Western’s students are coming to campus with higher academic qualifications, higher expectations and more needs, said university leaders at a recent academic forum. As of March 20, the pool of accepted students for the incoming freshman class had an average weighted GPA of 3.66 – up one-tenth of a point from last year – and an average SAT score of 1,084 – up 28 points from last year, said Alan Kines, director of admission, at the forum.

Although the actual size and characteristics of the complete applicant pool and fall class will not be clear until all applications and tuition deposits are received, Provost Kyle Carter said what is clear is that there will be a qualitative difference over time in Western’s student body. “It may materialize this fall, or it may materialize a few years from now,” Carter said. “Regardless of when the change occurs, we need to prepare for a very different group of students.”

Sam Miller, vice chancellor for student affairs, said the differences will go beyond academic readiness. The incoming freshman class likely will bring more expectations, some sense of entitlement and many needs, Miller said. Many will have been born in 1990 to involved “helicopter” parents who hover in their lives, he said. Student services will need to have the resources to serve a class where 15 to 25 percent of students reportedly have taken or are taking medication for mental health, and 20 percent or more have been exposed to a sexually transmitted disease, said Miller.

Surveys show students are expecting a higher level of academic challenge and more supportive campus environment, said Melissa Wargo, director of assessment. Wargo said that does not necessarily mean harder courses; rather, students expect more creative, challenging and meaningful programs and activities, such as undergraduate research. High-performing students are expected to demand more academic support services, such as tutoring and writing assistance, said program directors.

Pat Brown, dean of educational outreach, said she felt WCU is well-positioned for this kind of cultural change. The university’s Quality Enhancement Plan, which is being implemented, is built on the concept of educational synthesis – helping students connect their academic and co-curricular experiences in order to better reach their goals after graduation. Miller highlighted the recent success of initiatives that link academic and extracurricular interests such as Western PEAKS, a group of freshman living in learning communities formed around common interests such as leadership or ecology. The semester-to-semester retention rate of participating students is more than 90 percent, he said.

Elizabeth Addison, head of the English department, said having a more academically prepared class of students is an opportunity to lift the intellectual climate and culture on campus. “We will have to up our game to handle it, and the university will have to up its game, too,” said Addison. “These are students who will come to college and be ready to get excited about ideas, and we need to be ready to set their minds on fire.”

—By TERESA KILLIAN

Meet the Class of 2012

Before most of them were born… The Berlin Wall was dismantled.
When they were 2 years old… Bill Clinton was elected president.
When they were in third grade… Students and a teacher were fatally shot at Columbine High School.
When they were in fourth grade… Google Inc. launched google.com.
When they were in sixth grade… Terrorists attacked on Sept. 11.
Now that they are high school seniors… They are connected – sending text messages, networking online, talking on the phone, downloading videos and listening to iPods (possibly all at the same time).

Note: This list is based on the assumption that most incoming freshmen were born in 1990 and will be graduating from high school in 2008.
Understanding the ‘Why’ Behind Crime Motivates New Head of Applied Criminology

Western’s new head of the applied criminology department, Stephen E. Brown, said he vividly remembers the feel of a screwdriver pressed against his throat during an armed robbery. What haunted him, however, was a question: what leads someone to do that? “Nearly 40 years later, I am still pursuing answers,” said Brown, whose experiences as a victim of armed robberies when he worked the graveyard shift at a gas station had a powerful influence on his decision to study criminology. “I can assure anyone that it is not an easy question.”

Brown will join the WCU faculty July 15 after completing his seventh year as director of the honors program in the criminal justice and criminology department at East Tennessee State University, where he also was department chair for nine years and interim chair for two.

Brown said he most enjoys guiding student research, which ranges from racial disparity in the death penalty to sports activities as they relate to delinquent, deviant and criminal behaviors. “Over the years, I probably have done more research with students on the topic of deterring criminal behavior than anything else,” he said. “The questions that we need to answer about the causes of crime and how to best cope with and minimize it are extremely complex.”

Brown earned a doctorate from the University of Maryland, and master’s and bachelor’s degrees from Eastern Kentucky University. He has been a member of the Academy of Criminal Justice Science since 1977 and a member of the American Society of Criminology since 1977.

