

A New Identity for Downtown Seneca

■ Course Description

Landscape architectural design in the urban context. Students study urban issues and offer design solutions for urban areas. The course includes a reading and theory component, as well as an opportunity to collaborate with architecture students.

■ Course Objectives

- To understand fundamental urban design theories, principles, and applications to landscapes.
- To explore the social, natural, and cultural aspects associated with urban public landscapes.
- To evaluate/interpret urban design languages, quality of life, and sense of place in urban landscapes.
- To analyze/synthesize landscape patterns and spatial typology.
- To develop effective verbal and visual communication skills.

■ Learning Outcomes

- Can expand professional knowledge and skills required for urban design.
- Can address social and cultural issues in community design
- Can explain the roles, characteristics, and the values of landscapes in public spaces.
- Can visualize landscape functions, features, patterns, and meanings for people.
- Can demonstrate a design process for place-based design effectively and creatively.

■ Issue on Main Street Downtown Revitalization

American downtown used to be the heart and soul of the community. The Main Streets of small American cities still offer the creative resources and the power to represent the unique identity of their mid-sized communities, to revive local economies and histories, and to forge the future potentials for healthy growth. Great streets attract city dwellers and visitors who love to gather for daily routines and offer urban amenities including pedestrian-friendly activities and a variety of recreational and cultural opportunities for all.



Figure 1. Bath, Maine (left) and Woodstock, Vermont (right)

During the post-industrial era, many small cities have lost their identity and vitality in the face of economic hardships that often occurred through the loss of significant industries leaving them with vacant lots, disruptive streetscapes and public spaces, in addition to poor infrastructure and other environmental challenges. What does it mean to be a Great Main Street? How can design contribute to reimagining the future of downtown and transforming main street into a new identity for recreation, health, growth, and social vibrancy?

■ The Project Area

• Downtown Seneca, SC (approx. 30 acres)

The City of Seneca is an old town of the Cherokee nation, situated in the northwestern (golden) corner of South Carolina, between Georgia and North Carolina. Established in 1873 the city has

developed around the railroad in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. With the rapidly growing population of about 9,030 (2023), the city has sought new and unique opportunities to incubate economic growth while “keeping the best small-town community features” (for more, see 2023-2033 Comprehensive Plan on Box).

Downtown Seneca is currently designated as **Core Commercial** district (CC) abutting N. Fairplay St. and Cherry St., parallel with First St., Main St., and Railroad St. The future zoning is envisioned as **Community Village Center** (CVC) to encourage commercial and community service activities. Throughout this semester, we will reimagine main street downtown with a new identity that promotes more pedestrian (and transit) friendly opportunities for cultural and historical heritage, local businesses, transportation choices, healthier life choices, recreational opportunities, and everyday social interaction.



Figure 2. The Project Site Boundary (from an aerial image of downtown Seneca)

■ Course Format + Requirements

• **TASK 1: Reimagining main street (3 weeks)**

This task offers an excellent opportunity for each student to explore, reveal, and imagine the site.

Requirements:

1) A series of working collages that capture the main characteristics of downtown Seneca as points of discussion. It is a form of journaling physical/material conditions and features of the site. You may pick a theme to describe the city.

2) A hand-drawn elevation of the main street (crossing four blocks, Freescale in proportion, close to 1"=10', in color) you are envisioning and imagining for future downtown Seneca. This elevation should represent both existing and suggested features, such as facades, windows, door, roofs, or trees along the street (vertical elements ONLY). Be expressive and creative. You may borrow some images from successful precedents from other cities. For color rendering, use a black and white pen(cil) and color pencils, markers or watercolor.

We will discuss FOUR different topics/scenarios (a team of two) on the main street revitalization. Do not jump into a design at this stage.



