



The iconic Alumni Tower on the Western Carolina University campus was dedicated October 28, 1989 as part of WCU's centennial-year homecoming events.



## Hilton takes over as director of CSP graduate program, plans to make improvements



Dr. Adriel Hilton

Dr. Adriel Hilton joined WCU as Director of the College Student Personnel (CSP) Graduate Degree Program this past summer, expressing ambitious plans to improve same.

"My goal is to completely revamp this program from the ground up, increasing the quality and rigor of the coursework, putting emphasis on research and mentorship," says Hilton. "I want this program to produce 'practitioner-scholars.' In other words, professionals who advance the field through both their service and research."

To help achieve this goal, Hilton is preparing to make one significant change—decreasing the hours of degree completion from 48 to 39, in an effort to focus on quality of coursework rather than quantity. He explains, "I feel this change will allow students to focus on excelling in class, while also maintaining a rigorous schedule of that all-important work experience required in this field."

However, under Hilton's leadership, some things will remain the same. He says he plans to continue its tradition of strong placement rates, post-graduation, and emphasizes that students will continue to benefit from a variety of work experience as they pursue their degree here at WCU. Hilton added that he hopes to increase the student body and make Western's program a destination program for higher education student affairs professionals.

Prior to joining WCU, Hilton served as Assistant Vice President for Inclusion Initiatives at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Allendale, MI. In this role, he facilitated support and education on campus diversity and inclusion to all levels of administration, faculty, and staff. He also acted as liaison to GVSU's Office of Multicultural Affairs, Women's Center, and the LGBT Resource Center.

Hilton hails from Miami, FL, earning a B.A. in Business Administration (Finance) at Morehouse College, Atlanta; a Master's of Applied Social Science in public administration from Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, and a Ph.D in Higher Education Administration from Morgan State University in Baltimore. His award-winning dissertation and research is titled, "The Perceptions of Administrators Concerning the One Florida Initiative."

Hilton is the recipient of many honors and awards for his leadership and scholarship in promoting diversity in higher education, including the 2013 Michael A. Powell, Esq. Service award by the National Black Graduate Student Association; the 2013 Joseph H. Silver, Sr., Leadership and Mentoring Initiative Alumni award by the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education; and recognition in *Ebony* magazine as a 2009 Top Young Leaders Under 30. He is the chair of the American Educational Research Association's Multicultural/Multiethnic Special Interest Group and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Negro Education*. His research has been published in refereed journals, such as the *Journal of Research in Education*, *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Journal of College Student Development*.

### Inside the CSP Newsletter

- 2014 CSP Program review & site visit
- Meet CSP Faculty Member April Perry
- Stories about CSP students
- What CSP Alumni have to say

# CSP Program receives positive review

The WCU Department of Human Services and the College of Education and Allied conducted a review and site visit to the CSP program—the first formal evaluation for the 10-year-old program.

A four-person team performed the critique: two external visitors—Jillian Kinzie, Indiana University School of Education and Dick Mullendore, University of Georgia College of Student Affairs Administration Program; and two internal reviewers—Kofi Lomotey, WCU College of Education and Allied Professions and Michael Smith, WCU Kimmel School of Construction Management and Technology. The primary contact for the review process was WCU Director of Assessment David Onder.

The review team examined the specific areas and made recommendations for improvement as follows:

## Faculty Support and Mentoring

- Establish support structures to mentor and guide new faculty
- Ensure that all faculty, full-time and adjunct, are involved in regular meetings
- Reestablish an Advisory Committee

## Admissions

- Create steadfast admissions criteria
- Commit to a cohort model, optimum size, and have all students begin in fall
- Consider holding recruitment weekend event

## Marketing and Recruitment

- Involve Advisory Council, Student Affairs, etc. in marketing and recruitment
- Develop method to involve alumni in recruitment and to solicit input on program improvement
- Engage regional universities and colleges to recruit their students to the program and help place graduates for employment

