

## Cherokee Center External Review Report

### Introduction:

Among Southeastern Native Peoples, including the Cherokee, establishing paths between villages of different Peoples was a symbolic and political act. Clearing a path between villages involved practical matters, such as filling in low spots, removing debris, and otherwise maintaining the avenue of travel. But “clearing a path” also came to mean maintaining relationships, and it signifies purposeful connection, diplomacy, and shared goals of communication. With the establishment of the Cherokee Center in the heart of the current Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians territory, the Cherokee People had welcomed the creation of a path between the academic institution, Western Carolina University, which sits on the site of a former Cherokee village, and their community.

The combined resources used to build the Cherokee Center’s log cabin, of both Cherokee and WCU labor, represented a shared commitment to a long term relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocity. That it has continued to exist as the only physical office of an institution of higher education on the Qualla Boundary with the increasing need for buildable space speaks to its ongoing value by the Cherokee community. The EBCI and WCU renewed and formalized their relationship in 2005 through the development and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by Principal Chief Michel Hicks and Chancellor John W. Bardo. As with any path or relationship, the one that connects the EBCI and WCU is now in need of clearing and improvement. Over the years, there have been missteps that have made the path less clear in terms of direction, and communication has become less intentional and fragmented. It is our belief that the Cherokee Center, as originally envisioned by both parties and as affirmed by our meetings with the Cherokee and WCU communities, should play an important role in restoring and even expanding that path.

The Center’s Administrative Program Review makes clear and the External Review Team confirms that the Center’s objectives conform to key aspects of the *WCU 2020 Strategic Plan*, including Goal 1.4—Eliminate barriers to student access through coordinated endeavors with B-12 and community college partners; Goal 1.6 Attain a student population that balances the University’s commitment to access, its responsibility for student success, and ensures the sustainability of student funding; Goal 2.3 Instill pride in the University through more visible recognition and celebration of institutional achievements and traditions; and Goal 3.1 Strengthen the relationship and communication between the University and its external partners.

It is our hope that this review of the Cherokee Center—the first in over 14 years--will be an important part of that process of path clearing, relationship building, and the achievement of WCU’s mission and vision. We have conscientiously met with stakeholders in tribal government, business partners, charitable organization

partners, university faculty, administrators, staff, and alumni to aid in that effort. What stood out most to us in meeting with the various Cherokee community partners was their willingness to work towards clearing and even expanding this path between WCU and EBCI. This is a rare opportunity to strengthen a productive partnership, and we hope that it is not missed.

### **Analysis of Program:**

The primary unit functions of the Cherokee Center as summarized in its 2015 Administrative Program Review Self-Study include thirteen objectives, many of which will be addressed below. However, in the External Review Team's interviews with the Cherokee Center staff; university administrators, faculty, and staff; and stakeholders in EBCI tribal government, business partners, charitable organization partners, and alumni, a more focused and nuanced understanding of the everyday functions of the Cherokee Center emerged.

When the Cherokee Center opened nearly 40 years ago, Cherokee students faced many barriers to accessing WCU, including issues of transportation, funding, and culture shock. In addressing these important issues, the Cherokee Center's primary purpose has been to "serve the educational needs of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and surrounding communities and to serve as a cultural bridge between the Cherokee community and the university community." Interviewees corroborated this general vision of the Cherokee Center and recognized its important role in the past and presently in increasing enrollment of EBCI and other local students at WCU. Interviewees also acknowledged the importance of the role of the Cherokee Center as a local presence on the Qualla Boundary and as a support for students, families, and Cherokee Central Schools. In addressing the barriers to accessing WCU, many WCU classes have been held in the Cherokee Center over the years and interviewees spoke fondly of its use as a community classroom and meeting site—albeit one with very limited space. With its decades-long presence in the community, the Cherokee Center is widely recognized as a clearinghouse for information about WCU and its academic programming.

