



Faculty Forum

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Make Room For Baby: The Rising Teen Pregnancy Rate and Its Challenge to WCU Sharon Jacques, Nursing

We are reminded daily of the rapidly escalating global population explosion and the many issues its impacts have and will continue to have on every element of our world and our society. The rising rate of teen pregnancy is alarming, even while the news glamorizes and, in effect, sanctions teen and out of wedlock births by entertainment, sports and even political figures on the national stage.

Many find this situation deploring and increasingly look to educational and health institutions to offer a range of options and solutions. As a major resource for the people of western North Carolina, Western Carolina University has opportunities and, yes, obligations to address this issue. I hope that this article will be a springboard for dialogue and suggestions from faculty and staff. While we no doubt have much more to do, we are already proactive on a number of fronts:

Serving our WCU students:

The WCU Health Center has top-notch Women's Clinic Services (see www.wcu.edu/7863.asp). Condoms are readily available at the Health Center for free. The latest Healthy Campus Data Report (see www.wcu.edu/7911.asp) shows that only 6% of students reported using no pregnancy prevention at last vaginal intercourse, so that is encouraging.

There are many resources on campus to prevent or respond to sexual assault: an active and observant round-the-clock campus police force, a late into the night campus shuttle service that transports students from fringe parking lots straight to their dorm doors, new call boxes placed strategically around campus, an active, involved Women's Center that works hard to promote awareness, a Women's Studies program that educates and illuminates these kinds of issues every year in their Gender Conference, and Counseling and Health Centers that are a confidential resource at a critical time of intervention.

As for prevention of unwanted pregnancy and safe-sex practices, emergency contraceptives are available at the Campus Health Center at a lower cost than off-campus. The Gardasil vaccine against HPV is fully covered by student health insurance. It appears that all of these services are very effective when students take advantage of them.

Education: Our Main Task

✓ Preparing Teachers To Support Students in K-12 Schools

Public school systems are on the front line for preventing teen pregnancy. WCU's teacher education programs include a second academic concentration in Health Promotion and Wellness, which enrolls about 20-25 new students a year. Options for teaching pregnancy prevention in K-12 schools are abstinence-only, "abstinence plus," and comprehensive sex education. Federal regulations are likely to change soon, and NC Rep. Susan Fisher's (D-Buncombe) Healthy Youth Act now under consideration in the NC House offers more options to local school districts. Debby Singleton, in Health & Human Performance, who is teaching the new HEAL 360 Sexual Health through the Lifespan, said she works to get students comfortable with a full range of topics. Class dynamics include setting group norms, enabling free discussion, using slang without degrading others, and omitting personal opinions.

There are intensive programs in some schools to support teen parents and their children. The NC Coalition for the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy has published research showing that effective programs must show as much attention to those who don't get pregnant as to those who do. Marvin Schade in HPER said his interns provide role-models and support to students as they make choices about how to spend after-school hours. Extra-curricular activities help keep teens busy and focused on long-term goals. Service learning opportunities for HPER students further this involvement. Athletic opportunities for both boys and girls will probably survive economic cutbacks in public school operations. After-school programs in the arts (except marching and pep band) are more vulnerable in some schools.

✓ Preparing Nurses To Provide Accurate Sex-education Information

We know that student nurses almost immediately become health care and information resources to their families and friends. Sexual wellness and childbearing have always been part of our basic curriculum. Few of our newly licensed graduates work in areas where they come in regular contact with teens, unless they are already parents themselves. RN to BSN students more often work in schools or health departments. Family Nurse Practitioner master's students do didactic and clinical work in Reproductive Health & Childbearing Family and in Primary Care of Children and Adolescents. These graduates are ready to respond in their communities.

Several years ago I had an RN to BSN student whose Community Health teaching project was to serve as a resource to her teen daughter and her friends. She opened her home regularly after school as a safe place where the girls could ask questions and get straight answers. She was also a resource to the other girls' mothers. This effective intervention leads me to my last suggestion for WCU.

