



Faculty Forum

From The Faculty Commons for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Progress of an Idea *Looking Forward – Looking Back*

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*“Neither accident nor miracle placed Western Carolina University here in the heart of the rugged mountains of Western North Carolina” wrote former president William E. Bird in his 1963 publication, **The History of Western Carolina College.**¹*

Bird relates an event in 1944 in which WCU founder, Robert Lee Madison, appeared to reflect on the early years of sacrifice and struggle in moving his dream to reality. “*My heart bled*”, said Madison, “*to find such staggering absence of any forms of meaningful education for the youth of the mountain region, and I felt that something must be done about it.*”² But “*dreams of themselves*”, declares Bird, “*however vital (become) mere dreams or realities*” depending on the dreamer’s understanding of the laws of cause and effect and their expression through the labors of the dreamer.³

The citizens of the valley were, from the outset, writes Bird, determined to have a permanent school in their midst, at whatever cost. They not only provided what meager monetary support they could, they opened their homes and barns as housing for the students who came from across the mountain ranges to study at the new academy, with only one small instruction building on just ½ acre of land, with no provision for housing or dining facilities. The Cullowhee Baptist Church lent its facilities for use in music instruction, and school neighbors saw that wood was hauled in for heating and food was shared from their bounty. Eighteen students met President Madison for the first day of classes and by the end of that first year, 100 students were enrolled, creating serious crowding in that one small building. To solve the problem, local loggers used their sleds and teams of mules and oxen to move the previously closed one room Liberty School House from the East La Porte community to the new Cullowhee Academy, a feat which required taking the building apart in order to transport it, fording the Tuckasegee River and re-constructing it on a site known as the Madison Memorial on the Academy grounds on the top of the hill overlooking the valley. That early campus, consisting of only one building, is pictured here, courtesy of Hunter Library Special Collections.

From the school’s founding in 1889 until 1901, when the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated the first mere \$5,000 in operating capital for the new academy, total support for the school came from the people of Cullowhee Valley and from the students who came from a widening regional scope. Through the years, the school survived a Great Depression, though like everyone else, it lost all its cash assets deposited in a Sylva bank. It also survived two world wars and several

¹ The History of Western Carolina College, William Ernest Bird, University of North Carolina Press, 1963.

² Robert Lee Madison, 1944.

³ The History of Western Carolina College, William Ernest Bird, University of North Carolina Press. 1963

“conflicts” that adversely affected enrollment, taking young male scholars out of school and away to the battlefields.

Despite these hard years, the Academy continued to grow and make improvements and acquisitions, some by outright donation. In the summer of 1923 Madison, having served a total of 24 years as the institution’s dreamer and guide, retired as president, but continued as a member of the faculty, bringing his service to a total of some 40 years. Madison was succeeded in the presidency by Hiram T. Hunter of Wake Forest College, who continued in that role for over 24 years, again providing the continuity and the vision necessary to moving the Madison legacy forward to many of the essential elements of what the university is today. By the time the looming Great Depression forced the NC General Assembly to make deep cuts in its modestly increasing appropriations, the Academy was seeing record enrollments and the school was on the cusp of moving to a four year degree school, which came at last in 1929. The decade to follow, known for its austerity and trials, were, perhaps the most telling years. The state budget cuts of 1930-1931 forced a decrease in faculty salaries by one-half of the \$240 normal salary for a six week term, and then another 10% off that. I wonder how many of us would stay today if we had that severe a cut?

Western Carolina College survived, sometimes held together by a “slender thread of faith and hope”, while many other similar institutions gave up and closed their doors.⁴ Throughout those formative years, institutional leaders and state officials re-stated our founding purpose, which I would argue is no less critical today “to prepare teachers for the public schools of North Carolina.”⁵

More than seven decades have come and gone since those trying years, including many other economic down-turns and periods of international conflict that continue to snatch away the promise of education, community leadership and prosperity from our youth. As the college transitioned in 1967 to a full-fledged regional university, we expanded our academic offerings to include degree programs in many disciplines other than education, leading to greater success in growing enrollment beyond those seeking an education degree. Today, prospective students can find almost any discipline available right here in the Cullowhee Valley.

So, here we are on the eve of the institution’s one hundred twenty-second birthday, and again we find ourselves faced with a struggling economy that is forcing difficult budget cuts, and the impending transition to a new leader at our helm. I grew up here in Cullowhee, lived and worked in Asheville many years, and have been back on the mountain here for eight years now, teaching part-time at the university and as a Faculty Fellow in the Coulter Faculty Commons. It warms my soul to be here in your midst, surrounded by such an august body of intellectuals and scholars, and I share in your dismay at the budget cuts, but I revel in the opportunity to be a part of planning and dreaming the next century of this noble institution’s future.

A few months ago I bought an original autographed copy of former president Bird’s *The History of Western Carolina College – The Progress of an Idea* at a local thrift shop for a measly \$1.00, and reading it prompted a deeper understanding of where we’ve been, and where we must go in the future. My observations and communications with students and local folks tell me that we have strayed too far from the original vision. Still too many mountain youth do not finish high school and go on to higher learning. Why? Is it related to our watered-down recruitment from mountain high schools compared to the efforts we make to attract out-of-state students and those with successful parents living in Charlotte and Raleigh? How, I ask myself, can this institution be more effective in embracing and inspiring the people who live here in our shadow? I was a product of the McKee Training School, which was then THE public school, a quasi-extension of the college, providing a training ground for future teachers who did their practice teaching in our classrooms. Was it this that motivated me, a first generation high school graduate, to dream of a college and graduate school

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 1925 General Assembly Re-authorization of the Charter of Cullowhee State Normal School.

education? Maybe. Why, I ask myself, were local farmers who struggled to survive a crushing economy then, willing to invest their limited resources in helping Madison establish the Cullowhee Academy, when today few local folks will even show up for public forums and educational events sponsored by the university? What has changed and how might we re-invigorate the people of this region to see that their children finish high school and come here to learn? How might we engage them as prime supporters of this institution into the 21st century and beyond?

