



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 22, No. 5

February 1, 2010

The Future of Cullowhee: Staff and Faculty Voice Their Opinions

Todd A. Collins, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science
<http://blog.wcu.edu/tcollins>

Last semester faculty and staff shared their opinions about potential development and changes to Cullowhee. This important survey was part of a civic engagement project for upper-level political science students, who were directly involved in writing the survey questions, publicizing the survey, and initial data interpretation. This project mirrors a student survey conducted last spring that measured student opinions. We also worked closely with the Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor (CuRvE), which is working to improve the area. In total, 589 employees (including 381 faculty members) voiced their views and concerns about Cullowhee. This represented 40% percent of WCU's employees. On behalf of the students in the class, I want to thank you to all those who took time out of their busy schedules to complete the survey. This semester students will be presenting the results in an open forum, probably about mid-March, and I encourage everyone to attend. Watch for more announcements about the event.

While there are many areas in our community that may need revitalization, our focus in the study involved the area along Old Cullowhee Road. Aside from its importance as being within walking distance of campus, our survey results also indicate that many faculty members (65%) travel along Old Cullowhee Road at least weekly. Survey questions included opinions on Cullowhee's current appearance, current use of the businesses along Old Cullowhee Road, and potential use of future businesses and recreational activities.

Many of the results are not surprising to those that have heard complaints for years about the conditions around campus. For example, over 77% of the respondents indicated that the current businesses and structures along Old Cullowhee Road need "a lot of improvement." Many of the open-ended comments mentioned the need to remove dilapidated and unattractive buildings. When asked how often they currently use the businesses along Old Cullowhee Road, about 14% say they

use the businesses weekly, 38% say they use the businesses monthly, 25% said once or twice a semester, and 22% say they never or almost never frequent these businesses. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) said they would be much more likely to use these businesses if they were cleaned up and improved. Out of those that said they currently do not use those businesses at all, nearly half (44%) said they would be much more likely to use those businesses if they were cleaned up and improved.

We also asked about usage of new businesses and recreational activities in the Old Cullowhee Road area. Most respondents (66%) said they were “very interested” in seeing new businesses open along Old Cullowhee Road, with another 29% stating that they were “somewhat interested” in new businesses. Most respondents said that they would use grocery stores (82%), sit down restaurants (96%), and bookstores (84%) if available. Support appears to be present for other businesses, but to a lesser extent, as 60% said they would use convenience stores, 63% for drug stores, 60% for fast food restaurants, and 61% said they would use new clothing stores. It also appears that many employees’ wishes mirror those of the students, as many respondents also mentioned the need for pubs, bars, music venues, and other place to socialize, with the possibility of having an adult beverage, as well.

Most respondents also showed interest in additional recreational opportunities in the Old Cullowhee Road area. Nearly 83% said they would use picnic areas, 82% said they would use hiking, biking, or walking trails, and 68% said they would use canoe, kayak, or tubing put-ins in the river if available. Fewer respondents indicated a desire to use designated swimming areas in the river (49%) or designated fishing areas (37%). As many folks are aware, Jackson County has noted the recreational potential of this area, too, as plans are underway for a greenway trail to follow the river in the Old Cullowhee Road area.

Regardless of whether our concerns are for greater recreational opportunities, having a place to get a beer after work, or just a desire to make the area more aesthetically pleasing as we drive to work, there is another key concern that was clear from this survey: the area around the University impacts who works and attends the University. A majority of the respondents (61%) said Cullowhee’s setting makes it more difficult to hire and retain faculty. These results comply with the anecdotal stories of departments that intentionally avoid taking their job candidates along Old Cullowhee Road when giving area tours. Only 8% said that Cullowhee’s setting has no impact on faculty recruitment and retention, 11% saying that Cullowhee’s setting attracted faculty, and 19% were unsure of Cullowhee’s impact. Similarly, 58% of the respondents said that Cullowhee’s setting makes it more difficult to attract and retain students.

The overall opinion from respondents indicates that due to our surroundings, the University may be losing (or never getting) good colleagues and bright students. While Cullowhee will never be (nor would most want it to be) the next Atlanta, Asheville, or (insert your favorite metropolis here),

issues raised by this study and the student survey indicate a need for concern. The results indicate a pressing need and desire to revitalize our greater University neighborhood, for both personal and professional reasons. While many steps have been taken to improve the appearance on-campus, most would not deny that stepping off-campus is a much different story. If we want to maintain competitiveness for top faculty and students, the answer lies not just in making an attractive campus, but doing what we can in our community as well.

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 directly to this article by clicking on this link: https://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/wiki/0ac30/The_Future_of_Cullowhee_Staff_and_Faculty_Voice_Their_Opinions.html. 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>.

Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning Responses to the December 09 Faculty Forum article



Soaring High or Parachuting Out

Reflections on Phased Retirement

By Gordon Mercer

Vera,

Gordon's article is excellent! Thanks for encouraging Gordon to share his experiences with those of us who just might be looking at phased retirement in the not too distant future. Always a pleasure to work with you!

Don Livingston

Great work, Vera. Thank you.

Beth Tyson Lofquist

I have always enjoyed the Faculty Forum and you have been doing an excellent job. Have a great day.

Fred Hinson

I am thankful that you've been able to place all 21 years online [not to mention making sure Dr. Mercer's article was included in this month's offering].

Mark Crawford

Disclaimer

Please note: The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Coulter Faculty Center.