His publications include dozens of chapters in journals and encyclopedias in addition to books such as “Criminology: Explaining Crime and Its Context,” which he co-authored with researchers including former WCU faculty member Finn-Aage Esbensen. Brown met Esbensen in 1988, the same year he first visited Western’s campus as part of a review committee under the direction of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission.

“At that time, I saw a solid program working to improve itself,” said Brown. “Nearly 40 years later, I am still pursuing answers.”

Linda Seestedt-Stanford, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences, said there could not be a better time for someone with Brown’s experience, vision and administrative acumen to join the team.

“The department of applied criminology has two of the most sought-out and growing majors in the college – criminal justice and emergency management,” she said. “We are positioned to expand these majors even further through online programming. I am confident that Dr. Brown will guide our excellent faculty in producing quality course offerings, supporting them in research and expanding collaborations that will enhance teaching and learning.”

–By TERESA KILLIAN

Faculty Education Proposals Due

Proposal submissions for the second annual Faculty Enrichment and Education Day are due Monday, April 14, FEED, to be held Tuesday, Sept. 23, in the University Center, is an opportunity for faculty to educate themselves about campuswide projects and programs so that they have a better understanding of where to direct their students.

Example topics include environmental stewardship and sustainability, campus health and wellness, campus crisis, international partnerships, alternate learning opportunities, QEP implementation and online classes. Presentation formats include 75-minute workshops, 50-minute workshops and poster presentations.

To submit a proposal, or to read descriptions of last year’s workshops, visit http://facctr.wcu.edu/feed.
A research project co-presented by Millicent Abel, professor of psychology, won a first place student research award at the recent Southeastern Psychological Association’s annual meeting in Charlotte.

The project, titled “Men’s body size preferences related to women’s body image,” was a finalist for the Committee on Equality of Professional Opportunity’s Student Research Award. Abel worked on the study with Andrea Melzter, a WCU alumna now enrolled in graduate school at the University of Tennessee.

In addition, two papers by William Poynter, assistant professor of psychology, and a third co-authored by Poynter and Scott Minor, professor of psychology, were finalists for SEPA’s Outstanding Professional Paper Award. The papers were “A method for assessing the visual quality of LCD displays,” authored by Poynter; “Hemispheric asymmetry in feature search,” co-authored by Poynter with graduate student Paul Ingram from Asheville and senior Candice Roberts from Mars Hill; and “Hemispheric asymmetries in attentional processing vary with self-reported attentional deficits,” co-authored by Ingram, Minor and Poynter.

A total of 25 research projects selected for presentation at the conference highlighted the efforts of WCU faculty and undergraduates. In addition to the research projects mentioned above, faculty members were listed among authors or presenters on the following projects:

- Abel, “How comedians’ sex and attractiveness affect ratings of comedy routines.”
- Abel and Malcolm Abel, assistant professor of business administration and law, “Effects of sex and race on job applicant ratings.”
- Lydia Aydlett, assistant professor of psychology, “The importance of legal advocacy to victims of domestic violence.”
- Cathy Grist, assistant professor of special education, “Personality and temperament: A comparison in a preschool population.”

Ron Rash Named Pen/Faulkner Finalist

Ron Rash, the Paris Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Culture, has been named one of four finalists for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the largest peer-juried prize for fiction in the United States, for his compilation of short stories, “Chemistry and Other Stories.”

The names of the award winner and four finalists were announced recently after contest judges reviewed almost 350 novels and short story collections written by American authors and published during 2007. Winner Kate Christensen, author of the novel “The Great Man,” will receive a $15,000 prize, while Rash and the other three finalists receive $5,000 each. All five authors will be honored in a ceremony on Saturday, May 10, at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

In announcing Rash as a finalist, contest judges called him “a pre-eminent chronicler of Appalachia in fiction and poetry” and said the narratives in his short story collection “span the 20th century from perspectives as authentic as they are unexpected.” The stories, they said, “depict a wide range of characters – a logger, waitress and carnival knife-thrower among them – in voices both stark and lyrical of characters young and old.”

Brian Railsback, dean of WCU’s Honors College and an English professor and published novelist, noted that, as a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner, Rash is in the company of such literary giants as Annie Dillard, also a 2007 finalist. The honor “is akin to being named finalist for the Pulitzer or the National Book Award,” Railsback said.

