



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 5, No. 8

May 1, 1993

The True Heroes

Western Carolina University is but a tiny dot on a map containing thousands of other institutions of higher education across the country. What makes that dot slightly brighter than the others in the eyes of Western students and alumni? In simpler terms, what makes WCU unique? I believe it is the faculty. This is not necessarily because most of the faculty have earned doctorate degrees or because of their willingness to trudge to work through snowstorms but because they truly care about their students.

If I were to randomly survey citizens across the United States, the majority would have heard of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill while only a few would recognize the name Western Carolina University. The reason for this might be Chapel Hill's excellent and well-known athletic program or because of its size and high rate of out-of-state attendance. But with apologies to all those who hum the tune of the Tarheel alma mater, aside from all the NCAA fame and glitter, it is possible that student faculty relationships there rank an extremely distant second to those at WCU. For example, a high school friend who attends UNC-CH recently visited me during her spring break. She told me that after returning for the spring semester she had made an appointment with the history professor with whom she had received a grade of C instead of her expected grade of A. When she arrived to inquire about the surprise grade, the professor was sitting with his feet lounged across his desk, smoking a pipe and reading a book. As she explained her situation, the professor did not once alter his position or shift his eyes from his book. After five minutes of this so-called interaction she frantically asked, "Are you even listening to me?" Without looking up he responded, "I grade as I see fit and your grade stands as is." Needless to say, she was very hurt and distraught by the professor's lack of interest in student affairs. I was very proud and happy to tell her that I had never had an encounter like hers with a faculty member at WCU and did not anticipate ever having one. Even though WCU's basketball team has never been declared National Champions, I don't think you'll ever find another school where the faculty cares as much about its present and former students.

Obviously, WCU's faculty is not the only faculty which cares about its students, but there are probably few faculties that care to the degree or depth of WCU's faculty. Teachers at every

STEERING COMMITTEE: FACULTY CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Larry Boyd (7401) | Jerry Cook (7272) | Duncan Tye (7401) |
| Steve Eberly (7264) | Sharon Jacques (7467) | Al Wiggins (7491) |
| Hal Herzog (7361) | Glenn Liming (7260) | Kathleen Wright (7491) |
| Casey Hurley (7415) | Henry Mainwaring (7244) | |

FACULTY FELLOWS

| |
|-------------------------------|
| Ellen Bacon, Fellow (7196) |
| Hal Farwell, Fellow (7196) |
| Terry Nienhuis, Fellow (7196) |

CENTER STAFF

| |
|--|
| Ben Ward, Director (7196) |
| Mary Anne Nixon, Asst. Director (7196) |

school ask students to learn assigned material and fulfill class objectives and many professors try to incorporate education about real life into their daily curriculum in order to benefit the student, but the WCU faculty is not only committed to student achievement inside the classroom; it is also concerned about the student's life outside of the classroom. The students of WCU deeply respect their teachers and are not afraid to ask for their help regarding personal matters. I believe that every student at WCU has at least one teacher whom he/she thinks of as a mentor and/or friend. I know this because I personally have a wonderful instructor whom I view as a figure who will remain an intellectual and emotional support during my period of personal and intellectual growth at the university. I am assured that he is willing to help me, or any of his students, with any problem we might endeavor during our stay in Cullowhee. I am certain that many other students feel the same because I have seen them chatting with professors after class, stopping teachers in the hall, and conversing with them over lunch. These examples show the faculty's interest in the students and their willingness to be accessible.

Since students feel they can confide in faculty members, a teacher at WCU cannot predict what a student will ask him/her next. As a result of the closeness between the students and faculty, not only traditional questions about homework are answered by the faculty. Questions range from "how do I get to the telephone company in Sylva," to "I think I have a drug problem, where can I get help?" Problems which a student might come to a teacher with range from ways to confront an unfaithful significant other in a relationship, finding the best school to transfer to in a particular field, or thoughts of dropping out of school because of the lack of a feeling of direction. By answering these questions, a member of the WCU faculty willingly takes on the roles of instructor, adviser, counselor, mentor, friend, Mom/Dad, and information bank. This characteristic is important to the adjustment and well-being of the student and can be readily found among the ranks of professors at WCU, perhaps to an extent that is truly unique in higher education.

While the main purpose of this essay has been to define and explain the factor which makes WCU unique, it is also commendation for those special teachers about whom I have written. It is offered as a small reward for their dedication, just in case student smiles and thank-you's are slightly too sparse or sporadic. But this essay is also an effort to inspire those teachers who have "given-up" because of student apathy. I would like to remind them that even though they may not always hear the praise which they deserve, the students at WCU do appreciate their involvement and value their advice--today, tomorrow, and far into the future.

Sarah Floyd, Freshman