✓ Preparing Future Parents To Know How to Talk with Their Children About Sex

Practically everyone agrees that the schools cannot bear the burden of sex education alone. Families must be more involved and effective in providing accurate information within their value systems. Previous generations of parents, who were measurably less educated than emerging generations, may have been understandably ill-prepared and reluctant to talk with their children honestly and openly about sex. Today a university education ought to include plenty of opportunities to explore both the information and values in safe and balanced discussions.

Debby Singleton found her HEAL 360 class attracted a wide variety of majors. PSY 331 Human Sexuality sells out every time it is offered. SOC 365 Marriage and Family is another popular course. So, we are already doing many important and strategic activities to address teen pregnancy, unplanned pregnancies, and gender issues around sexuality and choice.

However, as the largest and oldest state supported educational institution in our region, shouldn't WCU be doing even more to help reduce teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among our students and the people of the surrounding communities? Girls in middle and high school still drop out of school at a high rate and often see no other real options than getting married early and raising families. Shouldn't we be asking ourselves what more we can and should be doing to educate our own students—the next generation of parents--and the community at large throughout the mountain region beyond Jackson County? Are there other courses with different or similar topics that we could offer? What assignments could we be giving students to help them become more effective parents? What Service Learning options could WCU students engage in with area schools and teens that would open windows of insight and hope to students? What about a speaker's bureau that reaches out to youth, church, and civic groups? How can we better educate our young men on campus and in the larger community to raise the bar on gender relations and change some of the old male paradigms that promote sexual aggression and unwanted pregnancies?

Yes, at a time that the world's population continues to spiral beyond our carrying capacity, and the topics of choice and sex are more acceptably discussed in the mainstream, shouldn't we at WCU be ratcheting up the heat (pun intended) on our role to speak out intelligently about these issues and help our students and the community make greater inroads in addressing the remaining problems?

Sharon Jacques
Associate Professor
School of Nursing

Please note: The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, you may input your comments directly through the wiki on the Faculty Forum webpage, or email vguise@wcu.edu by the 15th of the month following publication of the article you wish to respond to.

Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Responses to April Faculty Forum article entitled

FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ACADEMIC CURRICULA, AND THE CHANGING WORLD

By Santiago García-Castañón, Ph.D.
Professor of Spanish and Head, Department of Modern Foreign Languages

Introductory Comments from the Editor

Santiago's compelling article was first shared through the campus email and generated such a strong emotional response from faculty, we decided it merited publication in the **Faculty Forum** as a means of raising attention to his important argument and also a way to archive it in the annals of the university faculty newspaper—**The Faculty Forum**. As we looked back on the wealth of ideas and reflections in the email dialogue that Santiago's first dispatch generated, we decided it was important to capture those as well, knowing that faculty are busy and may not take the time to re-post their responses directly to the **Faculty Forum** web page. So, here they are for your edification and an addition to the institutional knowledge all of us are responsible for compounding. Special thanks to Sue Grider for helping me re-capture all your responses.

Vera Guise
Faculty Fellow, Coulter Faculty Center



I fully concur with the posts, too, but suspect that to speak the language (ha) of those who oppose the foreign language requirement we need to address the issue of jobs. Tell me, we're going to train people in construction management but they won't need Spanish? We're sending out people with business degrees who won't need Chinese? Get real.


Gael Graham, History

Dear Colleagues,


I want to respond to Santiago's posting because I believe that the issue is important. I fully support his argument. I find disturbing, and frankly incredible, the notion that Western would move against the grain of internationalism, cross-culturalism and multilingual competence in a shrinking globe. Santiago rightfully made reference to UNC Tomorrow, yet our own campus QEP calls for "active and engaged learning that addresses local and global issues." Moreover, the WCU mission seeks to "create engaged learning through [among other things] international experiences." What programmatic cues are we taking from these lofty declarations? Sending monoglots out into the world of "international experience" means that such experience will not be very international, regardless of the soil where it occurs. It will not produce much learning, and it will short-circuit the very cultural awareness-building such experience is supposed to engender.