“To have a writer of Ron’s stature at WCU is an amazing thing, especially for the writing students who work with him,” he said.

The PEN/Faulkner honor is the second major award that Rash has garnered for his short story collection, published last year by Picador. The collection also was named one of 15 “notable books” of 2007 by The Story Prize committee. The Story Prize is presented annually to recognize the author of a book-length work of short fiction judged as the nation’s best.

Rash’s most recent novel, “The World Made Straight,” earned him the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for 2006 and was named one of the nation’s top 10 books for teenage readers by the Young Adult Library Services Association. His earlier prize-winning novels include “Saints at the River” and “One Foot in Eden.”

Rash’s next novel, “Serena,” will be published in September by Harper-Collins Press.

Psychology Research Attracts Attention at Regional Conference

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The project, titled “Men’s body size preferences related to women’s body image,” was a finalist for the Committee on Equality of Professional Opportunity’s Student Research Award. Abel worked on the study with Andrea Melzter, a WCU alumna now enrolled in graduate school at the University of Tennessee.

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Grants Awarded for New Research

- The Mecklenburg County Health Department awarded $3,000 to Karrie Joseph, wellness coordinator, to fund activities during spring semester to make students more aware of the dangers of smoking.
- The N.C. Rural Economic Development Center awarded $40,000 to Ken Place, director of business development with the Institute for Economy and the Future, to conduct a feasibility study for implementing an inland port within the 29-county Appalachian Regional Commission region of Western North Carolina.
- The University of North Carolina at Charlotte awarded $62,400 to Phillip Sanger, director of the Center for Rapid Product Realization, to support development of slow light materials for applications in microwave communications such as cell phones and precision lenses.
- The Economic Development Administration awarded $45,500 to Hillary Sherman, social research assistant with the Institute for Economy and the Future, to support the efforts of the Know Your Region Project, a national initiative dedicated to researching, analyzing and disseminating information about how regions can become more prosperous in the knowledge-based economy.

For more information, contact Wanda G. Ashe, research grants manager, at 227-7212 or ashe@wcu.edu.
April 7-20

Monday, April 7

Spring Literary Festival — Reading by novelist Lee Smith followed by dramatization with dulcimer performance. 7:30 p.m. RH. (227-7264)

Tuesday, April 8

Visiting artist — Retrospective by Joyce Kozloff, pattern and decoration movement. 11 a.m. Room 130, FAPAC. (227-3598)

Spring Literary Festival — Poetry reading by Thomas Lux. 4 p.m., reading by author and commentator Dagoberto Gilb. 7:30 p.m. Theater, UC. (227-7264)

Living with the Land Folklife Series — “Rooting Our Mountain Existence: The Cultural and Environmental Significance of Ramps” 5:30 p.m. MHC. (227-7129)

Catamount Concert Series — Percussion Ensemble. 8 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Wednesday, April 9

International Festival — 10 a.m.-3 p.m. UC lawn. (227-2557)

Recital — music students. 2:30 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Spring Literary Festival — Poets panel with Joseph Bathini, Sarah Lindsay and Carolyn Beattie-Whitlow. 4 p.m., reading by Pat Conroy (“The Prince of Tides”). 7:30 p.m. RH. (227-7264)

Thursday, April 10

Spring Literary Festival — Poetry by Cathy Smith Bowers and students. Noon. Theater. UC. (227-7264)

Spring Literary Festival — Poetry by Gloria Vando. 4 p.m., Russell Banks (“Affliction”). 7:30 p.m. RH. (227-7264)

Health care expert — Cultural competency in nursing with Marianne R. Jeffreys. 6:30-8 p.m. Theater, UC. (227-2191)

WCU Jazz Festival — Catamount Chamber Singers and Electric Soul. 7:30 p.m. FAPAC. (227-3261)

Friday, April 11

WCU Jazz Festival — Jazz ensemble and combos. Featuring Ed Neumeister, solo trombonist with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. 7:30 p.m. FAPAC. (227-3261)

Saturday, April 12

Catamount softball — vs. College of Charleston. 1 p.m., 3 p.m. CSC. $ (227-3588)

