

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

## **Responses to Phil Wade**

At the risk of sounding like a defensive administrator, I would like to point out that all the things Phil Wade suggests at the end of his essay were implemented about five years ago, and they are working. Enrollment is up at WCU and so are SAT scores. We are finally on the path ASU discovered twenty years ago.

I would prefer to compare 1988 and 1991 enrollment and to use only ASU, WCU, and UNC General Administration figures. In those years, ASU is up seventeen points on SAT, WCU is up twenty four, and the UNC system is up twenty one. This paints a different picture and one which I think provides a fairer assessment of recent activities. UNCA's average SAT score actually went down between 1976 and 1988, and only went up this year in response to the new chancellor's policy that they would have to restrict enrollment to make their SAT's fit their image. UNCA is not really a comparable institution. Why not compare us with ECU?

Phil's essay points out that our problems stem from a decision made in the mid-1970's to build enrollment at any cost. It worked at first when we jumped by nearly 500 students in 1975, but by 1985, as Phil said, the bad students had driven out the good (and many others) and our enrollment was below what it was in 1974 (while the system enrollment was up). The students had caught on and the university had to make a decision. We could hold the course and try to bring in more bodies, or we could change our direction. We chose the latter. After suffering initial reductions in funds, we are now back on course with more students and higher SAT's.

*Cliff Lovin, Dean, Arts & Sciences*

There are three ways that **geography** conspires against us in terms of attracting students as our regional sister institutions do. Most obviously, the "friction of distance" continues to place WCU at a market disadvantage. The North Carolina center-of-gravity is far away from us and so, therefore, is the bulk of the potential college

student cohort. The farther a "consumer" must travel to obtain a good or a service, the less is the incentive to travel there. A glance at a map of North Carolina reveals that WCU is indeed the most distant and isolated of the sixteen UNC institutions with regard to the in-state student market. That geographic factor will NEVER change.

Also at work is the principle of "intervening opportunity." In the field of location analysis, this principle holds that when more than one source of supply exists, the source nearest to the consumer will usually be chosen. If an additional supply source is created closer to the consumer, the new source will likely be substituted--an "intervening opportunity" that changes or eliminates the interaction between the original supplier and the consumer. For example, the creation of UNC-A as a constituent institution of the UNC system represents a classic case of intervening opportunity not only BETWEEN WCU and an important market area (the Piedmont), but also WITHIN its traditional market area (the Mountains). True, the very geographic location of WCU that isolates it also lends beauty and attractiveness to its character and that's a "draw" in some respects, but I doubt that it compensates very much for the double-whammy of distance and intervening opportunities.

Finally, the actual SHAPE--the physical outline of North Carolina--conspires against WCU in its efforts to draw students. Refer again to a map. Western North Carolina is actually a long and narrow "peninsula." The state gets wider and "fatter" all the way to the coast--more territory, more people, more cities, more "market area," and more choices of colleges! If you're stuck out on the end of a more sparsely-populated peninsula you can see what kind of a "market area" you're left with. The perception of a peninsular market constriction is further enhanced when you remember that the state restricts ALL state institutions, east and west, from accepting more than 18% out-of-state freshmen! Who's going to be the biggest geographic loser then? NCSU? UNC-G? UNC-C? No, it's WCU that gets cut

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out most severely from the out-of-state market, with Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina so enticingly close yet blocked off by that invisible "18% Curtain," a marketing "Berlin Wall." Furthermore, on the only side of the peninsula that's "open" (the east), there sit those "intervening opportunists," UNC-A and ASU, diverting at least some of the student flow that would legitimately be available to WCU.

As Dr. Wade stated, there are many factors that impinge upon WCU's ability to attract and retain students of whatever quality. Perhaps after a number of responses to Dr. Wade's excellent and timely piece have been aired, we had better address another critical question: if more rigorous quality control can indeed stimulate WCU's "glacially-slow" growth, just how much "growth" is going to be enough for this already-crowded valley of Cullowhee?

