

# THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

## President Outlines Plans for 'America's Next Great College'

James Gray, Wesleyan's sixth president, has taken an active part in college life since he began his post over the summer. The Decree staff conducted a recent email interview with Gray on a wide-ranging set of issues.

**Q.** Students don't always understand the exact role of the president. Please describe your main duties.

**A.** The traditional role of a college president is chief executive of the school, and I am that for sure. But I also know that a college is far different than a corporation. For example, the status and responsibilities of the faculty are much removed from that of "employees." Some presidents who do not come from a lifelong tenure in the academic world do not understand that and may rebel against it at their peril. I am comfortable with the way we are governed. I report to the board of trustees. I want to lead more than manage, doing so with positive motivation versus a strong-armed management style.

We are fortunate that we have Dean Jay Stubblefield as the direct-line person responsible for academic and faculty affairs, though the trustees and I remain responsible at the end of the day for all that the school is and does.

My main responsibilities are managing and making the final decisions

### NCWC Meal Plan Policy Reversed

By Decree Staff

After considerable outcry among Wesleyan students, the college has rescinded a new policy that would have required all commuters to buy a meal plan for the school cafeteria.

The plan is now optional, according to Dean of Students Randy Williams, who came to Wesleyan after the plan had already been implemented.

Dean Williams and other administrators received numerous complaints from the Wesleyan community before making their decision, which Williams detailed in a recent email to the affected students.

"We hope that rescinding this policy demonstrates how much we value you as a student," Williams wrote. "The policy was partly developed to engage you further with the resources and activities offered at the college."

Many commuter students were angry on learning of the new charge over the summer.

One was Jessica Ashley, a senior and a mother of a 4-year-old daughter. She commutes 35 miles from Halifax. When she's not focusing on her coursework, Ashley said, she is holding down three part-time jobs and working almost 15 hours per week as an intern at the Bassett Center, where she assists homeless families.

She said the cafeteria charge came to \$255 per semester.

"I was outraged," she said. "My class schedule doesn't allow me to eat in the cafe. Between work and my internship and class, I'm not even here. And I'm not going to come early to eat breakfast. I have to get my daughter ready for school. I was being charged for something I was never going to use."

Other students had a similar reaction. Senior Shakelia Johnson, the mother of a 6-year-old son, commutes 20 miles to campus twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, two days filled with classes. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, she can be found off campus working as an intern at WebPoint Communications.

When she learned of the new meal plan requirement, she thought it was unfair. "I have not been in the cafeteria since the first week of my freshman year," she said.

She added that a plan for commuter students is "fine, but it should be optional to those commuter students who want it. Students such as myself are just too busy or have other obligations that hinder us from eating in the cafeteria."

What most upset Johnson was that the meal plan requirement was instituted without input from students. The charge just showed up on her bill, she said. "We were not made aware of the meal plan before it took effect," she said.

See MEAL PLAN pg 2

on our school budget, fundraising, serving as the chief communicator and community ambassador for the school, inspiring alumni, hiring and managing all employees with particular emphasis on senior staff and senior faculty, and in general being where the "buck



New NC Wesleyan President Gray with Ruby

Photo by C. Thomas

stops" for management of the school.

In turn, I report to our 24-member Board of Trustees, whose main job is to set policy and establish strategy while the president handles day-to-day management.

**Q.** Often a college president will possess extensive classroom and administrative experience. Your background is a little different, in that you've spent time in public relations and other fields. In light of your experience, what particular challenges will you face as president? And what strengths do you bring to the position, strengths that other college presidents may lack?

**A.** A good president's chief skills are relationship building, leading, marketing the school, fundraising, communicating and cheerleading. My whole career has taught me those skills, so in a way I have been preparing for this job all my adult life.

**Q.** In the past, students have sometimes complained that the Wesleyan president has not been visible enough on campus. But many students have already been impressed by your involvement in orientation and other activities. What are your plans for interacting with students?

**A.** I will continue to be highly visible on my geezer bike and on foot! But I don't want to be intrusive or micro-managing. A college is like any organization in that it's all about communicating openly and honestly with people. Building relationships that benefit the school and faculty-students-staff is all-important.

We are opening up the president's house to much more in the way of receptions and events for our total community. It is your house and not ours. I know my wife, Beth, is enthusiastic about being a major contributor to Wesleyan as well.