## Academic and Curricular Issues

- Examine content related to community college emphasis, diversity, multiculturalism, budget and finance
- Evaluate offering courses at Biltmore Park, hybrid or totally online formats

- Review course topics, sequencing, course planning and scheduling for students and full- and part-time faculty

- Investigate educational and work expectations for assistantships, internships, and consider how establishing “practicum experiences” might offer students greater exposure to a second area of focus without being overly demanding of their time

- Ensure students have fundamental knowledge of field before beginning internships and practice
- Benchmark program policies, curriculum and quality with comparable Student Affairs programs at other colleges and universities
- Ensure balance between academic rigor and learning from experience

## Rebuilding Morale and Bridges

- Rebuild relationship between CSP, Student Affairs and other units
- Involve Student Affairs to foster deeper connections to the program
- Involve adjunct instructors in curricular decisions

## Funding Issues

- Clarify funding sources and create more consistent funding packages for students
- Provide funds for new program faculty to visit nearby programs and participate in meetings hosted by ACPA and NASPA
- Decide on fair and consistent compensation for adjunct faculty

Lastly, the team ended the review on a positive note by identifying the program's overall strengths (as follows), stating “...they provide a solid foundation for considering the suggested topics for program enhancement.”

- Positive institutional perceptions across campus constituencies
- Full cooperation with Student Affairs Division in providing essential academic and experiential support
- Healthy enrollments, particularly given the program's relatively short history, with African American student enrollment more than doubled in recent years
- Consistent exceptional rating of student performance in internships
- High success of CSP graduates gaining employment



Dr. April Perry is shown holding her daughter, Prescott, who will be two years old in March.

## Meet April Perry

Dr. April Perry joined the faculty of the CSP master's of education program at WCU this past summer. She was previously the Interim Associate Director of the Writing and Learning Commons at WCU and adjunct professor in the Leadership Minor. Perry is passionate about student development in the college years and lives by the motto...“The only thing better than watching someone grow is helping them grow.”

In fact, Perry is so passionate about helping students that after earning her bachelor's degree in Communications-Broadcasting from the University of Central Oklahoma, she returned to work at Central Oklahoma in Student Affairs and to pursue a M.Ed in Adult Education—Training and Development. This was after she worked in Los Angeles for companies such as Entertainment Tonight and Disney Buena Vista Marketing.

In 2008, Perry and her husband moved to New Zealand to pursue their Ph.Ds in Higher Education. While there, she was a UC International Doctoral Research Fellow, as well as winner of the Postgraduate Research Showcase. The findings of her dissertation, “Trading through Swampy Water: Graduates' Experiences of the Post-University Transition” have been used to better understand final year students and explore how institutions of higher education can better prepare their graduates for life after college.

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Perry is also a Strengths Finder Facilitator, quoting the Strengths philosophy: "Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness." (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 112) "By using Strengths Finder as a tool, I am able to help students better understand themselves, and in turn, they are able to better help the students they serve," said Perry.

Perry and her husband, Lane, have a daughter, Prescott, who will be two years old in March. Dr. Lane Perry also works at WCU, serving as Director for the Center for Service Learning. The family loves to travel, having been to over 30 countries on five continents. This past summer, the couple took Prescott on a study trip to Europe along with 14 WCU undergraduate students.

For more about the Perry's life, see this article from *The Reporter* at

### What Dr. Perry has to say about joining the CSP program faculty:

*This is such an exciting time to be at WCU! With Chancellor Belcher's 2020 Vision and the College of Education and Allied Professions support to make positive changes to all of its degree programs, the enthusiasm and support for the CSP program is energizing!*

*I have worked as a Higher Education practitioner scholar for nine years before accepting this faculty position. Those nine years have been spread across three universities (two in the US and one international). I feel like I bring great practical experience from the kind of jobs that our grads will be pursuing. I am also incredibly passionate about my work. I not only take pride in the curriculum and content of what I teach, but I care about the students, their feelings, and their future. I think the students who have had me in class this semester can attest to the fact that I am here to help them succeed. I do not claim to have all the answers, but rather, my job is to steer them in the way they want to go and help them become the best versions of themselves that they can be.*

For Dr. Perry's faculty profile, click [here](#).