The Cherokee Center's approach to recruiting EBCI students to WCU has been to increase the profile of WCU within the EBCI community and by continuing direct outreach to students. Over the past five years, the Center's programming activities have included engaging the EBCI by serving on boards and committees. By serving on boards for the Cherokee Preservation Foundation and the Center for Native Health, as well as being involved in community initiatives such as the Snowbird Doula Project, the EBCI gambling study for NC DHHS, and environmental planning with the Little Tennessee Land Trust, the Cherokee Center integrated WCU's presence deeply with the EBCI community. The Center staff has sought to nurture educational relationships through serving on the advisory boards for Cherokee Central Schools, the Diversity Committee for the WCU College of Education & Applied Professions, and assisting with the annual WCU American Indian Expo, which is held every November during Native American Heritage month and is

designed to share information about Cherokee and Native American culture with the WCU community. In terms of direct outreach, the Center engages with students who are either in college or are preparing for college, and shares information regarding admission, housing, and financial aid processes at WCU. Several interviewees stated that they learned of WCU's programs through the Cherokee Center and that it played a pivotal role in their choosing to attend WCU.

The Cherokee Center's role in student recruitment ties directly into its function as a cultural bridge. As was made clear throughout the External Review Team's interviews, in order for Cherokee students to succeed at WCU the University needs to have a welcoming and inclusive environment. At times, this has not been the case. One interviewee told a story of how EBCI students have at times felt unwelcome at WCU and would retreat to their cars between classes. The Cherokee Center has sought to create an inclusive campus climate through direct engagement with students, faculty, and campus units. In working with students, the Director of the Cherokee Center, Roseanna Sneed Belt, has advised Native organizations on the WCU campus. When Native American students voiced concern over culturally insensitive activities on campus, several interviewees called attention to the way the Cherokee Center Director has acted as an unofficial ombudsperson through quelling tensions and educating parties involved in the events. In another but related capacity, the Cherokee Center works regularly with faculty and students from a variety of academic disciplines and units at WCU to facilitate cultural visits to Qualla Boundary and to offer skills training in how to engage and work with a tribal community. The Center has participated in the planning of events such as WCU's Rooted in the Mountains annual symposium and, just recently, collaborated with the WCU Catamount football team to develop an annual Cherokee Day recognition program during a home football game--an innovative and exciting way to both educate the campus about the EBCI and to recruit EBCI students to WCU.

Since its inception, the Cherokee Center has provided crucial leadership and assistance in developing research, academic programming, and community development programs between a variety of WCU academic units and the EBCI. On an institutional level, recently the Cherokee Center hosted a meeting between WCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the EBCI's two IRB committees, of which Director Belt is a member, with the aim of explaining EBCI research issues and how future research could proceed in a positive manner. The Cherokee Center is actively working with WCU's programs in Health and Human Services, the Certificate of Native Health, Nursing, and Social Work. The fields of Nursing and Social Work are of particular importance to the EBCI. The Cherokee Center has played an important role in assisting WCU units to develop partnerships and programs such as the NNCAT and MedCaT with the EBCI. Faculty involved with these particular projects stated that the Cherokee Center was instrumental in their research and community outreach programs.

The Cherokee Center's engagement with WCU's highly regarded Cherokee Studies program and Cherokee Language Revitalization Project is worthy of particular

emphasis. WCU faculty interviewees stated that the Cherokee Center and Cherokee Studies are inextricably tied. In fact, the Cherokee Center is listed on the Cherokee Studies website and, collectively with the Sequoyah Distinguished Professor, already call themselves “Cherokee Programs.” These ties begin with the site of the Center itself, which serves as a point-of-entry on the Qualla Boundary for WCU faculty and students. Because much of the work of Cherokee Studies faculty takes place on the Qualla Boundary, the Center has become a catalyst for establishing productive relationships with the EBCI community. For decades now, scholars, students, and community members have met at the Center. They continue to utilize the Cherokee Center as a site to develop Cherokee language materials, meet with Cherokee language speakers, offer classes, and conduct research in their disciplines. For Cherokee Studies faculty and students, the Center staff has facilitated the development of key, lasting relationships and partnerships within the EBCI community. As multiple interviewees stated, Director Belt’s advice has been crucial to the development of research and programming proposals; her intimate knowledge of the community has been vitally important.

