As spoken by Andrew T. Hsu, the president of the College of Charleston (CofC), “until the College of Charleston becomes part of the solution to addressing the long-standing systemic issues that hold back many African Americans and perpetuate inequalities, we will remain part of the problem” (The College Today). His speech, given on June 11, 2020 was released in response to the tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement that was shaping around the nation. His speech was released a mere week following the peak of protests in Charleston in response to the killing of George Floyd and to support Black Lives Matter (Post and Courier). The speech, written and released by Hsu,
outlines how the community, specifically the College of Charleston community, responded to the deaths of both of these men, but also how Hsu wanted to support the black members of CofC and take action against the disconnect they felt from the rest of the members of the college. Within his message, Hsu outlined a new 10-year strategic plan that was drafted and released to combat racial injustices on the CofC campus. In his 2020 Campus Community message about racial inequalities, CofC President Andrew Hsu responds effectively to the rhetorical situation presented. Specifically, Hsu uses language that shifts responsibility onto the college, employs a call-to-action tone, and appeals to his audiences’ sense of character, emotions, and logic. While this speech was given almost a year ago now, it remains just as important, if not more, in the current climate of campus and the continued fight against racial injustice on the college’s campus.

In order to analyze the effectiveness of Hsu’s speech, it is important to define what a rhetorical situation includes. According to Lloyd F. Bitzer’s model, *The Rhetorical Situation*, a situation can be seen as rhetorical if it sparks discourse and includes exigence, constraints, and an audience. The exigence of a situation is a problem in need of a solution, which the audience of the rhetorical situation is able to act upon to resolve (Bitzer 6). Bitzer defines the constraints of the situation as the “persons, events, objects, and relations” that contain the power to take action and “modify the exigence” (Bitzer 8). Finally, Bitzer defines the audience as individuals who “are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Bitzer 7).

Although fighting against racism and racial inequalities on a college campus does not need an explicit reason to be done, President Hsu’s message was released in direct response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the responses he received in light of a previous message he sent on the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd to the CofC campus community. The
speech was given in order to serve as a call for action against racism as well as a way to ensure the black community of College of Charleston that they are heard and being fought for. Hsu references how he wishes for the black members to see how they are valued as he says, “To our black students, black employees, and black alumni, you deserve action… You need to see that the College cares and values your histories, your lives, your contributions, and your futures” (The College Today). Hsu’s message released to the Charleston community outlines the issue of racism and racial inequalities on campus and serves as a way to spark the community to work harder to combat injustices.

The audience of President Hsu’s speech is the campus of College of Charleston. In particular, the black community and those who support Black Lives Matter and the fight against racism. He depicts his targeted audience as he states phrases such as “to our black students” and “many of our black alumni” (The College Today). By saying “to” the college’s black students, employees, and alumni, Hsu is speaking directly to his audience and making them aware that this message is meant, in part, for them. Hsu, however, opens up the audience of his speech to anyone who wants to aid in helping make CofC a better, more inclusive campus. He asks that “the entire campus community” (The College Today) works to remove any of their unintended biases and come together to help eradicate some of the injustices that the black members face.

There are, however, limits to how Hsu’s speech resonates with those who received the message. For example, his audience of CofC students could be divided on the issue at hand: racial inequalities on campus. There are some members of the community that may not be in support of the Black Lives Matter movement or feel that there are no racial issues present on campus. This message would not be taken by everyone the way it was meant to be received. Within his speech, Hsu provides a bulleted list of examples in which action has been taken to
fight against racism on campus already and states “I know that a lot of work has been done [to address the disparities] and that we have made progress” (The College Today). With the inclusion of “a lot of work has been done”, some individuals receiving this message may feel that enough initiatives have already been undertaken and that this speech is simply being released due to the BLM movement being in full swing.

Hsu is able to effectively use rhetorical strategies such as ethos to appeal to his audience. Hsu establishes his sense of character through his credibility as a Ph.D. certified individual. By having received such a high-level of education, his message is able to be well-respected by other higher educated individuals. Additionally, having been born in Beijing China and not having come to the United States until graduate school (The College Today), Hsu is able to appeal to other minorities within his audience who face injustice and stereotypes in their daily lives. When he speaks of the inequalities and mistreatment of the black community, he is able to be seen as someone who understands what it is like to be a minority and seen differently than others. It is likely that him being well-educated and respected as well as being a minority would aid in the success of his speech. If the audience can feel as if the person speaking to them is knowledgeable about the subject they are speaking on and finds meaning in their actions, they would more readily accept the initiatives that Hsu believes will help.

