

THE DECREE

since 1960 “of, by, and for the Wesleyan community.”

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Evan Duff Inaugurated as Wesleyan’s 8th President

NC Wesleyan President Evan Duff was inaugurated in ceremonies held at the Dunn Center on September 17, with members of the college community and invited guests on hand.

In a wide-ranging interview following the ceremony, President Duff talked about the college’s current financial status, enrollment and its response to the Covid-19 delta variant, among other topics.

Q. Congrats on your formal inauguration. What was going through your mind during the ceremony?

A. During the ceremony I often wondered if people were having a good time and hoping they were not bored. I was also filled with excitement and felt gratitude that my family and friends were present to share this day with me.

Q. Have you, and your family, set a goal for the length of time you would like to serve in the job?

A. My family is continuing to settle into our new home on campus and in the community. While I think about the future, I try to focus on the present in order to make the most of it.

Q. What is Wesleyan’s current financial situation? How would you characterize the college’s current condition? What is the projection as far as end-of-year?

A. We’re scheduled for a break-even budget for fiscal year 2021.



President Duff speaks at his inaugural ceremony held at the Dunn Center. Wesleyan PR photo

We’ve attained that goal or better since 2019. While it’s optimal for a non-profit organization to have a break-even budget, when we perform better than this, we can reinvest that money into programs, benefits, and infrastructure. I think the college is in a good place considering the circumstances in the world, but we always have room to improve.

Q. What was the total student enrollment in the traditional program at the beginning of the semester?

A. The original goal was 930

total students (returners, freshmen and transfers), but we budgeted for 900 as a worst-case scenario. After the drop/add period, we ended at 876. We were able to cover that loss in revenue this year, using some of the federal stimulus funds given to all higher education institutions. Some funds were earmarked for budget shortfalls.

Q. In terms of numbers, how is the APS program doing?

A. Our adult and professional studies program has also seen a downward shift over the last couple years. This correlates with this trend all over the country. The Covid recession was not like typical recessions and there was not an influx of adult students going back to college. At present we have 645 adult students as compared to 723 last year at this time. We’re working on additional marketing and operational initiatives to improve our enrollment.

Q. Wesleyan elected not to require a vaccine for all students and staff. What all factored into that decision?

A. The VIRT team and administration weighed a number of factors. We looked at national, state, and local trends, reviewed what our peers were doing, weighed the benefits of a forced mandate vs. providing opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to make an informed decision for themselves as well as sought advice from our strategic partner CREDO.

Q. According to the latest date (October 12), what percent of students and faculty and staff have been vaccinated?

A. The student immunization rate is 62.4 percent. That includes students who have been vaccinated. It also includes students who have antibodies from previous infection.

As far as faculty and staff, only half have responded to our recent survey. Of 105 total respondents, 96 have been fully vaccinated (91.43 percent), 2 have been partially vaccinated (1.9 percent) and 7 have not been vaccinated (6.67 percent).

Q. Early in the semester, there was a fight between Wesleyan students, and at the time a student was found to have brought a gun on campus. How confident is the college that there are no guns on campus, either in dorm rooms or cars?

A. I feel confident that we’re doing everything to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and a safe working envi-

ronment for our faculty and staff. Having a gun for any reason on a college campus is a felony. We have an anonymous tip line that students use, we have cameras in the lobbies of our dorms and in other outside areas around campus, and our resident advisers and area coordinators do a great job of working with students regarding their safety concerns.

Q. At the end of the academic year, Dr. Wyatt is returning to her previous position as associate provost. What qualities would you like to see in the next provost?

A. In the last two years, Dr. Wyatt has done an outstanding job while wearing multiple hats in academic and student affairs. I’m excited that she’ll be returning to a role that she loves and that is vital for retention and student success. Regarding the new provost, I would want someone who can advocate for faculty and students

while understanding the unique balance of meeting their needs while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Having a charismatic personality and a passion for private, faith-based higher education would also be important factors.

Q. The college brought in a high number of new faculty this year. Do you foresee additional hires during the current academic year?

A. Yes, we’ll be able to fill a few positions that are essentially replacements for those retiring this year or who recently retired. Not all faculty requests will be met, unfortunately, this year. Our hope is we can fill the other positions after student headcount normalizes.

Q. Please provide a status report on the Annual Fund and other fundraising efforts as of October 15.

The Wesleyan Promise is going well with over 40 percent of the faculty and staff contributing so

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NC Wesleyan Community Pays Tribute to Matthew Clemmons (2002-2021)

Hundreds gathered at the Southern Bank Green September 3 for a candle-light vigil to honor the life of Wesleyan

sophomore Matthew Clemmons, who died unexpectedly the previous day, four days after his 19th birthday.

City Police said Clemmons was found unresponsive in his campus dorm room at about 8:45 that Thursday

morning. The state medical examiner later found that he died of natural causes, due to an underlying medical condition, the Rocky Mount Telegram reported.

Among the speakers at the vigil were Head Football Coach Jeff Filkovski, Wesleyan Chaplain Edwin Ferguson, and friends and teammates of Clemmons, a Supply, North Carolina native, who was a psychology major and an offensive lineman for the Bishops.

In an interview, Coach Filkovski paid tribute to Clemmons as a true student-athlete, saying that he embodied all the qualities that Wesleyan seeks in a recruit. The coach noted that Clemmons made the President’s List for his academic achievements and lauded him as “a great football player with a ton potential.” Describing him as a selfless teammate, Filkovski said, “Matt was more about you than he was about himself.”

Dr. Jonathan Sarris taught Clemmons in History 112 last spring. Though class meetings were often restricted to Zoom sessions, Dr. Sarris said Clemmons made a vivid impression. “Even through the computer

screen, his curiosity, intellect and commitment to learning showed,” he said, noting that Clemmons always gave 100

percent on his assignments. “He enjoyed talking about history, and about America. I was looking forward to the possibility that I might get to teach another class with Matthew in it. I am so saddened by his loss.”

Like Dr. Sarris, Chris

Hatch spoke of Clemmons’ work ethic. A starter on Wesleyan’s offensive line, Hatch recalled past football practices when his teammate, then a freshman, would stay late and ask Hatch to help him refine his technique. “Matt was a perfectionist,” he said.

Hatch praised Clemmons as a “great brother and friend.” He said that Clemmons was genuine, caring and always upbeat. “He always had a smile on his face,” he said. “And he would cheer you up just by looking at you.”

Toby Larson expressed similar feelings about his teammate. He recalled that Clemmons encouraged him to stick with football even after injuries and other setbacks made him want to quit the team. “He always made me feel better about myself,” Larson said. “And no matter how bad my day was going, he always made me smile. He was a kind and loving friend.”

Coach Filkovski said that he has continued to think about Clemmons and his contributions to the football program in the months since his death. “I read somewhere that ‘grief is the price that you pay for love,’” he said. “I love Matt Clemmons.”



Matt Clemmons SI photo

Freshmen Encouraged to Get Involved with Campus Life

By Mary Cat Davis
Senior Staff Writer

Becoming a Battling Bishop is a different journey for every student. From clubs to cafeteria food, one has to adjust to their new life as a freshman.

The Decree interviewed upperclassmen from various majors and student organizations to ask for their advice on what will make a student’s first year at Wesleyan great. Many agree that jumping into campus life is the best way to go.

Senior Grant Harrell, an elementary education major, gives the same tip to all new students. His advice is to put yourself out there and make the college experience a good one. “If freshmen get out and meet new people and try to make a difference here on campus, then college will be some of the best years of their lives,” he said.

Working as a campus tour guide, he likes that he can influence a student’s decisions to come to Wesleyan. He said that holding a work-study job allows students to get involved on campus. “I’ve gained another family,” he said of his time as a tour guide. “Having a work-study has made college a lot more fun.”

Senior Bethany Dunham agrees that getting involved on campus is essential for building relationships. “The memories they make now will influence the rest of their time here at Wesleyan,” said Dunham, an elementary education major.

Dunham urges freshmen to value their inner circle of friends, who will help to make some of a student’s favorite college memories “You’ll only have a few close

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Kristal Dule, a freshman from Italy, was one of two Wesleyan athletes to excel at the recent Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) Southern Regional. She upset several veterans on the way to a second-place finish in the tourney. Turn to page 3 for more sports coverage. SI photo