

Clemson presidents see progress, potential ahead

By John Staed

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CLEMSON — If Clemson University founder Thomas Green Clemson were alive today, he would see the university is facing tough times, said school President James Barker.

But he would say it wasn't the first time and the university can rise to the challenge, Barker said Wednesday during the State of the University Address at Tillman Hall.

Barker was one of five presidents at the university who talked about their year. Besides Barker, the presidents were Tim Drake, staff senate; Bill Bowerman, faculty senate; Abby Daniel, undergraduate students; and Tammy Vaught, graduate students.

Each presented impressions of Clemson's successes and problems during the past year.

For Barker, it has been a year of challenge. That includes having \$58.2 million less in funding from the state and the Clemson Foundation in the past 18 months, and seeing state funding drop from 40 percent of the school's budget in 2000 to about 15 percent today.

But the school has found ways to work through the money problems and today is focusing on seeking stable state funding, acquiring federal stimulus funding and pushing the Legislature to approve a bill to back capital expenditures through a state bond. He also said the university is seeking legislative passage of regulatory reform to save money when constructing buildings on campus.

It has moved ahead on a staff development program, is looking at incentive pay structures, transit issues, a recommitment to shared governance with the faculty and developing strategies for the future, he said.

Those strategies include focusing on intellectual and economic development at Clemson, developing student-centered focus, and looking "for opportunities to address ... the challenges of the 21st century."

He announced that the university would limit the next freshman class to no more than 2,950 students, about 400 fewer than this year's.

“We’ve been watching what the larger freshman class has done,” Barker said. “We’ve seen lines we’ve not seen before. We had concerns about quality.”

The smaller class will allow the university to “strengthen the quality” of its programs for freshmen, he said.

Barker said Clemson officials on Wednesday fought – and won – a battle in the Legislature with a House subcommittee to move the school’s Public Service Activities functions – from 4-H to county extension agents – to the state Department of Agriculture.

“It was a matter of looking for efficiencies in state government,” Barker said. “They decided it would not save staff to do it.”

In his comments, Drake said the Staff Development Program, allowing leadership and management training for staff members, has drawn 100 applicants for 25 slots. This is the first year of the program. He said the Furlough Relief Fund was conceived by the staff senate and was successful in helping lower-paid staff manage through mandatory furloughs in 2009.

The difficulties of the past year “have drawn many of us closer together,” Drake said.

Bowerman cited the Board of Trustees’ support of shared governance and the development of compensation committees to address complaints about administrative salaries and pay for rank and file. He said the senate is looking at the issue of fewer tenure appointments, which is an issue nationwide.

Daniel said undergraduate students were working on sustainability issues, improving the school’s transit system and related fees, and working with the faculty on improving the “e-portfolio” required of students each year.

Vaught said the 3,700 graduate students of 18,000 Clemson students were a key element to research and work at Clemson. She urged movement on graduate student housing and development of a graduate student living-learning community complex.

“I challenge the university to take a hard look at the value graduate students add,” she said.



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