The Cherokee Center has come to occupy a unique niche in mediating the relationships between Western Carolina University and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. For Cherokee students on the Boundary and at WCU, it continues to open access to WCU through recruitment and its involvement with WCU students. For faculty and staff at WCU, those people and units that have utilized the Cherokee Center’s services—from outreach, to culture sharing, to research—have found them rewarding. However, the External Review Team did find significant areas of necessary development. The Center has not had a unit review in over 14 years and has experienced a substantial lack of administrative oversight at the divisional level. In the long absence of, until recently, much administrative leadership, the Center has not developed adequate program assessment strategies that can chart its progress toward achieving its goals. The Cherokee Center Administrative Program Review recognizes that assessment of the unit is lacking. The nature of much of the Cherokee Center’s work as a liaison, cultural bridge, and research facilitator makes quantifiable assessment challenging, but there are certainly ways in which the Center could better document activities, interactions, and consultations, as well as solicit regular feedback regarding its programming from those who utilize it. The Cherokee Center staff needs training in such forms of assessment. As a part of this process, the Cherokee Center would benefit greatly from engaging in a formalized way with the campus units with which it interacts in creating measurable goals and assessment outcomes. A similar process may be employed with its constituents on the Qualla Boundary.

### **Analysis of Staff:**

A native of Cherokee, N.C., and an enrolled member of the EBCI, Roseanna Sneed Belt has been director of WCU’s Cherokee Center since 2001. Belt’s academic path led to the University of Colorado at Boulder where she received her bachelor’s degree in History and worked for ten years as a university counselor. She then

received her master's degree in Counseling and Consulting Psychology from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and, upon returning to Cherokee, received certification in school counseling from Western Carolina University. Prior to becoming the Cherokee Center's director, Belt was a counselor at the Cherokee Elementary School for thirteen years. Today, she continues her work with Cherokee students through college preparation, on-campus mentoring, and post-graduate interaction.

However, Director Belt's activities and influence extend well beyond her work with WCU students and alumni. A highly respected resident of the Qualla Boundary, her deep level of community involvement is evident in the long list of local and state organizations in which she serves as a board member, committee member or advisor. Over the years, she has participated in numerous specialized education training programs and presented at several national conferences. Interviews with WCU and EBCI stakeholders indicate that Director Belt plays a pivotal role in providing WCU faculty and outside researchers with a point of entry into the community, facilitating connections with individuals, businesses, and tribal leadership. Cherokee Studies and Social Work faculty members cited Director Belt's continuing involvement in program planning as critical to their success. Several interviewees also praised Director Belt's work at WCU on planning committees for annual events such as the Rooted in the Mountains conference, the Native American Expo and the Catamount Football EBCI Day, as well as her service as advisor for Native student organizations Digali'i. She is also a proponent for beginning an AISES chapter at WCU, working with a current student who is a member of that organization.

Ronda Quillen, the Center's Administrative Support Associate, is an experienced office manager with strong communication and customer service skills. A longtime Youth Minister with deep family roots in western North Carolina, Quillen expressed great enthusiasm about the opportunities for community service and student interaction provided by the Cherokee Center. Although she has only been employed by WCU for a few months, she has already upgraded office record-keeping procedures, created a Cherokee Center Facebook page, and helped to represent the Center at several public events.

Cherokee Center staff and supervisor interviews indicated that current evaluation procedures do not adequately address the Center's unique cultural liaison functions. Additionally, a lack of record-keeping about Native student recruitment and retention throughout WCU departments hinder the establishment of clear goals in this area for Cherokee Center staff. Almost all of the stakeholders commented on the convenience of the Cherokee Center building as a local meeting place and informal classroom. Although WCU has recently invested in furniture, equipment, and a heating/cooling system for the building, EBCI and WCU stakeholders commented that its small size and lack of up-to-date technology (e.g., new computers and a Smart classroom setup) severely limit the Center's scope of activities.

