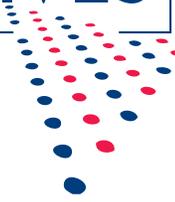


PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



*A HIGHER
EDUCATION
PRESIDENTIAL
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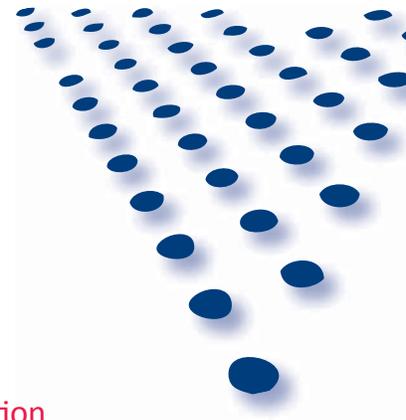
2012-2013 Series:

Responding to the Commoditization of Higher Education

Chapter

3:

The Endangered Campus?
*Defining and Defending the Value of
Place-Based Higher Education*



The Endangered Campus?

Defining and Defending the Value of Place-Based Higher Education

James F. Barker, FAIA: President of Clemson University

Each spring, I help team-teach a seminar on the meaning of “place” as reflected in our history, culture, music, literature, landscape, and architecture. This has been a passionate interest of mine for my entire life, first as a student of design and planning and, later, as a practicing architect and teacher. As a university president, I have a special interest in the college or university campus as a distinct place in America’s physical and cultural landscape.

I think the campus has a unique value and I am worried, frankly, about its future.

Over the past several years, the national dialogue about higher education has seemed to start with the obvious economic challenges – rising tuition, rising student debt – and then move quickly to doubts about the value of a degree today, and from there to the crystal ball: What might replace our broken system?

When some of the nation’s elite universities began offering some courses online – for free – the future revealed itself. Or so it would seem from reading much of the news coverage and commentary on the topic.

Everyone in higher education recognizes the tremendous educational opportunities offered by massively open online courses – MOOCs – and other advances in education technology. Universities have always adopted the latest technology – in fact, we created much of it – and we will continue to explore new ways to use technology to improve teaching and learning.

The way forward is not a choice between online and face-to-face teaching, however. The challenge is to find the right blends and to use them to our students’ best advantage. I believe the public, state, and national policymakers, and business leaders all understand that. But I don’t think we can afford to be complacent. I worry about the tendency for complex public policy debates to become oversimplified.



Technology can’t do everything. Students must be highly motivated to do it all online.” — Bill Gates, Microsoft founder





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Do we need to adapt our campuses to accommodate the changes in the way higher education will be delivered and consumed in the 21st century? Absolutely. ***But we also need to define and vigorously defend the value of place in higher education.***

Please think about that with me for a moment:

The Campus — Past and Future

In his 2006 book *American Places: In Search of the 21st Century Campus*, the late Perry Chapman traced the evolution of the American college campus. From its roots in the cloistered, inward-looking medieval colleges of Europe, the institutions of the New World evolved as more open, rural, public, and welcoming spaces.

The **idea of campus** begins with five concepts:

- Each campus is a *distinct place*. Each of us experiences it in a very personal way.
- The campus is a **community** – an *intentional community*. We are not born there. We choose to study or work there. It is a place of diversity and unity.
- The campus is **stimulating and energetic**. It bustles with ideas, creativity, and innovation.
- The campus is a **work of art** – for many of us, the first designed, beautiful, and cohesive landscape we experience.
- The campus is a place of **pilgrimage** – a place we return to, to renew a sense of belonging to the community we experienced in our youth.

The vision of the “ideal campus” with its iconic clock tower and manicured lawns is powerful, and it is deeply ingrained in the American psyche. The ideal has persisted throughout the 375-year history of higher education in America as it evolved from small, religious schools to major public universities and community colleges. You can see it today in the advertising and marketing of institutions that offer almost exclusively online instruction.

This ideal campus survived and prospered during the democratization of higher education following passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act and the GI Bill. But can it survive the combined effects of the Great Recession and the Internet in the 21st century?

I must admit, when Harvard, Stanford, and MIT decided to take away “place” from some parts of their education by offering free online courses, it got my attention. Are they being altruistic and civic-minded to share their knowledge so freely? There is some of that, no doubt. But they also understand the strength and prestige of their own brands as research and education institutions.



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MIT Provost Rafael Reif has written that “our campus residential model not only provides the best education environment to MIT students, it is also at the heart of knowledge creation and dissemination.” MIT leaders clearly believe they can afford to give away a part of their core product because there will always be excellent students who will seek to study **at** MIT.

The Value of Place — and the Campus

Besides the cultural and historic value of our campuses, **they also have economic value.** In his book *Where Good Ideas Come From*, Steven Johnson traces the natural history of innovation from the coffee houses and cafés of Europe through university classrooms and laboratories to today’s vast computer networks and online communities. Johnson says human beings are social creatures, and it is the random collision of people and ideas that leads to discovery and innovation. He believes these collisions will always occur in the real world, as well as in cyberspace.

Similarly, in a recent *New York Times* column, Thomas Friedman wrote that “the best entrepreneurial ecosystems in the future will be cities and towns that combine a university, an educated populace, a dynamic business community and the fastest broadband connections. These will be the job factories of the future.”