## KUNKLE FOUND CALLING AT WCU

My name is Kelsey Kunkle, and I am a second-year student in the CSP program at WCU. I was born and raised in Montgomery County, MD, and graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2012 with a B.A. in Communications.

I fell in love with the college environment after many significant experiences as an undergraduate student that include joining a sorority, transferring schools, playing a club sport, and serving as a peer educator. In my senior year I realized that my passion lies with helping students succeed in college and achieve their educational, career and personal goals. After asking my academic adviser how I could get a job like hers, I started looking into college student personnel programs and found WCU!

During my first academic year at WCU (2013-14), I served as a Graduate Success Coordinator in the Office of Academic Initiatives under the Department of Residential Living. In this position, I had the unique opportunity to work with two Living-Learning Communities and gain experience in housing, case management and academic support. As part of the CSP program, students are required to complete at least two internships, so I also had my first internship in the Student Athlete Academic Success Services Office during my first semester.

It was stressful moving to a new university, starting a full-time graduate course load while managing a graduate assistantship and an internship. However, it was also extremely helpful, because I was quickly able to learn about WCU, the student body and make valuable connections all across campus. As a first-year student, I was also encouraged by supervisors and students in the second-year cohort to apply for ACUHO-I and NODA summer internships, through which I became the University of North Texas 2014 NODA Intern.



*Kelsey Kunkle is a second-year student in Western Carolina's College Student Personnel Program.*

For the 2014-15 academic year, I am the Graduate Assistant in the Advising Center and an intern in the Department of Intercultural Affairs with a focus on the Red Zone Campaign. In these positions I am getting hands-on experience with advising students, programming, researching best practices, creating partnerships with faculty and staff on campus, as well as serving on various committees. One of my favorite things about the CSP program is that all of these experiences outside of the classroom have proven critical to my learning in the classroom. My professors create assignments and facilitate classroom discussions that focus on practical application and the connections between the course material and job experiences.

In addition to having supportive supervisors and professors, being part of a cohort has been extremely helpful for managing stress and surviving very busy schedules. As classmates, colleagues and friends, my cohort has worked together for over a year now and created a lifelong network in student and academic affairs. I am extremely grateful for my experiences in the CSP program at WCU and look forward to seeing the program continue to grow and develop under the leadership of Drs. Hilton and Perry.



As a lifelong native of Cullowhee, Christopher Ray understands how the sheer beauty of the area can captivate visitors and students.

## Ray sets long-term goals involving higher education

Christopher Adam Ray is a first-year student in Western Carolina's CSP Program and currently works as a graduate assistant with Dr. Carol Burton in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. He also earned his undergraduate degree from WCU, double majoring in History and Social Science Education, with minors in German and Economics. Ray says he applied to several different graduate programs after

graduation but was uncertain as to the field he would ultimately pursue. As a result, he decided to take some self-development time and enrolled in an au pair program in Munich, Germany. Ray says, "This experience made me realize how much I enjoyed working and interacting within the field of higher education, which led me to enroll in the CSP program at WCU." He adds, "My experience in the CSP program has proven to be both rewarding and intellectually stimulating."

Within the first three months, Ray says he had the opportunity to network with members of the Board of Governors and has actively participated on numerous committees, including the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee and the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee. "Having the chance to serve on these committees has broadened my understanding of effective interaction among the diverse departments across campus," says Ray. "Furthermore, it has revealed to me the integral role that each individual plays in the overall success of WCU."

Ray is also working with Dr. Adriel Hilton on several research projects that range from the educational experiences of African

American males within higher education to opportunities of engagement for international students at WCU.