### **Cherokee Center Strengths:**

The external review team was impressed by the outpouring of support for the Cherokee Center during its two days of meetings on the Qualla Boundary and at the Western Carolina University campus. Interviewees recognized the important role the Cherokee Center plays in informing the WCU campus community about Cherokee culture and in providing a Cherokee presence on campus. In part, this work involves information sharing with the campus, but at times the work of the Cherokee Center functions as a cultural liaison. As a WCU unit, the Center acts as a liaison for the campus community in developing relationships with the EBCI community. At other significant times, however, the Cherokee Center has functioned in the role of an unofficial liaison *from* the EBCI community via Director Belt to the WCU community, educating the campus about cultural protocols and informing the community when cultural and political missteps have been made. In this capacity, the delicate political work the Cherokee Center regularly participates within should be recognized. As a campus unit charged with negotiating relationships between a state university and the community of a sovereign tribal nation, the Cherokee Center occupies a very unique position.

The current Director of the Cherokee Center, Roseanna S. Belt, was recognized by interviewees as very important to the Center and to WCU. Interviewees acknowledged that over her many years as Director, Belt has established lasting and important relationships with both WCU faculty and units, as well as in her home community of the EBCI. Her status as a respected citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has, in large part, enabled the Cherokee Center to function in its current capacity. The respect and admiration for Director Belt was evident by the sheer number of members of the EBCI community who volunteered their time to come to our meetings and share their knowledge of the Cherokee Center with the external review team. Members of the tribal council, esteemed elders, business leaders, and WCU alumni—a wide and deep representation of the EBCI community shared their thoughts on the Cherokee Center as a clear sign of support for the Center and its Director, but also in the effort to improve a valuable community institution. On the WCU campus, the outpouring of both respect for the Center and constructive criticism for its improvement as a campus unit was clear and attributable to its past success. Of note in particular is the work the Cherokee Center has conducted with the faculty within Cherokee Studies and Cherokee Language. Director Belt attends all Cherokee Studies meetings and has been deeply involved with both these units by assisting with research partnerships and connecting faculty and students within the EBCI community. The Cherokee Center has also regularly interacted with Health and Human Sciences, the Certificate of Native Health, Nursing, and Social Work. Specifically, the Cherokee Center has been involved with the NNCAT and MedCaT programs.

Interviewees validated that the Cherokee Center has served as a cultural bridge, been a useful WCU space on the Qualla Boundary for meetings and classes, and has served as a clearinghouse and even “cheerleader” for WCU and its programs within the EBCI community. Time and again, the review team was told by community

members that WCU is a great institution, and that while there have been tensions between the University and the EBCI community over time, the community members we spoke to considered the education they received at Western of the highest quality. Many of the alumni we spoke to were introduced to WCU by the Cherokee Center, and they are now among the leaders within tribal government, business, and education. Approximately 20% (47 students) of the EBCI higher education students are attending WCU currently. Both that percentage and number of students represents a significant and long-standing dedication to recruitment and retention.

### **Cherokee Center Challenges:**

After reviewing documents made available to us by the Cherokee Center, the University, and interviewing numerous University, EBCI community, and other stakeholders, it became clear that there is a commitment by the University to proactively engage with the EBCI. While initially envisioned to play a primary role in increasing numbers of Cherokee students, serve as a nurturing presence to assist in the initial exposure of Cherokee students to WCU, and as a venue for offering classes at the Qualla Boundary, as well as a cultural liaison, the current role has evolved over time. It appears that some of these shifts were in response to community needs, the growth of a Cherokee Studies presence on the WCU campus, and the changing social realities within the EBCI communities over the past nearly 40 years. However, these same stakeholders who value the relationship with WCU and the Cherokee Center's service to the community perceive that the role of the Cherokee Center in this engagement process is ill defined at present, outside the role of cultural liaison and advocate for Cherokee students at WCU or EBCI alumni of WCU.