Perhaps most important, **the campus has pedagogical value.** A beautiful, stimulating campus environment attracts the best students, faculty, and staff. It encourages personal reflection and group learning. Simply being together in a physical place, as a community of teachers and learners, has tremendous educational advantages.

The residential college experience still has powerful advantages, especially where faculty actually live among students, increasing the opportunities for spontaneous teaching and learning. Clemson has embraced with a Faculty-in-Residence program. We have four faculty members, some with spouses, living in student housing this year. It’s an old idea, but I think it works in the 21st century.

The Role of Technology

None of this is to say we should not embrace technology on our campuses. We already do, and online delivery is only one of many ways technology enhances today’s college experience. This is another issue that tends to get oversimplified in the public debate.

For instance: A decade ago, agencies and institutions began looking at ways to incorporate technology into the undergraduate classroom. The resulting SCALE-UP (Student-Centered Active Learning Environment for Undergraduate Programs) classroom model pioneered at NC State University has been adopted by institutions worldwide, including Clemson.

Students typically sit at round, technology-enabled tables rather than in rows of desks. Interaction and group learning is enhanced. Ten- to 15-minute lectures are interspersed with exercises to reinforce concepts and track progress. This combines the advantages of place-based and technology-enhanced learning.



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So the 50-minute lecture long ago gave way in favor of “modular,” student-centered learning on our campuses. We were “flipping the classroom” before anyone ever heard that term on the recent *60 Minutes* segment on the Khan Academy.

All of Clemson’s introductory math sciences classes, up through differential equations, are now taught in a small group, activity-based manner, the Clemson version of SCALE-UP mode. So is freshman chemistry, another “gateway” class. After six years, the success rates in these courses have increased dramatically. Overall freshman retention and graduation rates have gone up significantly.

A Vision for the Future

Even Microsoft founder Bill Gates has said, “Technology can’t do everything. Students must be highly motivated to do it all online.” Speaking this summer at a Washington DC celebration of the Morrill Act, Gates said innovations like Coursera and MOOCs represent something important. But he then asked: “How do we supplement that with face-to-face learning, which is still the best way to learn?”

The value of blended learning is clear, and that is what the best institutions are offering. The question my Board and faculty are asking is: How much of the residential experience do students need to have at *Clemson*?

This is not a new conversation for us. Clemson has never in its history been a cloistered, ivy-covered place. We are a hands-on, land-grant university, and our state is our campus. Our earliest students worked the farms, and alternated semesters at school with work at home on the farm or in the factory. Cooperative education has always been a big part of the Clemson experience.

Today, costs are rising and options are expanding for students to begin elsewhere and finish with us, or to take part of their courses online while working full time. So again the question arises: How much time do our students need to spend on campus? The answer may shift over time, but ***I cannot see a future in which one could get an undergraduate degree from Clemson through online courses alone.***

The “clicks and mortar” campus that Perry Chapman described is here. Our faculty are combining the best of technology-enhanced education with face-to-face, one-on-one teaching and mentoring. Bigger changes are yet to come and we will embrace them, in our strategic, deliberative way.

When the public debate seems to be shaping up as an either-or contest between online education and campus-based education, however, ***my voice will be among those saying: “It’s not even close.”***

As an architect, I have always believed that the design studio is the greatest learning experience ever invented. At Clemson, and I suspect at campuses all across the country, we are seeing this kind of small-group, project-based, engaged discovery, and learning replicated across the curriculum.

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Online education is exploding, and it should. When it is well-designed and executed, it can reach more students more conveniently with a rich, deep, interactive experience. It can open a window for our students to content from the world's leading experts, enabling our faculty to guide discussions and mentor research teams.

But online delivery is still no substitute for the experience of "going away to college." We must bring that experience into the 21st century and make it meaningful for today's students. The best education is not transactional but transformational. It's not: "You give me X amount of money and I give you a credential and a degree." Rather it is: "You give us four years, and you get a life-changing experience."

That experience begins with the physical campus that is functional, inspirational and, yes, beautiful. I'm an architect and planner, and I love beautiful, functional, inspirational public spaces. So do you.

The campus has always been the place where students begin separating from their families and gain independence. It's a place where the deepest kinds of discovery and learning can and should happen. It's a place where brains are fed, minds are opened, and lifelong connections and communities are formed. It's a place that attracts creative, innovative people and creates the right ecosystem for community and economic development.

I believe there will always be students who understand the value of "going away to college" and will want that experience. And America's colleges and universities will always be here for them, in a real place called campus.



James F. Barker, FAIA President, Clemson University

Jim Barker began his career at Clemson as an architecture student and track athlete. After years as a practicing architect, teacher, and dean at Mississippi State University, he returned to Clemson as dean of architecture in 1986 and was named Clemson president in 1999. He has since presided over an era of dramatic growth in academic quality and reputation. Now a top-25 national public university, Clemson is also recognized for its commitment to undergraduate teaching, strong return on investment, and for research and innovation that drives economic development at research campuses such as the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research in Greenville, South Carolina, and the Clemson University Restoration Institute near Charleston, South Carolina.

Jim Barker is a leading voice in higher education for South Carolina and the nation. He has served as President of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Chair of the NCAA Division I Board of Directors. He is a graduate of Clemson and Washington University in St. Louis, and a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.