

The Greenville News

GreenvilleOnline.com

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2009 ■ FINAL EDITION

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Barker fields questions on ranking, 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.

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.

Barker also said there are more than 90 nations currently represented on campus and everyone can do a better job of taking advantage of that diversity.

He expressed concern over reports of negative comments aimed at gay students, saying it’s important everyone feel welcome and inclusiveness is part of “Clemson’s DNA.”