



# Faculty Forum

*From The Faculty Commons for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

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WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## **2011: A Year of Tremendous Change and Opportunity**

**By Erin McNelis**

Last fall we started off the academic year with a focus on strategic planning and WCU's future with "Vision 2020". Yet, with announcements of turnovers at WCU and the UNC system leadership, and continuing budget woes, it is challenging to focus on the long-term when the New Year holds so many unknowns. At times I find it hard to see past the day, the classes, the meetings, and the deadlines, let alone the week, the semester, or the next decade; but that is exactly what we're called to do, and where publications like the *Faculty Forum* can help. We all have conversations about the impending changes and our opinions about the mission of WCU with our friends, our colleagues, and our departments. I hope that you will be willing to take some time to write down some of your thoughts and share them with the greater community of Western's faculty.

The upcoming **Faculty Caucus** has been re-scheduled due to the weather, for **Wednesday, January 19, 2011, 3 – 5 p.m., Illusions (in the UC)**. This is another excellent opportunity to get faculty together to discuss and develop a unified vision. Goodness knows that we will never agree on everything, but I believe there is a core philosophy about the future of our university that we all share and that needs to be articulated.

The forums with the Chancellor's Search Committee last November were very well attended, and individuals still continue to provide information to the Search Committee via the comment buttons on the search's website, but this is a chance to come together as a community and decide what Western Carolina University can and should be in the future. As one of my colleagues put it, we, as faculty, have the ability to shape our adaptation to our new circumstances, particularly our new budget, and to position ourselves not only to survive but to make smarter decisions. Rather than seeing WCU's administrative turnover as a hindrance or lull in our momentum, we should see it as our opportunity to shape the vision and mechanisms of our university that will enable us to leap into the future with purpose and drive.

For those who were unable to attend the faculty forum with the Chancellor's Search Committee or have not had the opportunity to read the transcripts on the web site, I'd like to present some of the thematic comments that were made, as well as others that I have received when asking for comments for this article. I hope that these will stir your thoughts, not just about our next Chancellor, but about the dynamics of the university, our mission, our strengths, and our obligations to our students, our region, and beyond.

### **Western's Strengths:**

- Our focus on quality teaching
- We serve the "late bloomer"
- Our Unique resources (cultural, ecological, etc.)
- Our Quality Enhancement Program (QEP)
- We produce citizens who care about this part of the country

**The Chancellor, WCU, and the Region:**

- The Chancellor needs to have knowledge of our region and our sense of place.
- The Chancellor needs to bring economic opportunities to the area; to continue that part of Chancellor Bardo's mission.
- The Chancellor must be a partner with the community, both civically and socially.
- The Chancellor must understand what it means to be a comprehensive university.
- The Chancellor should creatively explore options for bringing education to people here who find it difficult or impossible to access now.

**Leadership Style:**

- The Chancellor must foster a culture of openness and collaboration.
- The Chancellor must be able to connect and relate with students, faculty, and staff.
- The Chancellor must recognize the important role faculty play.
- Communication is key.
- The Chancellor should put together a leadership team with accountability and transparency, with expectations of teamwork across divisions.

**Academic Qualifications:**

- The Chancellor would not be required to have a scholarly record, but must understand scholarship.
- The Chancellor and Provost should function as a team, with the Chancellor willing to defer to the Provost in terms of academic qualification issues.
- A person who can lead an academic institution without a scholarly background is rare, and WCU should not be run like a business.
- The Chancellor must understand the importance of expertise and scholarship for the faculty, and how to convey that.

**Miscellaneous Comments:**

- We're trying to be all things to all people – we have too many things going on and we need to focus.
- The Chancellor must understand the importance of liberal studies in producing future citizens.
- The Chancellor must be invested in and an advocate for the humanities.
- The Chancellor must be committed to employment equity, particularly for our contingent faculty.
- The Chancellor must be a visionary.

I hope these comments and themes have helped to stir your thoughts, and that you'll consider sharing YOUR UNIQUE thoughts with the rest of us by responding to this *Faculty Forum* piece. I wish you a healthy and rewarding new year!

*Erin McNelis joined Western Carolina University in August 2002. She is an Associate Professor of Mathematics and currently serves as the Faculty Chair and the Coordinator of the Applied Mathematics Graduate Program. She is active in interdisciplinary research, particularly mathematical biology and computational science, and has led national workshops for scientists and educators in these areas. Currently preparing an introductory text on scientific computing, Erin has also published and presented work in incorporating simulation and modeling in mathematics courses.*

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## Coulter Faculty Commons for Teaching and Learning Responses to December issue of Faculty Forum Entitled

### Progress of an Idea: Looking Forward Looking Back



*We got mail!*

#### **From Mae Claxton, English Department**

*Vera, I really appreciate your article. This message was particularly appropriate coming from you with your connections to this community and the university. It is so timely to remind ourselves of our inspirational past and our historic connection to the community. I have always been proud to be part of a university with such a dedicated faculty and staff. I hope we can find a chancellor who really appreciates our history and our community. The word "community" is just as relevant now as it was at the beginning of our history. All the best, Mae.*

#### **From Catherine Carter, English Department**

*Thanks, Vera, for the December 2010 Faculty Forum piece, "Progress of an Idea." One particularly illuminating point is that the split universities often take for granted, "town and gown", didn't always exist here, and doesn't need to exist here, either. Western Carolina University, in its early days, was meant to serve a very particular region, and it can still do that. I hope our incoming Chancellor will take every opportunity to maintain and strengthen good relations with Sylva and with Jackson County, and to serve their very local and particular needs.*

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## Editorial Notes

We urge you to add your comments to **Faculty Forum** articles. It enriches the faculty dialogue about these many issues that concern us all. This is a particularly poignant time for faculty at WCU, as we contemplate a new Chancellor. Please take this opportunity to add to this important discussion. You may 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, but we do invite comments from staff, who are equally important in the pursuit of excellence here at WCU .

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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