Figure 3. A Modest City Hall in Sacramento (left), Urban Facades in Praha (right)

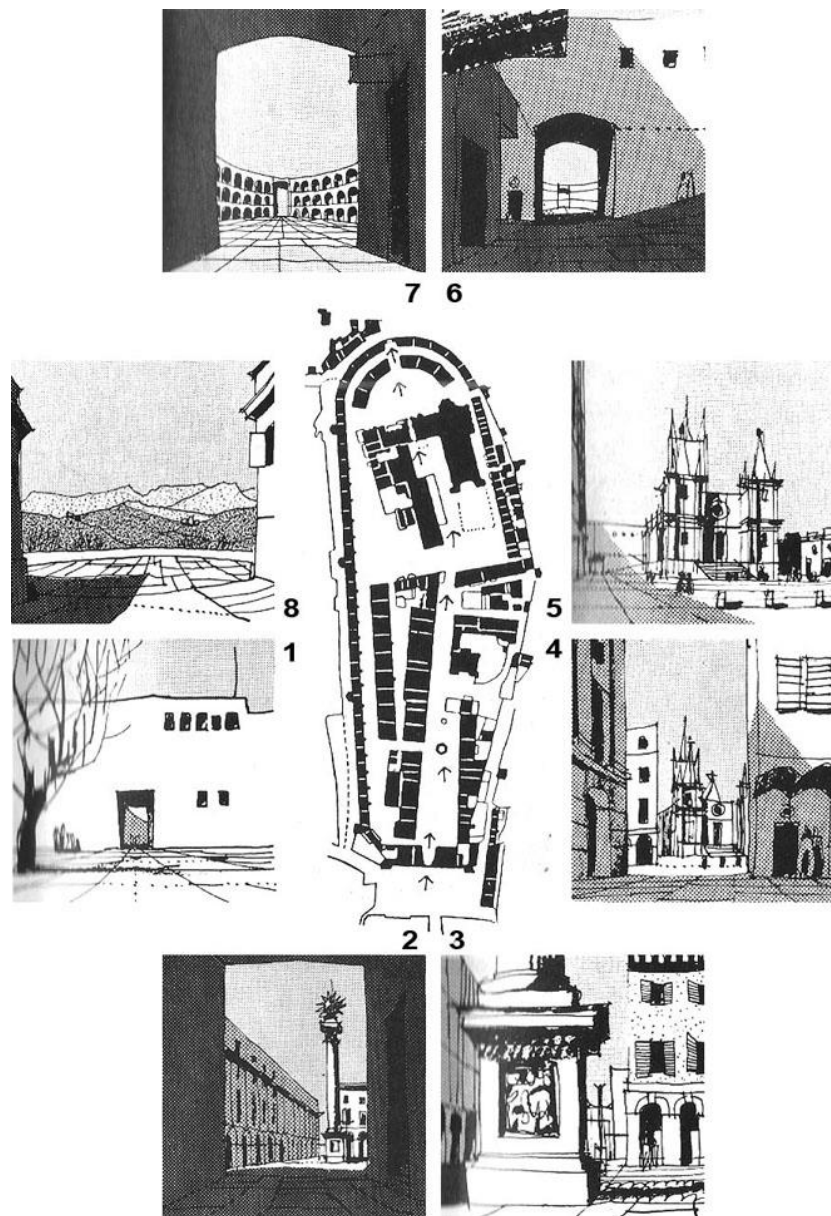


Figure 4. An excerpt from Cullen 1961. "The Concise Townscape"

• **TASK 2: Revitalizing downtown (4 Weeks)**

Students will produce a series of analytical-synthetic diagrams (trace papers) over a base map to test different alternatives to preserve/repurpose lot/building uses, reconfigure dimensions from streets to lots or parking spaces, and refurbish street features. We will discuss categories and units of analysis in class.

Task 2 will help us to think about social, cultural, psychological, and historical aspects and a sense of place to enrich the more urbane, local/regional, and humane experience of downtown revitalization. This exercise is critical to developing the central community park's programs and community activities for the next TASK 3.

Three Main Considerations:

- 1) Circulation & transit system and surface (parking) reconfiguration
Each team will reconfigure surface parking while creating more pedestrian-oriented open spaces. Consider reducing the lanes, greening streets, transit system (bus and railroad station), small plazas and pocket parks with a focus on the role and function of North Thomson Park as the community center.
- 2) Pavement, materials, and planting design
Parking design also has functional relationships with cars and pedestrian movements, building entries, walls, facades, bus stations, dimensions of sidewalks, driveways, fences, setbacks, medians, and other small green spaces, plants, and vegetative areas.
- 3) Lighting and signages/furniture design
Together with pavement and material design, each team will develop a schematic plan for more detailed street signages/furniture.

