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## After a decade, Barker says it's no time to step down

Clemson president will continue  
to work without a contract

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CLEMSON — Ten years after Clemson University President James Barker began work as Clemson University's 14<sup>th</sup> president, he and trustees remain committed to a "Top 20" quest that has yielded results and criticism.

"Trustees are very anxious to keep momentum moving forward," said Barker, who continues to work as president on a day-to-day basis without a contract, as he has for the past decade.

Trustees recently offered Barker "the concept" of a contract as the 10-year milestone approached. "I see no reason why that would serve Clemson well," Barker said.

Greenville attorney David Wilkins, Clemson's

board chairman, said Barker "has the complete and total support of the board of trustees. We don't think there's a better university president in the country. We want him to continue as long as he wants to."

Barker "has taken the university to a new level," Wilkins said.

As Clemson moved forward in the rankings, critics asked if this is right for South Carolina. While the average SAT rose from 1172 in 2000 to 1223 this fall, critics said Clemson, a land grant institution, is too selective, too expensive and no longer serves the students of the state.

When Barker, 62, moved from his office as dean of the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities into the president's corner office on the

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GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

Clemson University President James Barker would one day like to return to the classroom as a professor.



# BARKER

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top floor of Sikes Hall in December 1999, he said he would serve 10 years and then return to teaching.

Barker still teaches one architecture class a year. His "ultimate goal" is to be a faculty member in the architecture department, but the timing's not yet right, he said.

Clemson is 8-1/2 years into its 10-year plan, adopted by trustees in 2001. It won't be complete until 2011, said Barker, who remains focused on goals that include becoming one of the nation's top 20 public universities. Since 2000, Clemson has moved from 38th in the 2001 U.S. News and World Report ranking to 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## Staying the course

A student asked Barker at a recent town hall-style meeting if Clemson would "sacrifice anything" to be a

## Barker's decade at Clemson University

	2000-01	2009-10
Rank — national public universities*	38	22
Graduation rate	71%	79%
Student-faculty ratio	16-1	14-1
Freshmen in Top 10% of high school class	37%	50%
Percent of classes under 20	23%	49%
Alumni participation	23%	28%
Undergraduate applications	11,423	16,272
Graduate applications	4,065	5,014
Ph.D. enrollment	684	1,250
Average SAT	1172	1223
Research support	\$69M	**\$141M
LIFE Scholarship retention	44%	68%

Source: Clemson University News Services \*US News & World Report \*\*2008-09

Top 20 school.

Earlier this year, Clemson's former director of institutional research, Catherine Watt, said at a national conference in Atlanta that Clemson officials rate other schools lower than Clemson on a reputational survey in the rankings. *The Greenville News* requested to see the survey forms and found that Barker rated only Clemson as "strong" and rated all others at least a notch lower.

Budget cuts resulting

from state funding shortfalls included employee furloughs that eroded morale while Clemson continued to fund Top 20 initiatives. Faculty approved a "no confidence" vote to express frustration over a disparity between administrative and faculty pay.

Despite controversy, many students give high marks to Barker, who rubs elbows with them from freshman move-in weekend, when he and wife Marcia help unpack cars and carry belongings to

students' rooms, to commencement, when he shakes each graduate's hand.

"What he's doing with the school, the Top 20, that's awesome. It gets Clemson recognized," said Clemson junior Rachel Kaskin.

"He's motivational," said Clemson junior Laura Tscholl, "We have budget issues, but everyone does these days."

The Faculty Senate president recently told trustees that the salary disparity issue is being addressed, and the Staff Senate president said staff morale is improving because, although vacant positions were dropped and workloads increased, people realize their jobs are safe.

Barker said Clemson's pursuit of a Top 20 ranking is a quest for quality.

The ranking is a tool to sharpen focus on quality and provide a measurable way to track progress. Results include smaller classes, a higher graduation rate and the increasing national reputation has kept more of South Caroli-

na's best and brightest high school graduates in state, he said.

In 2000, 23 percent of classes were under 20 students; now 49 percent are under 20. The graduation rate has improved from 71 percent to 79 percent in that time.

The heaviest budget cuts fell on administrative areas, Barker said, protecting the classroom experience — and thus Top 20 initiatives — to the greatest extent possible.

"Our strategy was to stay the course," Barker said. "I believe we have a plan to carry us through."

Barker defended his stance on the reputational survey saying he truly believes — from his personal experience as a Clemson student, professor and administrator — that the Clemson student experience is unique, distinctive and the nation's best.

He answers charges on growing selectivity by saying that Clemson "has always been a selective institution." Clemson has had more applicants than seats since the 1950s, said Barker, who sees increasing numbers of applications as votes of approval that Clemson serves the state's students well.

Clemson's size is "vital to the amount of attention students get," Barker said. Increased enrollment would affect quality and would require costly construction to increase the capacity of the campus. Study abroad, cooperative work programs and expansions such as moving MBA classes to Greenville already help spread the enrollment load.

Clemson will stay the course in size, admitting about 2,800 to 2,900 freshmen annually and maintaining the mix of two-

thirds of students from in state and one-third from out of state, Barker said.

## Intellectual development

After a year of dealing with state budget cuts, Barker said, "We're back to doing the business of the university as opposed to worrying."

Clemson will stick to its "Top 20 Vision and "embrace" intellectual and economic development, Barker said.

"Our job is to create through our economic development efforts an even richer intellectual environment for our students. As a result of that we will be creating better higher-paying jobs in a knowledge-based economy," Barker said.

Clemson has "tremendous opportunities" in the decade ahead, Barker said. "Clemson's distinctive

qualities will still be here and the stimulating environment we're trying to build is starting to catch fire. We haven't even scratched the surface of our potential yet."

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