

# Clemson's "Fatal Attraction"

By [fitsnews](#) • on June 3, 2009



There's nothing wrong with wanting to be one of America's "Top 20" public universities - at least as defined by the editors of one particular magazine, but the all-consuming fixation of Clemson University with the *U.S. News & World Report* "America's Best Colleges" rankings has a "Fatal Attraction" feel to it.

Earlier this year, FITS published a series of explosive memos outlining the [questionable internal processes](#) that the University was employing in its effort to earn this coveted distinction.

Obtained by exclusively by FITS, these documents demonstrated how school officials methodically broke down the various criteria associated with the *U.S. News*' rankings - and then sought to appropriate funds and set other administrative and academic priorities accordingly.

Now, according to a new report from *Inside Higher Ed*, one Clemson official has "laid bare in a way that is usually left to the imagination the steps that Clemson has (rather brazenly) taken since 2001 to move from 38th to 22nd in U.S. News's ranking of public research universities."

Reporting from some higher ed conference in Atlanta, here is an excerpt from the [Inside Higher Ed](#) report:

In reporting institutional financial information to the magazine, (Clemson researcher Catherine Watt) said, Clemson runs "multiple definitions to figure out where we can move things around to make them look best" in the rankings. Academic expenditures are emphasized and administrative overhead minimized wherever possible, within reason, she said. The university has encouraged

as many alumni as possible to send in at least \$5 to help bring up their giving rate, and hired a firm to find disconnected alumni.

And to actual gasps from some members of the audience, Watt said that Clemson officials, in filling out the reputational survey form for presidents, “rates all programs other than Clemson below average,” to make the university look better. “And I’m confident my president is not the only one who does that,” Watt said.

Are you kidding us? Is this middle school?

Clemson’s obsession has drawn sharp rebukes from its peers, as well as South Carolinians who contend that the school is no longer serving its mission as a land-grant, publicly-funded University.

But that hasn’t stopped Clemson.

According to this report, the University has sought to “manipulate” - its word, not ours - “every possible indicator to the greatest extent possible.”

And what of the students who are being forced out?

“Two or three students here and there, what a difference it can make,” the article quotes the Clemson administrator saying. “It’s manipulation around the edges.”

Indeed ... it’s also pathetic.

Clemson receives hundreds of millions of dollars each years from the taxpayers of South Carolina - money it has frankly lost all sense of perspective on (click [here](#) and [here](#)).

Bottom line? More and more South Carolina parents are having their children rejected, the parents whose kids do get in have to figure out a way to pay the freight. After all, Clemson’s annual in-state tuition has more than doubled - from \$5,090 to \$10,378 - since President James Barker and “Top 20 Fever” arrived on campus in 2001.

We’re glad that Clemson is - a decade later - closing in on its goal of being ranked in the “Top 20” according to *U.S. News & World Report* ... we’re just sad the University sold its soul, compromised its integrity and abandoned its mission to the people of South Carolina in doing so.

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