The answer, I believe, lies in careful selection of the next leader. We must find that unique person who embodies not only the necessary professional training and experience, but also the well-honed people skills and a broad grasp of the culture of this unique region and its people—a person who can deploy that magic combination to build on the legacies of all the presidents and chancellors who have come and gone, including Chancellor Bardo. Thanks, in large part to Bardo, we now have a stellar campus with stunningly beautiful buildings. It is time now to draw our own youth to this magnificent campus to learn and develop the skills they need to teach and inspire subsequent generations of people of our state and region, and to arm them with the knowledge and talents they need to lead us and our grandchildren into the future.

Responses to November Faculty Forum Article Entitled

Bias on Campus: Fighting the Problem, Embracing a Solution

By Thomandra Sam

Henry Wong, EOE and Employment Relations: *My thanks to Dr. Sam on a well written, important, and timely article re Bias. Thanks.*

Nancy F Davis MC RD LDN: *Dr Sam, Thank you for the attention you bring to the issue of bias. The review of the framework for recognizing healthy dialogue, biased interaction, and hate crimes or aggression is useful.*

"Nipping behaviors in the bud" is the best way to prevent escalation and the suggested strategies for individuals who are the target of bias or who may be in a place to observe the incident(s) are applicable across the board. Early identification and intervention will allow WCU administration to work toward an outcome that is a win win for the involved parties and hopefully more self assured, open minded, inclusive people. There is value in the notion that what goes around comes around, and completely understanding that attempting to hold someone down does not lift you up.

Soon after this article was published I noticed a prompt on a commercial vehicle: "Compliments or Concerns".

My mind is organized in a way that I recognize extremes by comparing to neutral; so that I must be able to understand neutral or my assessment of the situation is skewed. I believe that students who are accustomed to bias from one of the extreme poles, do not understand neutral or the polar opposite from which they consider "usual climate". We all have had the moment of decision to take action, and we lacked the confidence or the energy to "report" bias (against ourselves or others); it was easier to be supportive or recognize it "out there" than it was to own it as wrong. Too often, there is a climate of deserve it, attract it, or had it coming and therefore no need to report it.

Thank you for raising awareness to the chain for intervention. I hope it is used to accentuate both extremes as well as neutral: #1 relationships that are healthy and facilitate inclusiveness; #2 those that are in need of repair and intervention. Every time one person moves independently toward complimenting, equity and healthy interaction the ripple of growth is realized by all of us.

We all need to be aware of the confidence gained and the peace that is present when non-biased dialogue is the climate of choice. The presentation of this information challenges me to observe and be aware of my own actions/reactions, as opposed to being defensive and looking for the "bad guys".

News and Notes from the WCU Faculty Senate

**By Erin McNelis
Chair, Faculty Senate**

The December 1st meeting of the Faculty Senate promises a lot of business as well as discussion and debate on several important topics on faculty's minds.

- A call for a university-wide prioritization plan that is visible to and involves input from all divisions and members of the university community
- Collegial Review Issues – clear charges to collegial review committees and confidentiality requirements
- Proactive call for review of DCRDs in anticipation of a need for increased teaching loads; the need to systematically reduce research and service requirements in proportion to the increase in required teaching load

Additional issues in Senate Councils include: an Honors College Liberal Studies Course Replacement form; SACS Distance and Correspondence Education Policy; Revisions to Section 4.0 of the Handbook (PTR wording and inclusion of DCRDs); clarifications on elected and appointed terms to the University Collegial Review Council; an update on the Faculty and Staff Memorial; clarification of requirements and procedures for Emeritus Faculty status; revising Graduate Faculty Status; clarification of who can serve as a Faculty Senator; and revising the Faculty Scholarship Task Force report deadline.

For more details on Faculty Senate activities and business, visit the Faculty Senate website:

<http://www.wcu.edu/25121.asp>

Update on the Chancellor Search Open Forums: The turnout for the session for faculty was very good and members of our faculty were very involved and shared their views on the initial questions posed:

1. What is your perception of the “state of the union” of the University?
2. What are the priorities of the chancellorship?
3. What background do you think candidates for this position should have?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Plus the additional questions:

5. What are you proud of/what do you do well?
6. If it's a year in the future and you're about to grade the new Chancellor, what would he or she need to have done to get an “A” from you?

Note From The Editor

We urge you to add your comments to Faculty Forum articles. It enriches the faculty dialogue about these many issues that concern us all. Comment to this article by clicking on this link then select the article under What's Hot on the top right: <https://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/>. The command requires you to use your email username and password to access the article. The Faculty Forum is a publication by and for WCU faculty, so this is our method of limiting access.

To access the article as a PDF, please select the article link at the following URL:
<http://www.wcu.edu/24987.asp>.

The direct link to the main Faculty Forum Webpage is: <http://www.wcu.edu/7480.asp>.

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