Far from de-emphasizing Western's foreign language requirement, we should be ramping up our standards by refusing to award degrees of any kind without functional mastery of at least one foreign language by graduation. Much of the world does this; so can we.

John LeBaron, Jay M. Robinson Distinguished Professor of Educational Technologies
Coulter Faculty Center

 *John has said it very elegantly. Increase the language requirement.*

Nina Marable
Visiting Instructor, Health Sciences

 *John and all, thank you for raising this issue. I won't recapitulate the arguments for foreign language instruction, because I hope that we all know them; however, I will add the question of where in our programs the foreign language instruction occurs. By struggling to find a different solution for each program and degree, we're both minimizing the importance of the issue and fragmenting our efforts; in the longer programs, for instance, we've in the past had to reduce our foreign language requirements simply to get students to graduate on time. This is in part because our current Liberal Studies program, now under revision, is so lengthy.*

I'd argue that our new Liberal Studies program should require sustained study in a language other than English up to the third or fourth year for every student, rather than allowing students to avoid foreign language study altogether if they choose other options. Foreign language study, that most crucial literacy for the new millennium, shouldn't be left to the discretion, or, in some cases, the desperation, of each individual program, degree, or college, but should be an area in which each of our graduating students should be prepared. I've raised this issue with my nearest representative on the Liberal Studies committee; I encourage all those concerned about this issue to do so as well.

Thanks,
Catherine Carter
English Department

 *Dear Colleagues,*

Coming from the office of International Programs and Services, many of you may not realize that there is a small revolution afoot among our students. Our students know that language acquisition and an international study, internship, and service learning experience will set them apart in the job market.

Even in these stressful economic times, we are seeing increased interest in studying abroad, especially to countries like Spain, Mexico, Japan, and China. High schools in Raleigh teach Japanese and feed into WCU because in the states, we have the most developed program in Japanese, offering four years of Japanese language and culture courses. High schools in North Carolina are beginning to teach Chinese. These students will be looking for a university that also teaches Chinese.

WCU needs to look more closely at the importance of language acquisition across the curriculum - not only in the BA degree. It may be time to revisit our options at the department, college and university levels if we truly believe that our students must be prepared for the global environment that they are entering. My office stands ready to assist any college or department in developing international programs for their students and faculty.

Lois Petrovich-Mwaniki, Ph.D.
Director, International Programs and Services

 Dear Colleagues

I would also like to respond to the posting sent to us by Santiago Garcia-Castañon. I am very surprised that there is thought to eliminating the foreign language requirement for undergraduates. I agree with all the statements that have been conveyed in the posting. We are a nation that is opening our arms and hearts to immigrants, becoming a multi-cultural/ diverse society but we are not opening our hearts and minds to the fact that we are the nation that supposedly thinks we are in the forefront of education, we have conducted research stating that language development is important and that the earlier we expose students to a new language the easier it is to learn it and acquire it without an accent. In the great majority of European nations all students are required to take English and another language. In college they are expected to continue this knowledge, and in fact some courses are taught in English.

If we are to continue to prepare students for the 21st Century- which is a global society- then acquiring a foreign language is a must. Statistics show that we are a multi-lingual society. Are we so arrogant to think that we do not have to learn a second language that the world has to meet our demands and learn our language? As we prepare future teachers/students, it is imperative that these students understand the dynamics of cultural/ethnic diversity and learn to communicate with them. One way is acquiring a second language. Research also shows that learning a second language also helps in the acquisition of content in other subjects and in brain development. I think it is time not only to inform nations about what is “research-based/scientifically-based evidenced, but also to put the results into practice in our own” turf.”

Iris Rouleau, Ed.D.
Special Education Instructor

Editor’s Reminder:

Don’t forget to post your comments to this month’s excellent article on the WCU role regarding the rising teen pregnancy rate, directly onto the Faculty Forum webpage. Scroll to the bottom of the page and use the wiki to post your comments directly. <https://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/wiki>

Thanks!