WCU Jazz Festival — The One O’Clock Lab Band, jazz ensemble from the University of North Texas. 7:30 p.m. FAPAC. $ (227-2479)

Sunday, April 13

Catamount softball — vs. College of Charleston. 1 p.m. CSC. $ (227-7338)

Catamount tennis — vs. N.C. Central University. 1 p.m. CAC. (227-7338)

Reception — “A Quilter’s Garden” by Laura Nelle Goebel. 3-4 p.m. MHC. (227-7129)

Monday, April 14

Recital — Music students. 2:30 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Tuesday, April 15

Catamount softball — vs. Presbyterian. 4 p.m., 6 p.m. CSC. $ (227-7338)

Catamount Concert Series — “Composers as Teachers.” 5 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Wednesday, April 16

Recital — Music students. 2:30 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Thursday, April 17

Documentary — “Polis Is This – Charles Olson and the Persistence of Place.” by Henry Ferrini and Ken Rialf and featuring John Malkovich. 6 p.m. Room 10, FAPAC. (227-2553)

Thursday, April 17-Sunday, April 20

Catamount tennis — Southern Conference championship. Charleston, S.C. (227-7338)

Thursday, April 17

Visiting artist — Brian Bishop lecture about his paintings and drawings. 5 p.m. Room 223, FAPAC. (508-1479)

Concert — Low-Tech Ensemble. 8 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Friday, April 18

Open House — For prospective students and their families. (227-7317)

Catamount track — Catamount Classic. Daylong. CAC. (227-7338)

Galaxy of Stars/Something for Everyone Series — Jim Witter, “The Long and Winding Road: A Beatles Tribute.” 7:30 p.m. FAPAC. $ (227-2479)

Concert — Choral ensembles. 8 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Saturday, April 19

Tuckasegee River Clean Up — Registration. 11 a.m.-1 p.m., coolout, 5 p.m. UC lawn. (227-3625)

Catamount football spring game — “A Taste of Tailgating” free samples from local restaurants, noon; team scrimmage, 1 p.m. WS/BW. (227-7338)

Concert — Choral clinic. 4 p.m. RH. (227-7242)

Sunday, April 20

Catamount Soccer — vs. Western Kentucky. 11:30 a.m.; vs. Carson-Newman. 2:30 p.m. CAC. $ (227-7338)

EXHIBITS

Mountain Heritage Center

“Working the Land” — Slideshow spotlight. April.

“A Quilter’s Garden” — A selection of whimsical, handmade textile pieces based on the traditional craft of quilting by fabric artist Laura Nelle Goebel. April 8-May 23. Gallery B.

“Migration of the Scotch-Irish People” — Permanent exhibit. Gallery A.

“People of the Land” — Ongoing exhibit. Lobby.

Mountain Heritage Center hours:

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. (227-7129 or www.wcu.edu/mhc)

Fine Art Museum, Fine and Performing Arts Center

MFA thesis candidate shows — C.W. Ward, through April 10; Andy Cline, April 11-19; and Travis Weller, April 22-30.

Art and design student exhibition — annual juried show. Through May 1.


“Worldviews” — Selections from WCU’s permanent collection.

Fine Art Museum hours:

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursdays; and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturdays. Donations appreciated. (227-3591 or http://fapac.wcu.edu)

Hunter Library

Art education exhibit — Artwork by art education students. Through July. Main floor. (227-7210)

KEY: $—Admission free; BB—Belk Building; CAC—Catamount Athletic Center; CCA—Center for Applied Technology; CEB—Cedar Creek Camp Building; CEC—Catamount Softball Complex; FAPAC—Fine and Performing Arts Center; HA—Hepburn Auditorium; HFR—H.F. Robinson Administration Building; HU—Hunter Library; HC/HC—Henson Stadium/Children’s Field; MHC—Mountain Heritage Center; RSC—Natural Sciences Auditorium; RH—Reactor Hall; WCU—WCU Regional Activity Center; UC—A.K. Hinds University Center; WB—Whitmore Stadium/Bob Waters Field.

Submissions:

Send news items, calendar notices and address changes to Reporter@email.wcu.edu or WCU Calendar, 420 H.F. Robinson Building, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723. Submit items for The Reporter calendar at least two weeks prior to the event.