"Enrollment in the CSP program has provided me with the opportunity to pursue an advanced degree and to engage in areas of higher education that correlate with my career goals," says Ray. He adds that in the next ten years he hopes to have his Ph.D. in Student Affairs and Higher Education and working in the Academic Affairs field. He adds, "My long-term goal is to become the Chancellor of a four-year public university."

With these goals in mind, Ray continuously strives to become actively involved in the CSP program, as well as other organizations, such as the Graduate Student Association. He says working in such diverse areas will provide him with a multifaceted understanding of higher education and prepare him for his own unique role within the discipline.

Ray is a lifelong native of Cullowhee, and says he understands how the beauty that exists in this area can captivate both visitors and students. As such, he enjoys its natural splendor by running, biking, hiking and swimming in his free time.

# WHAT ALUMNI HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR CSP PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

**Dr. Mary Alice Varga, a 2008 Graduate** from WCU currently lives in Atlanta, GA. After graduating from the CSP program, Dr. Varga worked in Undergraduate Admissions at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, before pursuing her PhD in Educational Psychology and Research. She is currently a tenure-track professor of educational research at the University of West Georgia, where Dr. Varga teaches graduate-level courses in research and assessment and serves on doctoral dissertation committees. She also teaches first-year seminar courses every fall. Dr. Varga's research focuses on college student bereavement and how experiencing a loss can affect the collegiate experience. Outside of the office, Dr. Varga enjoys running races with her husband—they just recently completed the Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta, GA.

**About her education at WCU, Dr. Varga says:** All of it has been extremely helpful, everything from the course content to the internship and

practicum experiences. A course I took with Dr. Ronda Bryant was particularly insightful, which focused on teaching in Student Affairs and helped me realize how passionate I was about teaching and being in the classroom. My internships and practicums allowed me to make several professional connections, which I still have today.

**Dr. Varga's advice to current CSP students:** Take advantage of all the great opportunities the WCU CSP program has to offer! Consider internships in other areas of student affairs and at other institutions. Attend conferences and meet as many other professionals and aspiring professionals as you can—it is a small world and the more connections you have, the better!

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**Whit A. France-Kelly, a 2011 Graduate** of WCU, lives in Iowa City, Iowa. He is the Assistant Director of Alumni Programs at the

University of Iowa Alumni Association.

He engages alumni domestically and around the world through various in-person and online efforts, including Homecoming, Constituent Relations, Collegiate Relations, Lifelong Learning, career services, membership programming initiatives, and reunion efforts. He has a passion for providing outlets for alumni to be engaged and give back directly to the institution while connecting with current students. He got the job at the University of Iowa just two weeks after graduating from WCU.

**About his education at WCU, Whit says:** "In grad school, I was very invested in my education, social activities, and extra-curricular programs (Relay for Life, MS Walk, alpha phi omega, CAT Center, Career Mentor Program along with my GA and various internships). This experience has been paramount in my career as an alumni engagement officer. Having that

flexibility to not only fine-tune my focus in alumni affairs, it allowed me to evaluate what I valued as a person. I was able to try new things, engage my community and fellow students, while providing programs of interest to varying demographic groups. Without the experiences both inside and outside of the classroom at WCU, I am not sure I would be where I am today. And I thank Dr. Daly and the administrators at WCU for allowing our program to include such elements as a GA, internships, and special projects. My GA director at Career Services, Mike Despeaux, was influential in providing guidance and encouragement as I matriculated through the CSP program.

**Whit's advice to current CSP students:**

Take in as much as you can. Go on educational trips with the university, attend conferences, get involved in extracurricular programs, have a meaningful relationship with your program director, and find your niche area where you can excel. I know I did and those experiences at WCU are still paying off, three-plus years later. You are in grad school for a reason—make the most of the time, resources, colleagues, and opportunities available.

