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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE

ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

President Gray Reflects on First Year, Looks Ahead

By Emelie Lundgren
Decree Staff Writer

James Gray's first year as president has come to an end, a year of changes designed to raise the academic level of the students and increase school pride.

The president mentioned the changes during a wide-ranging interview that touched on future plans for students as well as campus, fund-raising goals, the upcoming capital campaign and gaps in the budget, among others issues.

First and foremost Gray has sought to raise the academic level at Wesleyan and make it correlate with the new student body. He said that an analysis of the college's drop-out rate found that many freshmen lacked the academic skills required to pass classes. A three-year-strategic plan has been presented to put an end to the negative trend, the president said. The first step is to make sure that the college accepts new students who possess the ability to survive Wesleyan's academic standards.

Last year's retention situation was a major disappointment for Gray. "Too many students are leaving, most for academic reasons," he said. "But I'm confident we are turning that around."

While the application rate rose by 4% in 2010, the rejection rate increased by 40% as part of the college's efforts to raise standards.

This led to a volume decrease in the class of 2014 rather than the planned increase, a setback for a college that hopes to increase day-time student enrollment from about 700 to 1,000 in the next three or four years.

But President Gray stressed that Wesleyan must maintain the new standards and not to fall into the temptation of accepting unprepared students just to fill empty seats in the classrooms and empty beds in the dorms.

"When you plan on conducting major changes, you have to prepare for a time of transition, which is usually the first two years of the process, in order to see results," Gray said.

The toughened academic standards will not mean cuts in athletics, according to Gray, since many athletes are excellent students. "You are not a student or an athlete at the school," Gray said. "You're a student-athlete, just as the name states."

On the topic of finances, Gray denied the rumor that Wesleyan was in dire straits when he took on the role as president, noting that he researched the school's situation before he accepted the job. He admitted that the school has been caught in a negative cycle, going slightly down hill, but over all Gray judged the situation to be stable. Wesleyan's potential was clear to him, but the school was under-performing and in great need of changes, he said.

"Any small liberal arts school would be challenging to run, especially in these times of recession," the president said. "We're all working with limited resources."

Speaking in October, the president said there is a shortfall of about \$200,000 that has to be covered in the budget, which is already tight. But Gray pointed out that the gap is only about 1% of the total budget of \$23 million. He believes it's manageable.

To cope with the economic situation, Gray said, the college has taken steps such as offering early retirement for faculty and staff that meet certain length-of-tenure criteria. This is standard procedure when dealing with a tight budget, the president said.

"To be in financial trouble means that we would cut down on faculty or borrow money from somewhere else, which we are far from doing at this time," Gray emphasized. "I know schools that have a much bigger gap than us to cover."

President Gray has made it clear that he was ready to give Wesleyan ten years of his time — as long as the board of trustees and the faculty and students appreciate his work at the school. He said he hopes to retire from a proud and wealthy college at 71 years of age.

One year has already been checked off the list. By setting up new priorities, he has put many of his plans into action. Gray said he was surprised by the amount of work his position demanded of him, with

all the different facets of a college that require his attention.

"I was surprised by my personal intensity to accomplish these goals," he said. "The days and nights are longer than I expected. The rewards are immense, so I am not complaining."

After he assumed his position in summer 2009, Gray wanted to make sure that students, staff and faculty would see some immediate changes. Early in his tenure he directed the upgrading of poorly working Wi-Fi in the dorms and began a renovations program for residence hall bathrooms. Gray wanted the Wesleyan community to notice the changes in order to raise school pride and establish a trust for the administration.

Gray raised \$200,000 in the beginning of the first semester to pay for the early improvements. He said that \$1.2 million was raised during the 2009-2010 academic year, and the goal is to top that amount this year while increasing the annual fund drive, Gray said.

On a related matter, Gray was asked whether he'd be willing to share with students details from the operating budget, the college's expenditures in particular. He said students have not expressed such interest to him. "I would be glad to give students a summary of the budget if they seek to understand it and not just complain about this and that expenditure," the president said. "It's a complicated document."

Some \$50,000 was invested in the dorms over the summer, and Gray said the plan is to renovate one or two bathrooms each year "until they are all new and fresh."

