

Thoughts on an Emeritus College on Campus

The Emeritus College at Clemson University was organized in May of 2003. Since that time over 600 emeriti have been identified and become affiliated with the College. The twofold purpose of the College is: *1) to keep emeriti connected to the university for the benefit of extending the University's teaching, research and outreach missions and; 2) to continue the intellectual growth and stimulation of emeriti.*

In writing my dissertation almost 30 years ago, I discovered that retired professors do not tend to disengage. They tend to maintain professional contacts as well as participate in professional activities. They may write, consult, tutor or even conduct research well into retirement. And although some may take up a new hobby, travel extensively, or even retool for a new profession, most continue their earlier interests and association.

Thus, it behooves colleges and universities to find a way for retired faculty to remain connected to the institution. Some faculty want to continue to teach; others are interested in advising or mentoring; and still others are seeking involvement through committee work. Most faculty are not seeking remuneration for their services. In a recent study at Clemson, we found that "money" was a distant third in predictors of interest in emeriti returning to teaching.

So if emeriti want to stay involved, and it is economically beneficial to the university, then why not keep them involved? We have found that emeriti are anxious to return to campus and remain engaged. Through the Emeritus College we offer opportunities for social interaction and service on College committees which in turn, provide more opportunities for involvement by undertaking more projects!

For example: Our International Opportunities Committee is working with the Graduate School, International Affairs and the Alumni Office to establish Clemson Alumni Clubs in foreign countries. Our Emeriti in Action Committee worked with the University Curator to put together a library exhibit of works of emeriti since their retirement. And our Gen Ed Committee is currently shepherding a proposal through the curriculum system whereby a group of emeriti will teach a "current topics" general education course each semester.

Keeping emeriti involved is not without challenges. Often the infrastructure (office space, secretarial support, parking, etc.) is not conducive to retirees returning to campus. However, with a commitment from central administrative, expressed interest from the retirees, and one or two champions, an Emeritus College or similar entity can become a reality. In this day and time of shrinking budgets, most institutions could use a free hand. Lastly, the goodwill that is generated when emeriti stay connected to the university may well lead to more gifts and/or bequests in later years.

Diane G. Smathers, Ed.D., Director
Clemson University Emeritus College
www.clemson.edu/emmerituscollege