The results of the Cherokee Center Unit Review Survey that was administered to community members, faculty, staff, and students of WCU support an observation that the External Review Team heard throughout its interviews on campus and within the EBCI community. That observation is that for those who have established a relationship with it, the Cherokee Center is a deeply valued resource. Unfortunately, many units on campus have underutilized the Center as a resource because they are simply unaware of its services. EBCI community members voiced similar observations. The clear conclusion is that the Cherokee Center's services need to be advertised and promoted much more. In addition, the Cherokee Center needs to reach out across campus to build on already-established relationships and develop new ones with campus units that may benefit from its services.

While general goals were established that the Cherokee Center should work to increase the number of Cherokee students at WCU, no baseline numbers existed that unambiguously identified EBCI students at the time of the founding of the Center or at present. This is a result of no mechanism of collecting information related to tribal affiliation of Native students at WCU. At this time, only the number of self-identified Native American students enrolled at WCU may be counted. Based on

mailing addresses of students, it can be extrapolated which students are most likely members of the EBCI community, but again, this is not definitive, making it difficult to assess as to whether or not the Cherokee Center has met this goal. Perhaps the most accurate assessment of the number of EBCI students at WCU came from the EBCI education department, who maintain that the number of EBCI members at WCU ranges between 47 to 50 students, or about 20% of the number of EBCI students being supported by their higher education program.

A lack of consistent administrative oversight at the divisional level appears to have led to a dearth of recordkeeping by the Cherokee Center. Records have not been kept documenting the number of potential student contacts per year (i.e. assistance with college applications to WCU, campus tours), or interactions with existing students, although it is clear that these activities did occur as there were numerous EBCI alumni of WCU who had received support for these activities from the Cherokee Center. This lack of clear, measurable goals and record keeping (such as being able to clearly measure trends in EBCI student enrollment at WCU) made it difficult to assess how effective the Cherokee Center had been in meeting these goals.

There was near consensus among those interviewed by the External Review Team that Educational Outreach was an inappropriate division to which the Cherokee Center should report. The Cherokee Center's reporting structure has shifted over the years and interviewees were concerned that the unit had not yet found an appropriate divisional home that could support and develop its unique academic mission. For the last 9-10 years, the Center has been a part of Educational Outreach but has also reported to other divisions within the university. With its role in assisting research with units across campus and the development of a robust Cherokee Studies program at WCU, the Center now plays a significant role in University research and engagement with EBCI. It participates on Institutional Review Boards and provides a work and meeting area for Cherokee Studies scholars when on the Qualla Boundary. The Division of Educational Outreach encompasses Continuing and Professional Education, Distance and Online Programs, Military Services, and Testing services. Faculty interviewees at WCU stated that the Center would have more appropriate oversight, structure, and campus impact if it reported to an academic college.

Throughout the interviews with the EBCI stakeholders (elected officials, business leaders, tribal government employees, and WCU alumni), it became clear that the needs of EBCI had evolved significantly from the establishment of the Cherokee Center. Where once there was a need for classes at Cherokee due to limited finances of students, community stakeholders clearly expressed a desire for engagement with WCU programs related to youth and workforce development. The perception was that the Cherokee Center should be a conduit to the EBCI community to inform the community about youth programs, assist in developing new programs, and serve as a liaison between various university divisions and EBCI business, foundation, and educational leaders. To successfully achieve these new needs and

goals, all agreed that the current facilities of the Cherokee Center were inadequate; the cabin that houses the Cherokee Center is simply far too small. Given that the aforementioned community needs were not part of the goals expressed in the self-study, it became clear that EBCI should be directly engaged in the process of developing a new, clarified mission of the Cherokee Center.

