

## **THE CAFLS ACADEMIC AFFAIRS IMPULSE**

FSLI Project Impact Statement

Matthew G. Interis, FSLI Cohort 20  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences  
Clemson University  
[mginter@clemson.edu](mailto:mginter@clemson.edu)

### **Background and Problem Identification**

I interviewed for this position in Fall, 2022 and began employment at Clemson University in July, 2023. The position was vacant for about 1.5 years prior to my arrival, with its associated duties being distributed for responsibility by the Dean, other associate deans, and staff. Furthermore, prior to around 2018, when the Experiment Station (CUES) and Cooperative Extension Services (CUCES) were outside the college, the “college” was essentially one and the same as the academic mission of the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences (CAFLS), which now includes both the CUES and CUCES, as well as our Regulatory Services (RS) and Livestock Poultry Health (LPH) units, the latter joining the college in fall, 2023. I.e. CAFLS has 5 primary units (Academics, CUES, CUCES, RS, LPH) along with several other centers and institutes. In 2016, Clemson University became an R1 research institution and there has since been a tremendous push for research expansion.

Given this history, since I interviewed for and then began employment in this position, constituents of the position – generally those focused on the traditional academic mission of the college and teaching – have called on me to support and elevate the teaching mission of the college. Many have expressed that since becoming an R1, the college has not seemed as focused on teaching and education. Secondly, because of organization changes and the lack of an interim in my position, the general “college” and the “academic affairs” operations of the college were highly conflated. What students and faculty should come to me for versus what they should go to the Dean for was highly unclear. Thirdly, I inherited essentially zero dollars from endowments and gift monies for the support of teaching effectiveness and development (while, in contrast, having a relative abundance of such funds to support direct student experiences, recruitment, etc.). Lastly, my own communication strategy has been something I have been continually working on.

Therefore, I decided to create an annual publication out of my office that (1) highlighted some of the college’s teaching and educational accomplishments that either had not been previously highlighted elsewhere despite being particularly noteworthy, or were efforts or activities I wanted to highlight for strategic reasons (e.g. opportunities that seem to not be taken advantage of to their fullest), (2) asked for financial support where we need it, and (3) helped create a complementary but unique identity for the teaching mission of the college. The publication would be called the “CAFLS Academic Affairs Impulse”, an impulse being a “change in the momentum of an object acted upon by a force”, and “Momentum” being the title of our college’s annual report

(which covers all 5 major units plus more). That is, Impulse describes how the academic affairs arm of the college is changing the momentum of the college. Impulse was to be short and not comprehensive – 6 pages of content – but rather a delicious and easily digestible snapshot of our teaching and learning accomplishments.

### **Obstacles**

For better or worse, I deliberately chose a project that I (and my small team) could handle and control relatively closely and easily. I wanted my FSLI project to be something that I probably would not otherwise have had the motivation or expectation to do (that is, for it to be a truly “additional” project), yet I also did not want to impose a huge burden on my staff or others. The Dean supported the idea early on. I also ran the idea behind our MarComm and Development units, who supported it. Therefore, there were not many obstacles, though that was largely by design.

### **Outcomes and Future Plans**

Impulse was created largely over the spring, summer, and fall of 2025, and was designed to be delivered as an e-publication but also be formatted to be hard-copy printed as desired. It contained a call directing potential donors to an already existing gift account for CAFLS “Teaching Enhancement” (which, since I have arrived at Clemson, has contained only \$47.50), to generate some needed financial support for the teaching mission. Format: Front cover, stats page, student feature page, centerfold spread about donor dollars impact, teachers feature page, my thank you and a special highlight, back cover.

Impulse was distributed to all faculty and staff in the college in late October, 2025, coinciding with the time just after we receive our official enrollment numbers for the academic year (which are reported in Impulse). I received feedback only from a handful of folks, but it was very positive feedback. On the other hand, as of February, 2026, there is still only \$47.50 in the Teaching Enhancement gift account. However, I have just recently printed some hard copies of the publication and shared them with our development team, so we will see if we cannot yet generate some additional financial support.

I plan to release a new edition of Impulse each year at around the same time as in 2025. The stats, features and highlights can rotate based on the priorities at the time. Though it could be expanded in length with more pages of content, right now I am content to keep it as short and sweet as it is.

### **How my FSLI Experience Supported my Project**

One quote from FSLI that resonated with me was from Ravi Bellamkonda, Executive Vice President and Provost, The Ohio State University, who said “The trick to being able to do stuff in academics is to never ask your boss for money to do it.” This project did not require me to ask the Dean for any financial support and it further is designed to raise money in an area that would help me be more impactful in my job.

Another FSLI quote, from Claudia Fernandez, FSLI Leadership Core Director, was “Skills that make you successful in your current role may not serve you well for the next role.” Given this, I specifically wanted to develop my marketing, communication, and fundraising skills.

In FSLI we learned that egocentricity is a major cause of downfall, but that you also cannot be an absentee leader. I.e. “Be visible, but lift others.” (I forget who said this, apologies.) This project is designed to make the teaching mission of the college more visible, and also to give myself some visibility, though I deliberately put my message at the end of Impulse in order to first emphasize the accomplishments of the college and to play more the role of cheerleader.

Another quote (again, I’m sorry that I forget who said it) was “an organization gets the culture it tolerates.” So the major goal of Impulse is to celebrate and highlight the teaching and education mission of the college.

Lastly, FSLI both provides during the residential sessions and helps me to prioritize finding my own mental space and time to devote to strategic, bigger-picture thinking amidst all the fires and attention-grabbers in this job. It also has connected me with a fantastic new set of peers who have been great supporters and sounding boards for ideas, frustrations, and feedback.