

What Makes Clemson, Clemson?

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Let me tell you why I am so pleased to be with you today. It gives me the opportunity to say thank you to my colleagues on the faculty and staff for their encouragement, critique and inspiration for my 14 years of service as President, and for the past 4 years as a faculty member. I will always be grateful.

Let me also say thank you to our President, Provost and Dwaine Eubanks for your service and for this invitation, and for the wonderful job you are doing for all of us.

Isn't it exciting to see the growth and strength of the Emeritus College. Thank you all involved in this work. I am proud to be a part of the Emeritus College.

It reminds me of why most of us joined the academy in the first place. We were attracted to the faculty because we remained "students" with an unquenchable desire to learn and see the connection between ideas.

As full-time faculty focused on tenure & promotion and funded research, we felt the need to be vertical thinkers, digging deeper and deeper holes in the plane of knowledge.

In the Emeritus College we can be more horizontal in our thinking, and see how knowledge is connected.

We have done, and are doing the vertical and horizontal thinking in a place (Clemson) that has its own unique DNA.

I've spent some time thinking about Clemson's DNA, and I tried to be guided by what I learned about who we are as a university, and a place and a community.

One of the things I thought about is how Clemson deals with change and tradition. I concluded that we have done pretty well over 130 years of getting the right mix of change and tradition. In fact we managed significant change in the 1950's and 1960's as we transformed ourselves from an all-male, all white military school to an integrated, coeducational institution we enjoy today. So change is a part of Clemson's DNA.

I've come to see Clemson as a sphere with a surface that is dynamic and a core that is fixed and stable.

The surface symbolized change and the core symbolized tradition. Some universities have the same stuff from the surface through the core. Clemson doesn't.

From time to time, some change finds its way into the core of tradition..... in fact, too often this is the case.

What I discovered was that if we are not careful, we will let the core of tradition grow so large that it can reduce the dynamic surface.

I joked that if we did something 2 years in a row it became an “old Clemson tradition,” but it was not far wrong.

I began to see that if we wanted to have a great University we had to let go of some of our traditions as we established new ones so that the ratio of dynamic and static was reasonably balanced. If not, we could become dangerously tradition-bound and lose our strength in seeking change and its fresh new ideas.

I say all of this to say that a close look at our natural tendency to “worship” tradition needs constant self-inspection.

There is a phrase that has power on this campus and I want to look at it with you.

It has been asked since 1889 and it is still asked today.....Is Clemson Still Clemson? Or more importantly, What Makes Clemson, Clemson?

Let me lay out for you 7 qualities that make Clemson, Clemson in hopes of starting a conversation with you. These are 7 qualities that should be found in the core of tradition. (I know that you can and do have your own list, but here is my list.)

I start each of the 7 with the phrase, “The Clemson family..... because this idea of family must be the core of the core.

1. The Clemson Family has a remarkable “work ethic”. That comes from being “the sons and daughters of the working class.” Over time those sons and daughters had to have higher academic credentials to be admitted, but the issue is the remarkable work ethic that I see as part of our DNA.
2. The Clemson Family is very competitive. This comes from our drive to win at all things (academic and athletic). Create a national championship, tell us the rules and we are going to beat you. This applies equally to debate, Pershing Rifles, ethics bowl and even football.
3. In the Clemson Family, each individual matters. This is simply the way a family works. The inscribed names on the sidewalks and the remarkable relationship between students and faculty, indicate the importance of each person in this big family.
4. The Clemson Family is patriotic. This comes from our history and personality established by our decades as a military school. The physical manifestations of this patriotism is all around us in the Military Heritage Plaza, the Scroll of Honor and Memorial Stadium.
5. The Clemson Family is student focused. This comes from our beautiful college town environment where students are the focus of everyday life. (What else is there?)

6. The Clemson Family is inclusive. This also comes from our days as a military school when all cadets, regardless of status, dressed the same and followed the same daily regimen. This idea of being inclusive was manifested in 1963 when Harvey Gantt enrolled in Clemson with the media headline, "Integration with Dignity."

We still face significant challenges to ensure that we are truly inclusive. We must have no students, faculty, staff or alumni who feel they are outside and looking in at the Clemson Family.

7. Finally, the Clemson Family feels a true civic responsibility. This comes from our land-grant roots in service to the public, and it has a physical manifestation in the new park that is part of the Scroll of Honor with this phrase chiseled in stone....

"How will you serve?"

These are the 7 core "values" that make Clemson, Clemson.

Now let me make one final point and close.

What makes Clemson, Clemson, is not a factor of size, or new facilities, or architecture or research projects. It is about relations, and these 7 qualities transcend these other issues and transcend time.

If we keep an eye on the relationship between core and surface, as well change and tradition and these 7 qualities, and if we take the long view, we will ensure that Clemson is still Clemson.