**Melissa Boles, a 2014 Graduate** of the WCU CSP program, is currently employed as an Academic Advisor at Clark College, a community college in Vancouver, WA. She works one-on-one with students who plan to transfer their two-year degrees to a four-year institution, as well as students who are utilizing a college prep program to complete a GED, improve their English, or prepare for college courses. Outside of work, Melissa is involved with the Rotaract Club of Clark County, an organization that promotes community involvement and volunteering. She is also involved with the Young Democrats of Clark County, a writer, an avid reader and is a part of the staff of several blogs.

**About her education at WCU, Melissa says:** WCU taught me to utilize the resources available to me in order to truly help students. I consistently put students first, which is definitely something I learned from my classes and assistantships at WCU; and I'm so thankful I was taught that.

**Melissa's advice to current CSP students:** Learn everything you can from your classes, your professors, your assistantship, and the Student Affairs staff at Western. Sometimes you might feel burnt out or frustrated, but the things you are learning are ultimately going to help you in your full-time career. Take the time to ask all of the questions you have—you're there to learn, and the WCU staff knows that—so take advantage of their knowledge!

"Trust the process." The first semester you are

getting familiar with the CSP curriculum and learning at a higher level for critical and reflective thinking. Utilize your cohort and faculty to maximize your preparedness for the field. **– Rick S. McClendon, 2007 Graduate**

Make sure your internships are diverse and out of your comfort zone - makes you more marketable and gives you a broader outlook on things!

**– Stephanie Hesbacher, 2008 Graduate**

My advice is to take advantage of all the different opportunities afforded to you, from the grad assistantships, to the internships, and the classroom knowledge to gain. Also, the cohort model is such a cool thing to be a part of, as you will progress in the field with these people and can share your knowledge and experience with each other.

**– Richard Gamble, 2009 Graduate**

You put in what you get out, take every advantage you have to explore your discipline and those specific areas you enjoy. Remember, it's always about the students.

**– Zachary Pope, 2009 Graduate**

It's important to know what fields exist and what specific traits employers in those fields are looking for.

CSP students really need to think about the bigger picture in terms of what they want to do after graduation. Don't limit yourself to one thing, like student activities, but cross train in something like academic advising so you have a wider job market.

**– Amanda Everhart, 2012 Graduate**

Ask questions! I learned best by challenging the process and asking questions to clarify. Helped me grow and establish myself in the program. Also, develop relationships with your cohort members and lean on them when needed. Finally, find a life outside of CSP. If you are consumed by your work, you will have no stress relief. Have fun and enjoy what Western Carolina has to offer.

**– Patrick Fredricks, 2012 Graduate**

My advice would be to think about who you will be working with as you move into your careers. As a CSP major you understand that you will be working with college students, most of whom are 18-22 years old. Once you get into the work environment it is easier to see that you are working with faculty members, as well as other staff, to provide meaningful programming, etc. The skill set and knowledge needed to be successful include the ability to communicate and work with faculty and staff as much as provide programming for students.

**– Rebecca Nelms Kell, 2013 Graduate**

Make time for yourself. Grad school is that special place where you essentially blur the line of student and professional. While you now have professional expectations never forget that you still need to take time to enjoy yourself. While Cullowhee can seem a bit "limited," it is definitely a place you can make your own. Also, take some time to reflect on the bigger picture. The world of student affairs is one that is very vast yet close knit. When you begin job searching, expand your search, don't limit yourself to what you know or are comfortable with. Trust me, moving 3000 miles across the country hasn't been easy; but in my big picture, this experience at ASU will open so many more opportunities. While I NEVER would've thought I'd be living in Arizona, I am truly enjoying it. Good Luck, Work Hard, Have Fun! **– Winston Bland, 2014 Graduate**

Sustainability in higher education is a growing field; and because we save money for a campus, I don't see our jobs going anywhere. Great opportunity for people who enjoy event planning, student programming, and communications. **– Meghan Kearns**



*Western Carolina University students and administrators celebrate the announcement that Western Carolina University's Pride of the Mountains Marching Band has been selected for the 2014 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.*

Please direct all comments or questions regarding this newsletter to:

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