the quantities interested in each major are also much lower.
- Here are the Judson majors/pre-professional programs of interest to more than 50 men out of the 1,830 majors selected (students could select more than one):
 - Business administration (54)
 - Pre-med (57)
 - Biology (91)
 - Criminal justice (55)
- Here are the Judson majors/pre-professional programs with fewer than 10 men interested:
 - Elementary education (zero)
 - Pre-dentistry (5)
 - Pre-pharmacy (4)
 - English (1)
 - Spanish (zero)
 - Church music/music ministry (2)
 - Equine studies (zero)
 - Social work (2)
- Here are the majors of interest to more than 50 men not currently offered by Judson:
 - Accounting (54)
 - Business management (97)
 - Computer science (163)
 - Engineering (260)

What preliminary conclusions emerge from this data?

- Building a strong religion/ministry/Bible program is an uphill battle for new students and may have more potential as a “landing” area. Fuller HES work with seminaries and Christian graduate schools suggests the call to ministry is coming later in life than high school, which is a change from a decade or more ago.
- There is solid interest in programs like business, biology, pre-med, and criminal justice from both men and women. How can Judson attract a higher level of interest from women for such programs? This seems like an untapped opportunity the college should pursue.
- A move to coed would likely require additional academic and co-curricular programs since much of the current mix of majors is not of high interest to men. A common path to coed pursued by some former colleges for women included an aggressive plan to grow male enrollment through athletics, something Judson’s facilities in their current state would not support.

How has this potential interest translated into new student enrollment at Judson the last three years? The following chart shows first choice majors of entering Judson College students in descending order by three-year total. Note the share of total new students each year as well and absence of new students in any of Judson’s music programs. No new students enrolled in Spanish



during this three-year period, either. When comparing this data to the Christian Connector data, there is clearly potential to enroll more business students, for example, as well as sterling performance by the equestrian program given so few potential students.

| Judson - New Student Majors | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Total | 2018 % of Total | 2019 % of Total | 2020 % of Total | Overall % of Total |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Biology | 18 | 15 | 25 | 58 | 22.5% | 26.3% | 28.7% | 25.9% |
| Nursing | 7 | 4 | 12 | 23 | 8.8% | 7.0% | 13.8% | 10.3% |
| Elementary Education | 8 | 7 | 7 | 22 | 10.0% | 12.3% | 8.0% | 9.8% |
| Undecided | 9 | 5 | 5 | 19 | 11.3% | 8.8% | 5.7% | 8.5% |
| Equine Science | 3 | 6 | 7 | 16 | 3.8% | 10.5% | 8.0% | 7.1% |
| Criminal Justice | 5 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 6.3% | 1.8% | 5.7% | 4.9% |
| Social Work | 5 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 6.3% | 3.5% | 4.6% | 4.9% |
| Business | 4 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 5.0% | 3.5% | 3.4% | 4.0% |
| Psychology | 5 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 6.3% | 5.3% | 1.1% | 4.0% |
| Secondary Education | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 3.8% | 5.3% | 3.4% | 4.0% |
| Art | - | 4 | 1 | 5 | 0.0% | 7.0% | 1.1% | 2.2% |
| English | 4 | - | - | 4 | 5.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.8% |
| Pre-Nursing | 4 | - | - | 4 | 5.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.8% |
| History | - | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 2.3% | 1.3% |
| Mathematics | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 1.3% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.9% |
| Pre-Physical Therapy | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 1.3% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.9% |
| Pre-Veterinary Medicine | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 1.3% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.9% |
| Secondary Education/English | - | - | 2 | 2 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 2.3% | 0.9% |
| Biology/Pre-Medicine | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Blank | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Chemistry | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Criminal Justice/Psychology | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Elementary Education/Music | - | 1 | - | 1 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Equine Facilitated Mental Health | - | 1 | - | 1 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Equine Studies | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Graphic Design | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| History/Secondary Education Social Science | - | 1 | - | 1 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Mathematics Education | - | 1 | - | 1 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.4% |
| Pre-Pharmacy | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Religious Studies | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Science | - | - | 1 | 1 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.4% |
| Total | 80 | 57 | 87 | 224 | | | | |



Denominational Ties

Fuller HES focuses on the evangelical Christian higher education market, and across this market evidence of the post-denominational world is abundant. Research by [The Barna Group](#) highlights how differently Gen Z students think about matters of spiritual development. Denominational colleges across the evangelical theological spectrum find it much more challenging to recruit students from their sponsoring denomination as brand loyalty which existed in the past gives way to a more general sense of church. For example, how many students attending a church with a name like New Covenant Fellowship know or care to which denomination it belongs?