### No H1NI Cases Reported

By Decree Staff

Director of Health Services Holley Fairly reported no H1NI (swine flu) cases on campus as of September 15.

The news comes as many U.S. colleges have seen an early onset of the illness.

According to reports in the national media, Washington State University has been one of the schools hardest hit, with more than 2,000 reported cases, while the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State have each reported more than 300 cases. Closer to home, Wake Forest University said that some 100 students have been diagnosed and treated for H1NI at its campus in Winston-Salem, according to news reports.

NC Wesleyan's new Dean of Students Randy Williams and his staff are finalizing a preparedness plan to help the college respond in the event of an outbreak here.

Fairley has urged members of the Wesleyan community to get a shot for the seasonal flu. She noted that a flu shot clinic

**Q.** From time to time, there's talk of increasing Wesleyan's size. What are your long-range plans with regard to expansion? If you would like to see Wesleyan undergo significant growth, what would you tell students who like the college at its current size?

**A.** Our long-range plan says that we need to increase the size of both the on-campus student body and the adult degree program as well. Recommendations that seem to make sense are to aim for 1,000 students over the next three to five years. I do not believe that will hurt our class size or small college feeling or individual attention to learning. It will give us a stronger financial footing. With ADP, we probably need to add about 200 students over the next few years.

We have a balanced budget now, so we are not desperate for the revenue. I want to emphasize that. Of course our dorms are full this fall so we need to think about more dorm space, another classroom building and more faculty to accommodate that growth.

When the economy gets better in 2-3 years we hope to have a major capital campaign to raise money for those two buildings, rehab of our oldest buildings, and a football stadium/track and field complex. I am committed to taking care of our academic side before building that stadium, but it is important to give our students and alumni that full, rich campus experience.

**Q.** Describe your priorities as far as making physical improvements to the college?

**A.** Right now we are kicking off a big beautification program, starting with major planting in October around the front entrance and fountain. We are installing new signs around campus. As money becomes available, we will do much more. We have fixed the Wi-Fi system, repaired the fence around the soccer field, and made non-visible changes to our physical plant. My dream is to blow up the Braswell parking lot and put in green space and a fountain that serve as a town square for our community.

**Q.** What are your thoughts on making Wesleyan a "green" campus?

**A.** I am all for that, and we have some plans under way. However, to be honest, we need to put our money into other more critical things around school like landscaping, servers, classrooms, sports facilities, dorms bathrooms, etc.

Many of our dorm bathrooms are awful (but clean) due to their age. We hope to kick off a rejuvenation program soon. Each will cost about \$28,000, so we'll have to phase it in.

**Q.** What are some other immediate and long-term objectives?

**A.** We will have a new strategic plan that has been worked on for two years by faculty, staff and trustees. Students have given valuable input as well. We will share it with the entire campus and seek everyone's help in executing it. I have stated most priorities above. We want to grow the quantity and quality of our

students. Faculty expansion is critical. Our campus needs to look better and work better.

**Q.** What are your thoughts on Wesleyan becoming a "dry campus?" In what ways, if any, were you involved in that decision? What's the rationale behind it?

**A.** That decision was made before I arrived. I support it because so few of our students are 21 or older. I understand there was one over-21 dorm last year in which we allowed drinking but that it created problems.

This is a good example of an issue that in the final analysis will be decided by our community of students, faculty, staff and trustees. If the community wants to drink or tolerate drinking, there are ways for young people to do it regardless of the rules. If there is a student-driven desire to open this issue up, I will consult with our Student Affairs leaders and trustees and determine how to respond.

But let me make it clear that personally I believe we have the right policy.

**Q.** What are your beliefs on the rights

of student journalists? Can you envision a situation in which you would either block publication of an article or alter the content of a story?

**A.** I spent the first seven years of my career as a reporter in with the Winston-Salem Journal and Atlanta Constitution. I absolutely loved it and found it the most intense learning experience of my entire career. There would have to be something really bad for me to step in and censor a student journalist's work. If something were to do damage to a student or another member of community, through error or intent, I would withhold the right to stop it.

I believe deeply in free speech and a free press.

**Q.** What else would you like to say to students and other members of the Wesleyan community?

**A.** We have the ability to be America's next great college. Join me in believing that and working hard toward that. No one will love our students, faculty and staff more than I. No one will go to more student events than I. It sounds funny, but I have fallen in love with Wesleyan.

