Clemson wind plans draw GE's interest



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Jeff Immelt President and CEO of GE said the company's Greenville plant is an example of how the U.S. must develop to stay globally competitive.

University's testing center has 'potential,' CEO says

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General Electric's chairman and CEO said the global conglomerate would work closely with Clemson University and the state on wind energy research along the coast.

"We are long on wind energy, and you never know where that's going to go," GE's Jeff Immelt said during a visit to Greenville. "No specific plans right now, but we're quite excited about what the potential can be."

Immelt said the initial focus of the North Charleston center would be on the gargantuan wind turbines used to generate electricity offshore. While that market is developing in Europe in response to a government mandate, it hasn't arrived in the United States yet, he said.

Still, the GE chief said he thinks 20 percent of the components in wind turbines deployed offshore in Europe could come from the United States.

"We have the chance to start building the capability in the U.S. even if Europe is the lead," he said.

Immelt also said the company's Greenville plant is a model for the kind of high-tech, export-oriented manufacturing business the United States must develop to remain globally competitive and replace jobs lost during the recession.

GE's local complex, which designs and makes multi-ton turbines that generate electricity from natural gas or wind, "is a model site for what can be created across the state and across the country," Immelt said during a visit to Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research.

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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 22nd.

Staying the course

A student asked Barker at a recent town hall-style meeting if Clemson would "sacrifice anything" to be a 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 Carolina's best and brightest high school graduates in state, he said.

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

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."