*Jeff Neff, Geosciences &  
Anthropology*

Phil Wade's opinion piece raises some interesting issues that I can agree with, especially that each faculty member needs to exercise standards with present students and award grades consistent with academic rigor. However, I disagree with the point that the solution to the quality problem at WCU is to raise the admission standards. It is the old argument, "give me better students and I will be a better teacher."

Teaching today's students requires from the faculty new behaviors, new thinking, and new processes. With some exceptions, most of our students are poorly prepared. They have poor reading, writing, and math skills, very weak analytical skills, poor study habits, little intellectual self-discipline, and slight value for what we have to offer. They are a reflection of the larger society. Our job is to meet our students' needs where our students are and not where we wish them to be. Teaching today's WCU students requires that we collectively make up for their deficiencies by changing what

we do and how we do it. But this does not mean abandoning academic standards.

Therein lies the crux. Faculty have to admit that each of us needs to change his or her behavior and how he or she spends his or her time. We need to spend the preponderance of our time with students and for students. This is where the problem becomes one of university-wide policy. We do not have a value system or reward system that reinforces the behaviors and activities necessary to teach our students well. Despite all of the rhetoric to the contrary, we do not have a coherent policy that enacts the mission statement that WCU adopted.

I see places like WCU as opportunities for those students who, in the "old days," never got to go to college. **We can be a first rate, third-tier university.** That is very much different from being a third rate school. All it takes is for the faculty to have the will to change its values and behavior and focus its scholarly energies on educating the students we are fortunate enough to have in our classrooms.

*Bill Kane, Management*

Average SAT scores are not the issue that we should concentrate on in regard to academic standards. Such measures reflect what Alexander Astin has called the "reputational model" for judging the quality of higher education institutions. I agree with Astin that what we should use instead is a "developmental model," which focuses on an institution's ability to enhance the academic (and general) development of its students and faculty members. Furthermore, I would argue that the broadened concept of scholarship recently discussed by Ernest Boyer provides a useful measure for judging the degree to which that development occurs.

How does WCU do when judged by this measure? This is where I really despair because it is here that we as a faculty, rather than admissions officers, public school teachers, or

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even students, become the focus. For example, perhaps more telling than the average SAT score of **entering** students would be the average SAT score of those who ultimately **graduated**. (Based on the evidence I was given in anecdotal form by a previous administrator here, the average SAT score of graduating students is not significantly different from the average entering student--better SAT scorers are not more likely to graduate from WCU.)

The softer evidence of what happens to students while they are here at WCU is not encouraging. To paraphrase Astin, although we frequently recognize or even reward the demonstration of intellect, we less frequently engage in its development. Gathered informally over fourteen years at WCU, my experience has been that students are not asked to read enough, write enough or generally work hard enough while they are here. Students get by with sloppy work by almost anyone's criteria. Many faculty members do not want to take the time required to grade assignments, or more broadly, to give students the kind of constructive feedback they need to develop. In many courses, the major feedback students receive comes in the form of test grades or grades on end-of-term papers that they never get back, get back with few remarks, or get back with low grades for low quality but which never have to be rewritten at a competent level. As one colleague has pointed out repeatedly, the faculty too frequently has joined the students in a conspiracy against scholarship.

I guess it would be nice if we could change our admissions policies so that we would have better students. In the short run, we might become as small as UNCA and have a faculty about its size, but I would miss some of those low-SAT students who I have seen blossom as they began to take learning seriously for the first time. Instead of recruiting better students, I would rather see us change our teaching behavior. Yes, that means more of the C's, D's, and F's, but it also means more work for us as faculty members to teach students in the rigorous fashion Dr. Wade suggests. This is work that might eventually lead to a change in

reputation for WCU, one in which prospective students come to perceive WCU as a place where students, regardless of their entering abilities, expect that their minds will be changed.

*Bruce Henderson, Psychology*