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## Clemson President Barker faces questions on on rankings, diversity

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CLEMSON — Student concerns ranged from a new e-portfolio requirement to an age-old parking dilemma in a two-hour question-and-answer town hall meeting with Clemson University President James Barker on Wednesday.

Barker was challenged on his ranking of Clemson above all other schools on a U.S. News and World Report survey as well as the pursuit of a Top-20 ranking. He also was questioned on how the university is meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and on the appropriateness of the name of Clemson's landmark Tillman Hall, where the meeting took place.

Barker stood by his earlier responses about the ranking survey, saying Clemson has the "finest undergraduate experience" in the U.S. and that he wouldn't trade the "holistic experience" at Clemson with anyone.

Barker said rankings are "an annual way of measuring" Clemson's pursuit of quality, and the effort has brought smaller classes, higher graduation rates and other student benefits.

Barker called on staffers to offer specific advice to guide students who are in the first group to be required to have e-portfolios to graduate.

He told students that the university and the city of Clemson have applied for federal stimulus funding for a parking deck in order to try to fund the project without increasing parking fees. He said the university also hopes to add more buses and that mass transit reduces the number of cars on campus.

When asked if there was any discussion of renaming Tillman Hall due to "racist" beliefs of namesake Ben Tillman, Barker said there have been "conversations," but to try to "sugar coat" or "hide" the university's past "doesn't feel right."

Barker said Clemson's history "didn't stop with Ben Tillman, because Harvey Gantt (the first black student at Clemson) entered this building and changed all that instantly."

Today there are more than 90 nations represented on campus and everyone can do a better job of taking advantage of that diversity, he said.

"Every step we've taken to become a more diverse university makes us stronger," Barker said.

He also expressed concern over reports of negative comments aimed at gay students, saying it's important that everyone feel welcome and that inclusiveness is part of "Clemson's DNA."

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