Besides the bathrooms and other improvements to the residence halls, Gray would like to enhance landscaping on the college's 200-acre campus. Some students have questioned the emphasis on landscaping when they feel that the priority should be refurbishing the bathrooms and improving the food served in the cafeteria.

But Gray disagreed and underscored the importance of landscaping. He said an attractive campus helps to strengthen school pride. "Landscaping is so important, not only to make the students we already have here enjoy their surroundings, but also in order to give a great first impression to prospective students," he said.

The president mentioned that five big trees in front of Braswell were cut down before starting the academic year. "Now when students roll in to campus with their cars, the first thing they see is the fountain and the main building and the flag, and it looks absolutely beautiful."

According to Gray, future plans include building a football stadium, expected to hold about 2000 spectators; constructing another dorm with suites for upperclassmen; and creating more green spaces. The president would like to see "a town square" in place of the parking lot behind Braswell.

"A school that doesn't look good will not create any school pride," Gray said. "I don't know how much money we have spent on landscaping so far, but it's not enough. We need to do much more to make this a beautiful campus. It pays huge dividends in student attitudes, admissions, alumni, and fundraising," said Gray.

Further plans are to make Wesleyan Village, the apartments behind Food Lion, part of campus. Gray hopes Wesleyan Village will bring the international students who now live off campus closer to the school. "It would make it easier for them to be involved even after their classes and practices are done for the day," Gray explained.

To fund such projects, enhance academics, and increase the endowment, Gray has announced a \$25 million capital campaign, set to begin in about a year. Helping to spearhead that effort will be Chris Norman, who was hired over the summer as the new vice president for advancement. Norman joined Wesleyan after serving as director of the Wittenberg University Fund since 2007.

"This is probably the biggest reason that they chose me for the position, not as an academic role model leading the school—that's not what the school needs in its present state—but as a fundraiser and a communicator."

Being in-tune with student concerns was a top priority when Gray was inaugurated. He explained

that he loves to eat lunch with students in the cafeteria, asking them about "breaking news," on campus or in their classes.

While he likes the diversity among the student body, Gray acknowledged that it often produces a diversity of opinions when it comes to identifying the most pressing needs of the college. To gather information on community concerns, he plans on conducting surveys amongst both faculty and students every year.

"It's of course easier to communicate with faculty and staff than students since I work directly with the employees," Gray said, "but I'm very interested in hearing what the students have to say. I have an open-door policy and any one can come

see me whenever they want."

The president believes there is great potential for Wesleyan to transform itself into a bigger and better college. He said that he is even more passionate about his job than he was when he started last year.

"I said from the start that no one would outwork me," he said, noting that he's at his desk early in the morning. "I usually surprise the maintenance staff coming in to the office. And I leave as late as I have to in order to get things done. A leader can talk all he wants to convince his staff that he is devoted, but what it really comes down to is putting as much time into the work as it may demand. They didn't hire me to make good, but to make great."

'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' Reviews - Page 4



Melissa Ricketts and Joshua Rogers played Maggie and Brick in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.'

Photo by R. Drake

Wesleyan Experiences a Biking Boom

By Leila Heinonen
Decree Staff Writer

It is a Monday afternoon, the sun is shining, and bike racks are jammed with purple, red, and blue bicycles waiting for students. A group of football players is biking to the practice field. I can also see Coach Modise heading to the tennis courts by bike. NCWC is filled with many bicycles, creating a great new atmosphere on the well-manicured green campus.

The last two semesters students have increased the usage of bikes for transportation to and from campus. International students started the biking boom last fall semester, mostly because they couldn't afford to buy a car and they needed to get to school from their off-campus apartments. At the same time dorm residents started to use bikes to get around faster.

Many NCWC faculty and staff members and students agreed that biking is good for your health and the environment as well.

Biking is common in Europe, especially in big cities where it is difficult to find parking places for cars. Sophomore Kristin Seidel from Germany was one of the first ones who used a bike to move around in Rocky Mount. "I had to buy a bike because I couldn't afford to buy a car," she explained. "I'm used to biking back home in Germany a lot, and that's why I didn't feel like it's that big of a deal to bike a couple miles to school and back."

Other international students, such as Marcelo Prata and Evgeniy Bukatin, bike to school or to tennis practice at least four times a week. "I bike to school because I don't own a car and I don't want to bother people who have cars. I think it's a fast and easy way to get to the campus," explained Bukatin.