## Advice Given to Help Wesleyan Freshmen

By Meghan Herd & Rodney Holley  
Decree Staff Writers

North Carolina Wesleyan upperclassmen, faculty, and staff have come together to share some pointers on what could take first-year students to success.

Many can agree that time management is the main priority for freshmen. "Make sure to stay on top of your work," said Alyssa Balzano, a student. "If you wait until the end of the semester, it will build up and between that and finals you'll have a heart attack."

Mackenzie Tingle echoed Balzano, adding "You should get your work done first." Senior William Boyd said: "If you can manage your time, then you can do anything you want on this campus. Everything is about time management."

Athletic Director John Thompson said "learn how to manage your time right away. That's one of the biggest differences between high school and college—time management."

Resident Director Frankie Taal agreed with Coach Thompson. "Students have to remember that this isn't high school," he said. "There is going to be lots of reading and homework and quizzes almost every day and students are going to have to stay on top of these things. Don't procrastinate, because the difference between high school and college can be a rude awakening for new students."

Student Lorenzo Whitley and others called on freshmen to develop strong study habits from the outset. "Try for a good grade point average the first year," he said. Senior Justin Batts told first-year students "not to fall behind the first semester," while Scott Cooper said to "stay motivated."

Said Stephanie Battle, a pre-major advisor: "Stay focused and remember your purpose for being here and everything will fall in line."

Justin Lowe, a sophomore, described his approach to earning good grades: "Spend an hour of study time for each class that you have that day," he said.

Patrick Williams and others underscored the importance of using the resources on campus such as the writing center.

Scott Marsigli, a pre-major advisor in the Student Success Center, agreed. He said to "take advantage of all opportunities the school offers, such as pass sessions and workshops."

Marcus Rich, assistant bookstore manager, insisted that "There are a lot of people willing to help, so take advantage of that."

Said Grace Wallace, a member of the library staff, "Don't be afraid to ask for help." It's tempting, many interviewees said, for freshmen to skip classes. That would be a mistake, as junior Desiree Driver reminded freshmen to "Show up to class."

Dr. Fred Sanborn, assistant professor

of psychology, said "I think that it's very important for first-year students to get into the habit of going to class consistently."

Cassandra Silver, administrative assistant in Student Affairs, supported this advice. "Even though the syllabus may say you can miss a day, don't skip class," she said. "It's hard to catch up when you fall behind."

Madonna Ware, a junior, said that freshmen should not only attend class, but should "sit in the first two rows of class to avoid going to sleep."

Wayne Mikinnon agreed with Ware, saying "Keep your head up and pay attention to your professors."

Several faculty and staff members emphasized the need to communicate. Freshmen should communicate with professors, friends, and anyone who can help them. "Students should remember that the skill of listening is the biggest part of communication," Thompson said.

Silver seconded Thompson's advice, saying, "Get to know your instructors well" while student Jehovah Santiago said "Concentrate and work with your professors."

Other advice focused on non-academic issues. Some urged freshmen to make sure they surround themselves with the right people.

"Freshmen should choose their friends wisely," Ware said, "and they should always speak for themselves."

Lorenzo Whitley concurred. "Watch who you hang out with," he said, and "don't party too much." Jaren Wilcox added, "Don't get caught up in the partying."

At the same time, many acknowledged that first-year students should take the time to, in Wallace's words, "make friends" and take part in the many activities offered on campus.

"They should stay busy," said Tingle, a member of the volleyball team, who also performed in last spring's musical. "Get involved in a club, musical or athletics." Driver said to "Make your own fun."

And Taal added, "Just make the best of being on campus and try to be involved," he said. "There is something here for almost everyone."

Still other advice-givers encouraged freshmen to adopt positive attitudes and habits. "Take the sulky look off your face. We like you here," said Dr. Vivienne Anderson, professor of English.

Her colleague Dr. James Bowers said "Throw away your cell phone and you will be a better student and person." Jessie Warren, director of internships, said freshmen should view college as a life-altering experience. "Come with an open mind to new experiences as well as people and ideas," she said. "Students should see this as an opportunity to reinvent themselves and leave the past in the past."

Perhaps the simplest advice came from Loren Loomis Hubbell. Said the Vice President of Finance: "Eat breakfast."