The CC database asks students the type of church they attend. 26.2% of the 6,727 total students left this blank and were classified as “unknown” despite their clear interest in Christian colleges. This could mean they did not see their denomination on the extensive list of options, or they are not engaged in a church in a formal sense.

The survey gives students several Baptist options; when these are lumped together Baptists make up 30.2% of the total pool (29.6% of the women, 32.2% of the men). The Christian Church is the only other denomination which was the choice of more than 10% of the student population (10.5% overall; 526 women, 182 men, and 708 total).

With strong support from the Alabama Baptist Convention, active recruitment of Baptist students must be a high priority for the college. There are other evangelical Christian college options across these three states, so the path to improved enrollment faces stiff competition now and if the college decided to go coed. Many of the denominations represented do not have a college in these three states, though, creating opportunity for Judson to attract non-Baptist students.

The Women’s College Coalition Comparison

Judson is no longer a member of this organization mentioned earlier which has seen its membership shrink from 230 members in 1960 to the present 36 institutions. Based on the data below, the decision to withdraw membership was a sound one, but since the college is still listed on the website comparisons seemed in order. The Fuller HES team used public sources like IPEDS to gather comparison data about these institutions. A complete copy of this comparison worksheet is available as part of the supplemental documents to this report.

Judson’s so-called “unicorn” status continues within this group, even with the shared fundamental concept as colleges for women. For example:

- Judson would be the only Baptist and evangelical member. Several are Catholic and two are United Methodist, but the vast majority are independent and not religiously connected, at least in their current iteration.
- Endowment – the average WCC member has an endowment of \$269 million (FY 2018). Judson’s \$15 million only tops Bennett College, an HBCU in Greensboro, NC, which has struggled with accreditation issues based on financial challenges. The average endowment is impacted by Wellesley’s \$2.1 billion and Smith’s \$1.875 billion.



- Enrollment – in 2018 the average WCC member enrolled 2,283 students (1,623 full-time) against Judson’s 327 (241 full-time). As a group, they lost 1,365 total students between fall 2016 and fall 2018 and 5 colleges (including Judson) experienced losses in excess of 10% of their enrollment during this period. Only 2 colleges (Wesleyan and College of Saint Mary) experienced growth above 10% during this period (mostly driven by part-time enrollment).
- Retention – first-to-second year retention has been remarkably stable on average for the WCC with the last three years at 77%, 77%, and 78%. During this same period Judson has gone from 62% to 58% to 68% (fall 2016 – 2018).
- Graduate programs – Judson is one of only 10 of the 36 members who do not offer graduate programs.

The WCC clearly includes a mix of the “haves” and the “have nots” and Judson falls firmly into the latter category. A conversation with a leader at another WCC member suggested the organization has diminished in focus and capacity and may not offer a lot of resources for Judson and remaining members from this point forward.

This analysis was done to see whether Judson could learn anything from the experience of WCC members to help guide strategies and decisions. From the looks of the data, most of the other colleges bear little if any resemblance to Judson, especially those who appear to be thriving.

Focus Group Summary

The focus group sessions with alumnae were abundant and full of enthusiastic women who were eager to share their thoughts about Judson. The groups included members of the AAJ, two different groups of alumni board members, and many other alumnae. Despite the instructions to focus conversation on Judson’s path forward, a lot of alumnae memories were shared as illustrations of the impact Judson had on students finding their voice, learning how to lead, and building confidence as they mastered subject material and prepared for their future. There was such interest in participation by alumnae who graduated after 2000 that additional sessions were added and filled.

The feedback from alumnae fell along several themes including:

- Opportunities to improve what the college is doing – alumnae had a lot to say about recruitment and marketing strategy, necessary website improvements, the need for training of recruitment staff, retention worries, and fund-raising strategy (while acknowledging the success in money raised since mid-December).
- Eagerness for greater engagement – many expressed a willingness to be a mentor to a current student, host an intern, network on behalf of recent graduates to help them find a job, volunteer their time to offer seminars and workshops, and provide a variety of other contributions besides simply giving money.
- There was not a consensus about what Judson should do in terms of identity. Some believe Judson should fully live out what it means to be Baptist, Christian, and conservative in terms of lifestyle. Others believe the college should be more friendly to the LGBTQ community and relax “outdated rules” about lifestyle in other areas. Still others believe there is a middle ground with a more open form of Christianity practiced. There was both pro- and anti-



Baptist sentiment expressed, by the way, with many saying “we need to be Christian and that is bigger than just Baptist.”