Some dorm residents have decided to buy bikes just to make it easier to move around campus. One of them is Junior Dominic Fordsdike. "Campus is a big area to get around, especially living on the outer edge," he said. "I use the bike from class to class, to the field house, practice, cafeteria, and also to local places outside of campus." Clifton Lesak agrees with Fordsdike: "Bikes are a very useful way to get around, especially if your classes are in different buildings around campus."

Rather than driving to practice, many Wesleyan football players like B.G. Howell ride a bike. "I'm using my bike mostly to go to practice because there are not that many places to park a car after they cut our field," Howell explained, referring to the state highway widening-project.

One of the more prominent cycling enthusiasts is President Gray, who uses a bike to move to and from his office and to different school activities such as basketball games. "It's more convenient to use a bike rather than a car and I enjoy it—it's fun," stated Gray.

Some students and coaches bike to school to get daily exercise. Dominic Modise, head tennis

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In Tourney CNU Avenges Only Loss

By Kevin Quicker
Decree Staff Writer

Bulletin: After two wins in the USA South Tourney, the Bishops lost in the title game, 3-1, to CNU last Saturday. With the win, the Captains earn an automatic bid to the NCAA's.

The NC Wesleyan men's soccer team pulled off one of the great upsets in team history by beating the number 1 nationally ranked team, USA South rival Christopher Newport University, in a hard-fought game, by a score of 3-2, on October 13.

Prior to this game, CNU was one of the few remaining undefeated teams in the country at 12-0 and had conceded only four goals in 12 games.

The decisive goal came on an amazing cross from Owen White, on the right side of the field, to Mark Wielitzka who put the ball past the goalkeeper in the closing minutes.

CNU opened the scoring in the first half. After

a tightly played first 20 minutes of the game, when both teams passed the ball a lot looking for holes in the defense, CNU broke through in the 29th minute, scoring off a header on a free kick past goalkeeper Ville Ture.

White had mixed feelings after the Bishops fell behind. "Last year there was no way we would come back from a deficit like this," he said. "We would have put our heads down and gone on to lose. So it was going to be interesting to see how this year's team would react to the adversity early in the game."

Wielitzka was feeling positive after going down early. "I felt as if we were playing well up to that point and we had the ability to get back into the game."

The game remained 1-0 as it reached halftime.

But this lead did not last long. Just 10 minutes into the second half, Wielitzka, tied for the goal-scoring lead in the USA South with 11, scored off a brilliant cross from White on the right side of the field, the shot deflecting off one of the CNU defenders. The crowd erupted and fans began to

hope that they would witness history.

Just 15 minutes later the Bishops were able to go up 2-1 when Irvin Herrera played a ball to John Mendy, who was streaking down the left side of the field. One-on-one with the goalie, Mendy faked a shot to put the keeper on the ground, before he went around the goalie and deposited the ball in the back of the net.

The crowd was even louder than the first time because they knew their team was only 20 minutes away from beating the number-1 team in the country.

But a goal in the 82nd minute from CNU dampened the mood at Scalf Field, tying the game at 2-2. The game looked as if it was headed to overtime.

"After they tied it with just three minutes left, I thought I was going to be very difficult for us to win in regulation or overtime with the momentum they had," said White. Wielitzka said he had the same feeling.

Just four minutes after being shocked by CNU's late score, a through ball was played to White, who

then connected on a cross to Wielitzka, who put a one-time shot past the CNU goalkeeper in the 87th minute of the game.

"This was one of the better feelings I have experienced as a player," said Wielitzka. "When I saw the ball hit the net, I knew we had won it."

CNU did not have enough time to record the equalizer, giving the Bishops a 3-2 victory.

Not only did this win draw national attention but it also gave the Bishops sole possession of first place.

Following the CNU victory the Bishops went on to beat Ferrum, 4-0, with two goals coming from White.

They were also able to squeeze past Methodist 3-2 because of a timely overtime goal from senior midfielder Javier Castrillo.

The Bishops then tied Averett 0-0 in a game, which put everything on the line for them when the team played the Shenandoah Hornets. But the Bishops had no trouble handing the Hornets a 5-0 beating which clinched a regular season title for the Bishops.