As with the EBCI community, campus interviewees who have a relationship with the Center believe that, with proper support, the Cherokee Center can develop a more robust and integrated campus presence. A more expansive and integral role in developing research and programming partnerships between WCU and the EBCI is within the Cherokee Center's grasp, but it needs senior administrative leadership within WCU and the EBCI to clear a path for its future development through committing to shared goals for its future.

### **Recommendations:**

Obviously, in such a short period of time with limited abilities to deeply explore themes that emerged, at most, what we provide herein is our perceived opportunities for improvements. Not surprisingly, there is a direct relationship between these recommendations and the strengths and challenges previously noted.

These recommendations are divided into two main parts: (1) opportunities for the WCU administration that would directly impact the Center and (2) opportunities specifically for the Center. Each set of recommendations is divided into three parts: (1) those that we feel should be addressed immediately, (2) those that should be addressed within the next six months (short range), and (3) those that are long range (1-2 years). We begin with the opportunities for the administration that we believe should be addressed immediately.

#### **Immediate Opportunities for the WCU Administration:**

*1. Move the Center into closer alignment with Cherokee Studies, Cherokee Language, students and other faculty.* More specifically, the University should find a more appropriate reporting line within the organizational structure of the University for the Center (e.g., Cherokee Studies, Arts & Sciences, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies or Student Affairs). The most logical move would be to place the Center into alignment with Cherokee Studies, reporting to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. The Center already plays a critical role in Cherokee Studies research, programming, and student activities.

*2. Implement a strategic planning exercise for the Center with substantial input from members of the Cherokee community.* While there is great promise for future directions the Center may take, at this time there is a lack of clarity on campus and in the Cherokee community with regard to the roles the Center may best fulfill. This exercise would provide an opportunity to (1) clarify the vision and mission of the

Center, (2) set forth collectively agreed upon goals, and (3) establish corresponding activities with attendant timelines and the identification of responsible parties.

Short Range Opportunities for the WCU Administration:

*3. Establish an Advisory Council for the Center.* The 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the EBCI and WCU should be revisited and guide the development of the Cherokee Center Advisory Council. The Advisory Council should include members of the EBCI community as well as WCU representatives who have established research, teaching, and service relationships within the EBCI. There needs to be ongoing dialogue between the WCU campus and the Cherokee community related to the Center--beginning at the highest levels; communication is key.

*4. Facilitate the presence of Center staff in a clearly identifiable space on campus for two days each week.* A regular presence on campus will make possible regular face-to-face dialogue between the Center and faculty, current students, the career planning staff, and the admissions staff. In addition, it would enhance the opportunity for the utilization of student workers and/or graduate assistants who could staff the campus office when no full time staff are available.

Long Range Opportunities for the WCU Administration:

*5. Develop a succession plan for the leadership of the Center.*

*6. Ensure that the Center is written into grant proposals related to the Cherokee community that are submitted by WCU faculty and others for which Center staff provide significant support.*

*7. Consider constructing a classroom building within the Cherokee community--in conjunction with the Cherokee community--for the offering of WCU courses as well as preparation classes (e.g., SAT, GRE, GED, FAFSA).* In this regard, an exploration of funding opportunities through USDA is suggested. See appendix.

Immediate Opportunities for the Cherokee Center:

*8. Establish a process for routinely documenting the daily interactions and contacts of the Cherokee Center staff.* This can be started immediately with each staff member keeping a daily activities calendar and contacts log, supplemented by a record of on-site and off-site Cherokee Center programs and meetings that includes the number of participants for each event. The Center's Administrative Support Associate would be responsible for entering the raw data into a spreadsheet and generating regular reports. Several other WCU units (e.g., Career Services, Center for Service Learning, Mountain Heritage Center) compile similar information and would be willing to share their data collection and reporting mechanisms.