- While lots of love for Judson was expressed, there were also painful stories of experiences at Judson including racism, bullying, sub-standard classroom experiences, and loneliness. This came more from alumnae after 2000 than their older sisters.
- There was a fair amount of worry about the future of the college, the quality of the academic program, deferred maintenance, and other challenges well known to the administration and the board. They talked about great faculty they had known and wondered if the current faculty, many of whom no longer live in Marion, measured up. Some wondered if one-person departments and course overloads allowed for “measuring up.”
- They had consensus about a few key ideas, though:
 - The college should not close
 - It should not go coed
 - It should not move
 - It should not merge
- While there were a few exceptions, for the most part the combined alumnae voices are not aware of the realities of running a college in 2021 and beyond, which is not surprising. Higher education leaders who live these challenges daily might find themselves equally puzzled by the complexities of running a business or leading a government agency or running a bank or law practice. This was especially true when it comes to the “headwinds” facing Judson.
- As one might expect from a group of alumnae interested enough in their alma mater to join a focus group at such a time as this, there was a great deal of support expressed to raise money and do whatever it takes to turn Judson back in a healthy direction. One alumna described the December communication as a “wake up call we needed.”

The two current student focus groups focused on gaps in their experience including:

- Deferred maintenance – peeling paint, the condemned portion of W, taking cold showers for the first two weeks back on campus, sub-standard athletics facilities, potholes in campus roads, ladybug infestations, and other ways “facilities don’t match the tuition.”
- The need to both improve athletics facilities and experience and recruit more non-athletes.
- Worries about faculty loads and one-person departments in academics and other offices.
- A wish for a campus minister and more opportunities to grow in faith
- A wish for more diversity, especially on the faculty.

The two faculty groups focused on some of the same topics but added others:

- The college’s view of femininity as “old school”
- The college narrowing at a time when students want more open-minded approaches
- Recruiting challenges created by faculty loads, recruiters who only stay a year or two, and the need for better strategy. They also were concerned about what to say to potential students given the uncertainty about the college’s future.
- A worry about the quality of students enrolling now
- Deferred maintenance
- Communication and transparency – “we found out about the financial condition a few minutes before the media did.”



- Necessary website improvements
- Marion as both asset and liability
- The potential of the online program

The two staff/administration groups did not include members of the college's executive leadership team. Discussion included:

- Student activities in the Marion location
- Small teams in many offices stretched to do everything
- Deferred maintenance
- The need for greater awareness
- "Took four years to get a giving button on the website" and other challenges of getting things done
- The need for "more student voices to be heard more often" both in promoting the college and in providing valuable perspective about policy and strategy decisions
- The need for brand cohesiveness in telling the Judson story
- The need for better support for academic programs
- The need for improved retention.

The focus group experience had value as it gave a chance for many to be heard at this important time in the life of Judson College. There were some solid ideas shared, much support expressed, and great desire for both engagement and transparency expressed.

Options and Recommendations

The options facing Judson College are laid out in the Executive Summary at the beginning of this report. The data and focus group summary shared in the body of the report provides substance behind those options.

The Fuller HES team believes Judson has two primary options currently. Closing, while not desirable for any institution, much less one with 183 years of experience, is one clear alternative to the challenges the college is facing. While the alumnae base and other supporters have responded generously to the financial challenges with their giving, and the focus group feedback reflected a deep level of "all in" support, the path to a turnaround is daunting and full of difficult decisions. Perhaps a merger could preserve some aspects of Judson, but only with the right partner and for the right reasons.

There is certainly something unique and valuable about Judson, so pursuing a turnaround with vigor, focus, and a mobilized alumnae base would be both challenging and potentially rewarding. The Fuller HES team believes this must include a shared vision for Judson to garner the level of support necessary to accomplish this turnaround. A turnaround cannot simply be a better funded Judson in its current state; there must be substantial work on curriculum, infrastructure, marketing, recruiting, fundraising, and everything else necessary to strengthen the college for its next 100 years. Much of this shared vision needs to revolve around what it means to be a Christian college for women in 2021 and beyond, and the Fuller HES team recognizes getting agreement about this fundamental part of vision will not come easily. Especially around this issue, it feels like whatever



the board decides a group of constituents will be lost because you cannot please everyone on issues this fundamental to what, in this case, alumnae believe ought to happen.

During this project, many voices of faithful, Godly, women were heard in support of the college. These voices must continue to lift prayers for wisdom, courage, and for the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills to sell a few of them on Judson's behalf so the turnaround can begin and succeed.

Appendix

This report references a number of documents produced by the Fuller HES team as part of this project. Each document has been made available to President Tew and the executive leadership of the college. The list includes:

- Analysis of the Women's College Coalition membership by key variables such as endowment, enrollment, and affiliation.
- Christian Connector data on potential students
- Analysis of Judson new student funnel data by key variables such as intended major, geography, initial sources of contact, and denomination