Requirements:

Each will complete **an axonometric drawing** (you can choose any graphic tool, including freehand drawing) for the project site (a comprehensive site improvement plan) with a **project statement**. (1"= 50' in color, TBD)





1.10

Diagrams showing typical urban conditions in the United States and surface parking lots' coverage.

Orange: surface parking
Black: building's footprint
Gray: roads
White: unpaved areas

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Figure 5. An excerpt from Ben-Joseph 2015, "Rethinking a Lot."

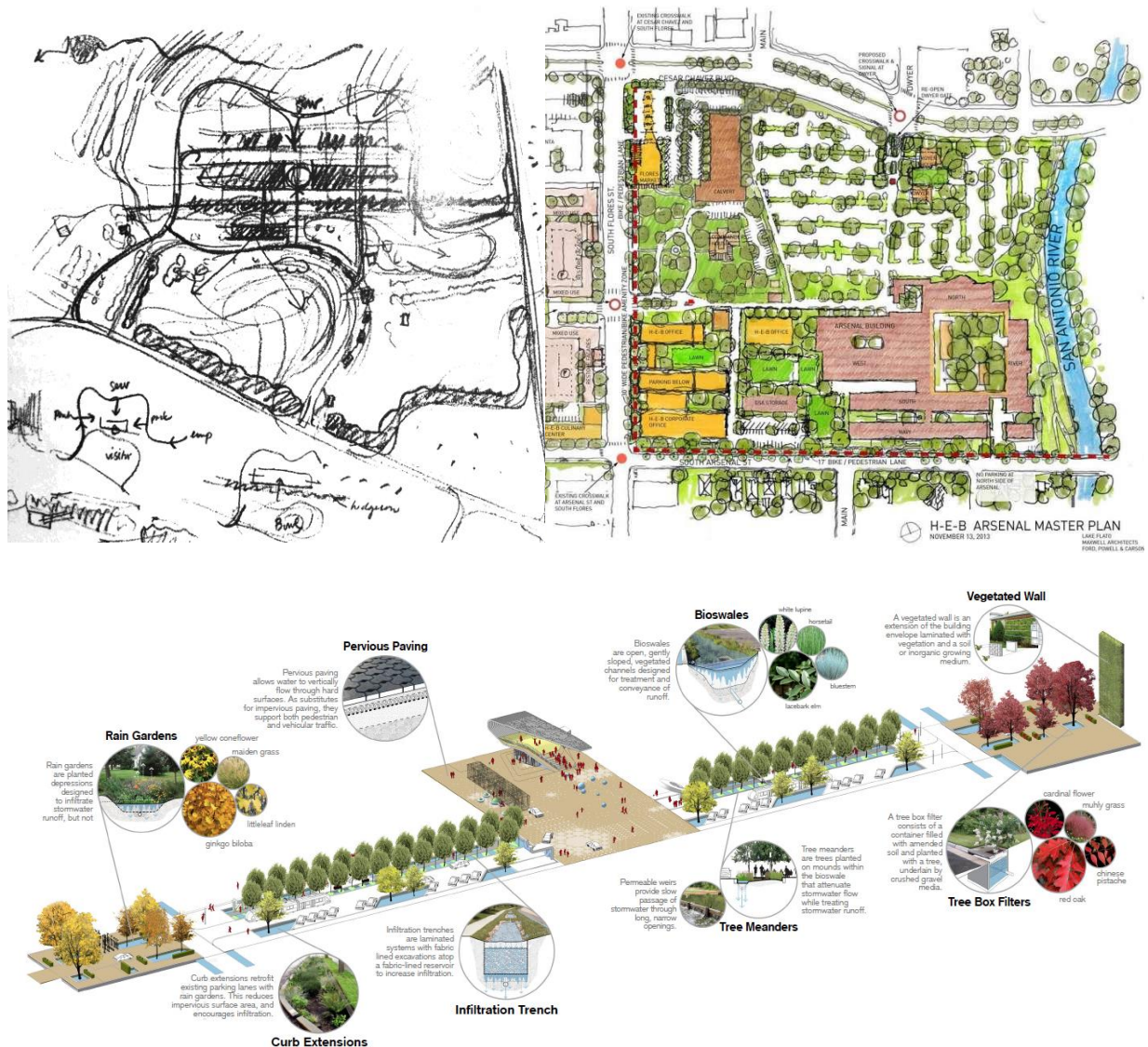


Figure 6. Images of schematic design and design considerations

• **TASK 3: Designing a New Community/Central/Cultural Park**

(Total 8 acres, approx. 1000x350-500') (7 weeks)