*9. Initiate planning to present additional Programs at the Cherokee Center.*

During the review team's interviews, several WCU faculty members expressed the desire to teach specialized classes at the Cherokee Center. Similarly, some EBCI stakeholders mentioned past Cherokee language classes at the Center, and suggested additional programs such as after-school tutoring by WCU students, or a series of workshops on college application readiness.

*10. Advertise Cherokee Center Services.* The online survey conducted as part of the program review indicated that many respondents were not aware of the variety of services offered by the Cherokee Center. Ways in which this lack of information can be rectified include an expansion of the Center's page on the WCU website, more frequent postings on the Cherokee Center's Facebook page, and the creation/distribution of a print brochure. WCU's Marketing, Social Media, and Creative Services departments can assist with the development of these marketing tools

*11. Cross-train Cherokee Center Staff in Admissions.* In order to better prepare prospective WCU students for a successful college application experience, some WCU stakeholders suggested that Cherokee Center staff should attend basic Admissions training to update and enhance their knowledge of WCU's admissions process.

*12. Participate in Strategic Planning Exercise initiated by WCU administration.*

Short Range Opportunities for the Cherokee Center:

*13. Maintain an on-campus presence in a clearly identified space two days a week.* It is the review committee's perception that the variety and amount of work done by the Cherokee Center on WCU's Cullowhee campus would be greatly facilitated by the establishment of an on-campus office. The Center's Director can post regularly scheduled office hours to facilitate drop-in consultations with WCU students and faculty, as well as regularly network with WCU staff. The Director's on-campus meetings can be scheduled to minimize travel, and office hours could be further extended by the Administrative Support Associate and student workers.

*14. Utilize student workers in Cherokee Center operation.* Although transportation to Cherokee may be a barrier for some students, the establishment of an on-campus office would allow work-study students to serve as receptionists, perform clerical work, and participate in the Center's program planning, marketing and public relations activities. Students in the Cherokee Studies and Native Health programs may be willing to travel to Cherokee for on-site internships or shorter "shadowing" experiences, and some commuting students may welcome the opportunity to work in Cherokee if it is closer to their home than the WCU campus.

*15. Coordinate Pre-Collegiate Programs.* In every interview held in Cherokee, community stakeholders expressed a desire for youth development programs at the

middle and high school levels. These programs would be coordinated by the Cherokee Center and Cherokee Central Schools and utilize WCU faculty members. The general perception was that the current facilities of the Cherokee Center were inadequate to host these programs, and that alternate program sites should be explored.

*16. Establish mentoring programs for middle school, high school and WCU students utilizing current WCU students and alumni.* Mentoring programs will provide a way for Cherokee alumni to continue their connection with WCU, and for current Cherokee WCU students to serve as role models for middle and high-school students. In addition, current students could present on-campus programs for a variety of audiences, such as a campus walking tour of Cherokee sites.

*17. Facilitate a consistent WCU Presence at Cherokee sports events.* EBCI interviewees noted that sports events are an important way for WCU to connect with their community. The Cherokee Center, in partnership with the WCU Athletic Department, would arrange for WCU student athletes to make public appearances at selected athletic events on the Qualla Boundary as a recruitment activity.

Long Range Opportunities for the Cherokee Center:

*18. Develop a program to identify and engage with EBCI college students who return home before completing their degrees.* Several stakeholders identified the large percentage of Cherokee college students who return home (from other colleges and universities) before completing their degrees as an important opportunity for WCU. As a result of additional needs identification and strategic planning with the EBCI, the Cherokee Center and WCU's Admissions Department will develop a strategy for identifying these students and reengaging their college careers at WCU.

*19. Coordinate workforce development programs in partnership with the EBCI.* Another important potential Cherokee Center function identified by EBCI leadership was the coordination of workforce development programs, serving as a liaison between WCU academic departments and EBCI business, foundation and educational leaders. Again, joint WCU and EBCI needs identification and strategic planning is necessary for successful implementation of this idea.

### **Appendix:**

A link to the USDA Rural Education Initiative grant:

<http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants>