Welcome New Faculty and Staff

As part of WCU’s strategic direction to Invest in Our People, the Office of Human Resources and Payroll, the Office of the Provost and Coulter Faculty Commons are collaborating to enhance the ‘on-boarding’ process for new faculty and staff.

This fall, incoming faculty and staff received a new Welcome Booklet produced by Creative Services. The booklet provides an overview of the university and is a quick reference compendium of resources and benefits available to university employees. We hope this booklet serves as a helpful tool for new hires as they navigate campus and integrate into life at WCU. Plans are in place to produce a pdf version of the booklet available online as a resource for current employees as well as for the recruitment of new faculty and staff. A second initiative to recognize new faculty and staff was a welcome lunch with the Chancellor, Provost, and Chairs of the Faculty and Staff Senates, held on August 10th. The lunch was a great opportunity to welcome and celebrate our fifty-one new tenure track and fixed-term full-time faculty members and the seventy-two new permanent staff that have been hired this year.

Welcome all to the Catamount Family!
Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

R25/25Live migration

Progress continues on the migration from R25 (Campus Events Web Calendar) toward the new 25Live class and event scheduling software. WCU is currently transitioning to the new space approval model, which includes a revised and reduced list of space approvers. Careful attention to detail is required in the set up phase of this migration to ensure those requesting information, i.e. the end-users, are able to view and access appropriate information. The planned “go-live” date is October 1, 2015. Training for space approvers and end users is being developed and should be available by mid-September. Be alert for email announcements as we approach the go-live date.

Student Data Mart
Impact on Data Reporting

Over the past 18 months, the UNC System has been developing a centralized Student Data Mart (SDM) which will house all institutions’ official data. The WCU Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE) has been intensely involved in the implementation and validation of the SDM, with the help of Information Technology, UG/GR Admissions, Financial Aid and the Registrar’s Office.

With this fall’s census, WCU and three other pilot campuses will ‘go-live’ with the new Student Data Mart. This transition requires use of completely revamped data file structures which necessitates rebuilding all of our reporting processes including all internal and external reporting (all automated reporting, ad-hoc requests, annual reports, Fact Book, official data in CATalytics, etc.). The impact of this added work will require a longer than usual response time on data requests, and the need to prioritize requests by level of institutional and strategic importance. Data requestors are asked to submit requests well in advance of known deadlines and to expect longer than usual delays in fulfillment of requests.

Thank you for your patience as OIPE works through this major transition. Please contact OIPE’s office at 227-7239 or oipe@wcu.edu if you have any questions regarding this transition or if you have any data needs.

WCU Quality Enhancement Plan

Every ten years, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) conducts a comprehensive review of each of its accredited institutions. Western Carolina University will undergo its next SACSCOC review in 2017, and at the center of that review will be the examination of WCU’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP will be a single, well-defined idea that will improve the institution and enhance student learning.

More than fifty topics were submitted by a committee comprised of staff and faculty from across campus for consideration for WCU’s next ten-year QEP, and eight finalists were chosen. The WCU 2020 Plan and the QEP will become the defining design for the next decade at Western Carolina. Now, all members of the WCU campus community will have the opportunity to cast their vote for the winning idea. Join us September 1st for the three minute thesis presentations then vote at qep.wcu.edu.
New Student Convocation

Submitted by: Dr. Lowell Davis & Glenda Hensley

As the formal and ceremonial welcome for new students to the institution, Convocation is an exciting occasion filled with the promise and dreams of all that can be. It is a perfect blend of pomp and circumstance, school pride, and inspiration. This year’s ceremony was marked by two new traditions that set the tone in an event that launches the academic career at WCU for over 2,000 new freshmen and transfer students. WCU invited members of the community and region to attend, as well as the parents of all the new students, to the event held on August 14th at 5:30 p.m. in Ramsey Regional Activity Center.

New students witnessed faculty and administrators enter by processional, which was led by Chancellor Belcher and Chief Faculty Marshal Gayle Wells. The Pride of the Mountains Marching Band, under the direction of David Starnes, accompanied first lady Susan Belcher as she sang the National Anthem. Students received a powerful charge to settle for nothing less than excellence from Chancellor Belcher during his welcome remarks, and were reminded of some of the many points of excellence and pride that are the hallmarks of WCU. Provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar then introduced the nine academic Deans, as well as other members of the platform party. The Provost urged students to commit to the standards and expectations of the Student Community Creed and demonstrate their pledge by signing a banner at the end of the evening’s event. The Creed Banner, the first new tradition of this year’s Convocation, will be displayed in the University Center on the second floor for the 2015-16 academic year.

This year’s keynote speaker was Wes Moore, author of the 2015 One Book. The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates. WCU’s new freshmen received a copy of Moore’s bestseller during orientation sessions and will continue to engage in a common intellectual conversation through various events scheduled this fall. Mr. Moore’s speech served an inspirational call to action to new students. He reminded them that with privilege comes responsibility and that they should focus on the big questions of life, those things that will matter most and allow them to make the biggest impact. He challenged them to understand that everything is connected and every moment is an opportunity to learn, to lead and to commit to making a difference, locally, regionally and globally.

Another new tradition added to Convocation, was a candle lighting ceremony. Dr. David McCord, Chair of Faculty Senate, introduced the ceremony stating: “The candle lighting represents faculty and students acting together to achieve enlightenment through the acquisition of knowledge. Once lit, the candles serve as a reminder of your pride in WCU and its permanent place in your heart.” Each academic Dean and a student representative from their college took turns lighting candles as they were introduced, representing the achievements and academic success that can be aspired to by the incoming class.

The Band members closed the ceremony by singing the alma mater a cappella as the convocation attendees joined them. The band created an incredible sense of excitement and energy as the students ended the ceremony, marking their official beginning at WCU.
Summer Learning Communities

In 2014, WCU launched First-year Experience (FYE) Summer Catamount GAP learning communities, expanding our First Year Experience. New freshmen accepted to WCU for the upcoming Fall Term under regular admission criteria, are invited to get an early start on their college career. Students earn seven credits in five weeks, attend classes together, live on campus, and get involved in programs and activities to enrich the full student experience. The summer program enrolled 62 new students in the initial 2014 offering, and included a cohort of 18 students enrolled in WHEE Teach, a learning community for students who aspire to be educators.

This initiative was implemented to address Strategic Plan goal 1.5.2:

“Expand the number of resident and distance summer school offerings for a wide variety of learners, including WCU students, guest students, senior citizens, B-12 students, and the general public: expand summer school enrollment by 25 percent by 2020”.

The 2015 enrollment in FYE Summer grew by 55%, to reach 96 students. Six different class groups, or cohorts, were offered, including WHEE Teach. Catamount GAP expanded from three class groups; adding a cohort for Honors students. In addition, working with the Kimmel School, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, and Mathematics Tutoring Center, a new group was developed for students selecting Engineering majors who were identified by Mathematics Placement criteria as students needing help to be 'math-ready' to succeed in Engineering.

The summer learning community program provides a unique transition experience for students who will benefit from the additional support and smaller size afforded by the summer program. With seven credits completed before the fall semester, students can plan to graduate early, make room for a study-abroad experience or internship or afford the opportunity to take a lighter semester when faced with a particularly challenging course load and still Finish in Four!

The 2014 cohort performed extremely well and fall to spring retention for this group was 96.8%, 4.4 points above the average for all full-time freshmen. Students in the 2015 FYE Summer cohort continued to perform extremely well academically. With an average summer GPA of 3.550, 64.58% (62 students) earned a 3.5 or above, and one-third (32 students) earned a 4.0. Students demonstrated overall behaviors known to contribute to student success: accessed resources; developed strong relationships with peers and faculty/staff and engaged with campus and regional opportunities and activities. Ninety-one percent of the summer students engaged with service learning projects. Although early in its development, FYE Summer shows great promise in meeting WCU’s mission for student access and success.

Good Work in the Community.

Jolene Coggins, Administrative Support Specialist in the Registrar’s office, recently raised $4,350.00 for Blue Ridge Early College in Cashiers by recruiting people to link their INGLES cards to this school. The school started the project but she took it and ran with it, asking for friends, neighbors and coworkers to link their cards each year. If you’d like to link your INGLES card to this worthy cause, go to www.inglestoolsforschools.com and follow the prompts to link your card to this particular school. There are several schools with similar names. Jolene encourages you to look for the Blue Ridge Early College in Cashiers. Jolene attended Blue Ridge Early College growing up and said “With all the budget cuts, I thought this would be a good way for the teachers to have money to buy their supplies”.

September 2015
Student Spotlight

Adam Ray has lived in Cullowhee, NC his entire life and calls himself a “true local yokel”. He is a proud Catamount and completed his undergraduate degree at WCU with majors in both History and Social Science Education and minors in Economics and German.

This academic year marks his second year within the Higher Education and Student Affairs graduate program (formerly College Student Personnel) at WCU. Over the course of this academic year, he will work closely with Dr. Lane Perry, Director of the Center for Service Learning, where Adam will teach a University Experience course for incoming freshmen enrolled within the Ripple Effect learning community.

While working diligently to wrap up his graduate studies this year, Adam will serve as the Graduate Student Association (GSA) President. He said, “I am both honored and delighted at the opportunity to serve my fellow graduate students through this position. One major goal that I plan to accomplish during my term is to take an active approach in strengthening the relationship between the GSA and the graduate students who attend the Biltmore Park instructional site through a series of Alumni Speaker events and holding at least two of our regularly scheduled monthly meetings at the site.”

Hank Henderson is serving as the Student Government Association President for the 2015-2016 academic year and Ex Officio member of the Western Carolina University Board of Trustees.

He is a rising junior in the Honors College from Marietta, Georgia where he graduated from Furtah Preparatory School. Henderson was appointed to Student Government his freshman year and has since served as a senator. In addition to SGA, he has been appointed to numerous university committees and been an active member in the campus community.

Henderson resided in the Buchanan dormitory last year and worked as a Residential Assistant to first-year students. As treasurer of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, he has also made his mark on the Greek community.

In his free time, he enjoys hiking, fishing, and other outdoor activities. Henderson spent the summer taking classes in Italy in pursuit of his entrepreneurship degree.

As president, he plans to continue to improve the quality of food on our campus, and heightening school spirit.

Congratulations to Adam Ray and Hank Henderson, exemplary students and leaders at Western Carolina University.
Faculty Spotlight

Todd Collins
Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs,
Director of the Public Policy Institute (PPI)

Dr. Todd Collins is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs and directs the Public Policy Institute (PPI). He earned a BA in Political Science and Philosophy and a JD from UNC-Chapel Hill. He also holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Georgia.

Todd became a faculty member at Western in 2007, to the delight of his father, a proud WCU alumnus. Dr. Collins’ scholarship involves law and courts, and he teaches classes such as Constitutional Law, Judicial Politics, and International Law. He also serves as a pre-law advisor for those students interested in law school after graduation.

Dr. Collins’ recent research projects include examining media coverage of Supreme Court cases, projects determining the influence of attorney briefs in judicial decisions, and a large survey of attorneys that assesses professional relationships and discrimination among lawyers. His work has appeared in both Political Science journals and law reviews, as well as op-eds in newspapers such as the Raleigh News and Observer and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Additionally, he edits the national newsletter Law and Courts published for law and court scholars.

In his role with PPI, Dr. Collins directs engagement projects with local governments and nonprofits that use applied research to improve the region. Recent external partners have included the Community Foundation of WNC, Henderson County, Asheville, Franklin, and the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits, among others.

His prior experiences as an attorney include a wide range of cases, from murder trials to a DWI involving a defendant driving a mule-drawn carriage. Outside of class, Dr. Collins enjoys the beautiful outdoors of the area and can occasionally be found in Reid gym playing (generally) friendly games of pick-up basketball with faculty and staff.
Staff Spotlight

Briana Ford
Military Student Services Offices

Briana Ford graduated from WCU in December, 2009 with a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Psychology. As a student, she worked in the Financial Aid office in the Work-Study Program. In 2010, she came back to WCU to work in Educational Outreach. Since that time she has moved from the front desk, to the School Certifying Official position in the Military Student Services Offices. In 2014, she took on the role of Director.

Briana is the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran. She is also an Air Force mom. Her oldest son, Tripp, is stationed in Italy. This personal connection fuels her passion for working with and advocating for WCU’s military students. Since 2010, Briana has led the Holiday Mail for Heroes drive on campus, partnering with several student organizations. Last year, the WCU community signed over 4,000 Christmas cards for service members. With support from many people on campus, she has established a scholarship for military students, increased participation in the Student Veterans Association and initiated a Veteran’s Day appreciation lunch for faculty, staff, and student veterans. Additionally, Briana has streamlined many of the administrative processes for military students. Briana serves on the Western North Carolina Veterans Council, the Military Affairs Committee (both at WCU and GA), and the Military Veterans Partnership Initiative. She is a graduate of Leadership Asheville Class 33.

In her spare time, Briana enjoys reading, watching low budget B-rated movies, and playing video games with her younger son, Tristan. She likes science fiction, but her favorite books are the Harry Potter Series. She is a supporter of the Harry Potter Alliance, an organization that promotes literacy and equality worldwide and the WCU Quidditch team. Currently, her favorite SciFi movie is the Sharknado trilogy. She lives in Haywood County with husband, Sam and their two cats, Ernie & Lucy. Both cats are former residents of Cataman2 in Cullowhee.