Hsu uses language that shifts the responsibility onto the students and college to deal with racism on CofC’s campus. He appeals to the emotion of his audience through language such as “I will not stand for this; you have my word that we will be a part of the solution” (The College Today). His use of personal pronouns allows for the audience to feel as if they are with him and working alongside him in the fight against racial inequality, which we are. He uses language encouraging us to unite as a campus to better the conditions in which we conduct our actions. He
encourages his audience to take action and “review all internal policies and practices to identify any unintended biases” (The College Today). These words serve as a call to action for us to remove any division in our campus and within our nation. Instead of asking for the campus to be mindful of how we act, Hsu directly instructs members of the college to reevaluate how we treat the black members of CofC and how we may be a part of the problem, unintentionally. Additionally, Hsu’s use of personal pronouns such as “we” and “I” create a sense of responsibility on the students and campus for allowing racial injustice to be present within our community. Because he is creating this sense of responsibility, it also elicits the audience to feel that they have the power to be mediators of change on campus, as well as within the nation.

The tone of the speech resembles that of a call to action as he makes direct statements such as “racial violence, racial profiling and the use of excessive force by police against black people is wrong and must stop” (The College Today). In this quote, Hsu is directly referencing the excessive force that the Minneapolis police used on George Floyd as a police officer kneeled on his neck for nine minutes, ending in his death. Rather than sugar-coating the difficult topic of the mistreatment and injustices the African American community faces, Hsu chose to remove any possibility of his views towards the issue being misrepresented in his statement. By using such blunt and short descriptions of the actions of others, Hsu is almost portraying how he feels about the topic: that he is tired and fed up with how the black community is being wrongfully treated and convicted simply due to the color of their skin. Since Hsu is highly educated and well-spoken, his choice to word this with such a direct tone shows that he simply wants to get his point across. The inclusion of “must stop” is a very commanding statement. Furthermore, Hsu includes a bulleted list of initiatives that sum up the 10-year strategic plan. By depicting how the college has chosen to combat racism and sharing it with the entire campus, Hsu portrays how the
main reason of this message is to outline how individuals of the campus can help to fight alongside them.

Hsu works to appeal to the logic of the audience through his quote, “...these initiatives, [referring to the new 10-year strategic plan] while important, may not fully address systematic issues affecting the College” (The College Today). Within this he outlines how reforming our campus is doable and while it may be difficult to feel as if enough is being done, that the outcome is fully worth the effort it may take to enact these changes. For example, within the 10-year strategic plan the College released, one of the initiatives is to recruit more “underrepresented minorities and first-generation students” (The College Today). The audience is able to see how this initiative is easily attainable over the span of ten years as the numbers of underrepresented individuals accepted into CofC would be able to steadily increase each admission cycle. An additional initiative listed within the 10 year plan is to require “mandatory diversity education and inclusion training for faculty and staff” (The College Today), which is easily achievable for the college. Logically, the audience can see how the initiatives chosen by Hsu and the college are direct actions that can be completed within the timeframe provided. Instead of using vague initiatives like reducing the amount of racism on campus or allowing for more education on racial inequalities, the college is using logical and attainable goals to be conducted on campus.

I would argue that while President Hsu’s speech may not be entirely well-reached by all those which he meant it to be, his message was rhetorically effective and appeals to its audience’s sense of character, their emotions, and logic as well as a use of language to create a sense of responsibility for the campus and a “call to action” tone. President Hsu’s speech was delivered at a time in which our country was raging an intense, yet extremely necessary, human
rights movement. Hsu had to ensure he was properly fighting for the rights of those within his community while also calling to action everyone that can help enact change and better the campus community. This topic in which Hsu’s speech is founded on is one which still takes precedence in today’s political climate. It is important that Hsu makes his call to action heard within the College and that students may work to combat racial injustices present in our community, and any community.