Each student will develop a full site plan with detailed designs for a new community park (or central city park) that replaces the existing North Thompson Park at the heart of the downtown. The final design should aim to:

- 1) address the future image of downtown Seneca as a cultural landmark;
- 2) foster the small town feel to pedestrians/tourists/visitors;
- 3) bring the community together to have opportunities for healthier life choices and everyday social interaction, and
- 4) create activities for strategically recruiting economic potentials and local and professional businesses.

The deliverables for the final review will be discussed in class but typically include the following:

- 1) The proposed context drawings (Task 1 + 2) that demonstrates the design process for downtown revitalization.
- 2) A site (master) plan (1"=40-60') the project with title, descriptions, or photographs.

- 3) At least two elevation drawings, and other freehand sketches to show design-thought processes.
- 4) Either 3D perspective or an axon drawing illustrating the entire site.



Figure 7. Alley as a beautiful alternative path in Charleston, SC



Figure 8. The Community Park in Louisville, Co.



Figure 9. Falls Park in Greenville, SC.

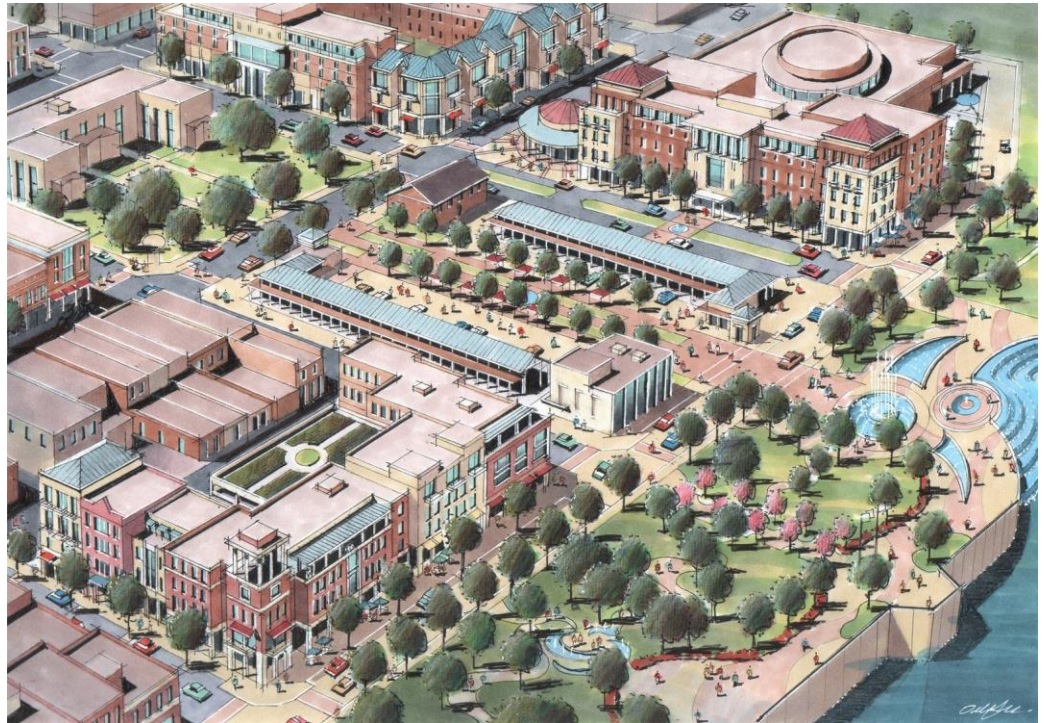


Figure 10. An axonometric drawing of downtown Owensboro, KY

■ Course Schedule

Week 1	Aug 23–25	Class Introduction Site visit + Inventory
Week 2	Aug 28–30, Sep 1	Input session desk crit desk crit
Week 3	Sep 4–6–8	<i>Labor Day</i> sign-up crit desk crit
Week 4	Sep 11–13–15	Input session sign-up crit Review Task 1

Week 5	Sep 18–20–22	Input session <i>Field Trip</i> working day
Week 6	Sep 25–27–29	Input session desk crit desk crit
Week 7	Oct 2–4–6	Input session desk crit desk crit
Week 8	Oct 9–11–13	desk crit sign-up crit Mid-review (Task 2)
Week 9	Oct 16–18–20	<i>Fall break</i> Input session desk crit
Week 10	Oct 23–25–27	desk crit pinups (precedents studies) <i>ASLA trip</i>
Week 11	Oct 30, Nov 1–3	<i>ASLA trip</i> Input session desk crit
Week 12	Nov 6–8–10	sign-up crit desk crit pinups (schematic design)
Week 13	Nov 13–15–17	Input session desk crit desk crit
Week 14	Nov 20–22–24	Final check-up (final boards layout) <i>Thanksgiving</i>
Week 15	Nov 27–29, Dec 1	<i>Working week.</i>
Week 16	Dec 4 (Monday)	Final Review (Task 1+2+3)/class evaluation

** Please remember that class schedule is subject to change due to unexpected problems or opportunities, ex. Field Trip, ASLA conference trip, or weather conditions.

■ References

The following books will be available on library or Box. Learning materials used for each assignment will be distributed via Clemson Box or as handouts via email.

• Classical Theories / General Principles

- Alexander, Christopher. 1977. *A Pattern Language*. Oxford University Press.
- Cullen, Gordon. 1961. *Townscape*. Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Gehl, Jan and Birgitte Svarre. 2013. *How to study public life*. Island Press.
- Lang, Jon. 2005. *Urban design: A Typology of procedures and products*. Burlington: Architectural Press.
- Kasprison, Ron. 2011. *Urban Design: The composition of complexity*. New York: Routledge
- Speck, Jeff. 2013. *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

• Design Manuals

- Harris, Charles. 2011. *Time Saver Standard for Landscape Architecture*. McGraw-Hill.
- Watson, Donald, Alan Plattus, and Robert Shibley. 2001. *Time Saver Standard for Urban Design*. McGraw-Hill.

• Useful Websites

<http://www.seneca.sc.us/>
<https://www.citylab.com/topics/urban-renewal/>
<https://www.mainstreet.org>
<http://www.livable.org/>
<https://strongtowns.org>
<https://www.blscm.org/history>
<http://www.greenvillesc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7912/Greenville-Downtown-Design-Guidelines>
<https://thefield.asla.org/category/urban-design/>
<https://www.archdaily.com/category/urban-design>

■ Evaluation

Commensurate with the spirit of an advanced studio, the instructor will not grade by attaching “scores” corresponding to all partial products of your labor and passion. Instead, you will be given a “**degree judgment**” with a numeric or letter scale for each assignment together with the matrix of evaluative criteria. You are required to **take notes** during all reviews and pinups and to submit them to the instructor when asked. They are most efficient and valuable feedback to keep track of your progress in developing designs. Ultimately, all measures and feedback will be reconfigured into numeric scores in accordance with academic regulations.

• **Productivity and creativity** will be taken most seriously (80%) based on the work produced on time, not any verbal claims or promises. The quality of work will reveal your critical thinking, your resourcefulness, your original trials and errors, your rigor and care for high performance as well as professional completion, your initiative and contribution to the class, and the maturity to cope with your particular strengths and weaknesses. The instructor will look at progressive patterns of your investigative efforts over time (20%), not just the incidents of a “one-time successful performance.”

1. Task 1 (25%) | 2. Task 2 (25%) | 3. Task 3 (50%) = 100%

Productivity (quantitative)	Resourcefulness, the number of trials and errors, level of completion, and visible evidence of progress and improvement	40%
Creativity (qualitative)	Critical thinking, rigor, relevance, applicability, novelty, and degree of quality care	40%
Ethics	Self-discipline, respect, responsibility, contribution, engagement	20%
		100%

• **Grades** of A, B, C, D, F, I, and W will be given in accordance with academic regulations:

“A” Excellent– Outstanding

The work demonstrates the highest quality of performance, achievement, and effective communication (where applicable) in both quality and content. The student effort, improvement, and contribution are also excellent or outstanding.

“B” Very Good–Good (average above)

The work demonstrates the high quality of performance, achievement, and effective communication (where applicable) in both quality and content. The student effort, improvement, and contribution are also very good or respectable.

“C” Fair (Satisfactory)–Average

The work suggests a fair effort, performance, improvement, and contribution, although the student’s effort and work need more evidence of quality and content to demonstrate good standing.

“D” Acceptable–Poor (the lowest passing grade)

The work suggests somehow demonstrates an acceptable performance, improvement, and contribution. However, the student’s effort and development are insufficient, show less evidence than the average.

“F” Failure

The work demonstrates the apparent lack of interest, no commitment to the work or class, and does not meet the minimum requirement.

“I” Incomplete

The incomplete grade is calculated as an F in the student’s grade-point average until the work is made up and a final grade is assigned. A letter grade of I converts to F unless the incomplete is removed within the time specified.

“W” Withdraw

The student withdrew from the course or was withdrawn by the instructor after the first two weeks of classwork and prior to the last five weeks of classes, not including the examination period. Withdrawal can negatively impact financial aid eligibility if a student does not complete a sufficient number of hours. Details are available at www.clemson.edu/finaid.

■ Policies

• Documentation

It is necessary to document all work processes as an important measure of your productivity and creativity. The instructor will assess your performance based on non-verbal tangible products you produce for each class. You are expected to follow the format required for each assignment.

• Assignments

- All assignments are to be completed by the dates given, unless a medical certificate is supplied, or in the case of extenuating circumstances, as discussed with, and agreed upon by the instructor.
- Please let the instructors know if you need special accommodation for a documented physical or learning issue.

• Attendance

- Attendance at classes is mandatory. No more than THREE absences without a valid reason will be acceptable. An absence will be regarded as “excused” if it is for legitimate reasons (such as isolation and quarantine), or personal emergencies.
- Due to pandemic circumstances which may impact student attendance, students should not receive grade penalties for unexcused absences.
- If the instructor is late for class due to unexpected events or emergencies, students must wait at least 30 minutes before leaving the classroom with a notification to the instructor via email.

• Syllabus Changes

- The instructor reserves the right to make any changes including requirements, due dates, as necessary and beneficial for class throughout the semester. Changes in assignments, point values, due dates are also discretion of the instructor and will be announced in advance of due dates. These changes and protective programs (i.e. testing, isolation, and quarantine) will be discussed in class and notified via email.

• Academic Integrity

- Clemson’s vision of ‘high seminary of learning’ is “a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form. In instances where academic standards may have been compromised, Clemson University has a responsibility to respond appropriately to charges of violations of academic integrity.”
- In order to promote an academic environment of integrity, all students, faculty and staff must commit to fostering the fundamental values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage.

• Plagiarism

- Plagiarizing is theft of the work accomplished by someone else. It includes copying and pasting words, phrases, sentence structure, computer code or files, images, or ideas from any source, including the Internet, and attributing the work to one’s own efforts. Blatant examples of plagiarism include failure to use quotation marks, to indent text of more than three lines and failure to cite consulted sources either in footnotes, endnotes or within the body of the text of a document. More subtle examples of plagiarism include paraphrasing or using others’ conceptual frameworks for developing creative works without acknowledgment or permission or citing a source within the text but then directly quoting the materials without the use of quotations marks or text indentation. <https://www.clemson.edu/academics/integrity/plagiarism.html>.

• Clemson Disability Access Statement

- Student Disability Services coordinates the provision of reasonable accommodations for students with physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. Accommodations are individualized, flexible, and confidential and are based on the nature of the disability and the academic environment, in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
- Students are encouraged to consult with the Disability Services staff early in the semester, preferably prior to the first day of class. Current documentation of a specific disability from a licensed professional is needed. Additional information or appointments are available from Student Disability Services, Suite 239 in the Academic Success Center, 656-6848. Details on policies and procedures are available at www.clemson.edu/sds.

• Sexual Harassment (Title IX)

- Clemson University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, veteran’s status, genetic information, or protected activity (e.g.,

opposition to prohibited discrimination or participation in any complaint process, etc.) in employment, educational programs and activities, admissions and financial aid. This includes a prohibition against sexual harassment and sexual violence as mandated by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. This policy is located at <https://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/access/title-ix/>.