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Criticisms Unfounded

Sylvia Flack

Guest Columnist

(I feel) compelled to speak out about the value and the strengths of Winston-Salem State University. This article represents only my views and not those of the university or any segment of the university.

Lately, many distortions have been published about the institution. It is very damaging when unverified negative information is released in a public medium. Sharing my views is an effort to counteract the negative press. I am both a graduate and a supporting alumnus with 25 years as an employee resulting in documented positive impacts on WSSU. My experience from having served WSSU as an associate dean of nursing, dean of the School of Health Sciences, special assistant to Dr. Harold Martin and currently as executive director of the Center of Excellence for the Elimination of Health Disparities empowers me to speak about the university. My involvement within the community also adds credibility to what I am compelled to say.

The criticism of low expectations, low student quality, faculty and student low performance, lack of faculty engagement, outdated curricula and lack of quality improvement is not what I have experienced nor witnessed. There is always needed improvement at any university and that is why Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and academic program accrediting bodies require institutional assessment and evaluation. In several reports, it has been stated that WSSU has not changed its curriculum in 50 years and that WSSU is lacking in liberal arts education. Informed academic leaders know that universities would not remain accredited by SACSCOC or academic accrediting bodies unless the curricula reflect currency and relevancy. WSSU has received in prior years some of the most coveted accreditations, including AACSB International for the School of Business and the School of Education NCATE.

It is very easy to blame the students, faculty and staff for concerns and issues within the university. On Dec. 19, 2014, the (Winston-Salem) Journal published an article listing student allegations about WSSU faculty in the areas of advising, class management, teaching methodology and requirements for outside classroom activities. The Journal reported,

that students allegedly complained that faculty members have poor attendance at faculty meetings, committees and department meetings and participation in university activities.

If the faculty is apathetic as described in the article, the question becomes why. What happened to transform an excited, enthusiastic and outcome achieving faculty? What will end these so called faculty issues? Is the answer to this question to act on hearsay or unverified data or is the answer to try fairness, transparency, shared academic decision making, truth, clarity of policies and providing resources? Should the faculty be provided opportunities to develop skills in working with the students who enter WSSU? Is the faculty informed when changes are made in the Faculty Handbook?

The belief that WSSU did not have a history of engaging in liberal education before 2007 is hard to accept. As early as the 1960s, documents show that liberal arts were integrated into the curriculum.

The faculty engaged in integrating student learning outcomes and curricular themes such as multicultural/global perspectives beginning in 1994 under then Chancellor Cleon F. Thompson and continued under the tenure of Chancellor Harold Martin from 2000 - 2006. These outcomes, initially referred to as abilities, are documented in WSSU catalogs published 1995-2010.

Faculty and student research has always been a priority at the institution. The life science and social science faculty received many grants and collaborations and used them to mentor large numbers of undergraduate students in research. Dr. Wilveria Atkinson from the 1970 to 1999 promoted integration of research into the curriculum and teaching methodology. The WSSU Center of Excellence for the Elimination of Health Disparities and the Center for Community Safety have documented evidence that both junior faculty and students have been heavily involved in real-life training in the community. In fact, the only new thing about liberal arts at WSSU currently is the creation of the Department of Liberal Studies and moving an existing program into that department. Also new is the requirement of 60 hours of general education courses focusing on learning outcomes, instead of the 45.

According to an interview in the (WSSU) News Argus, the merger of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Business and Economics and Education and Human Performance came about so that the students in business and education would get more liberal arts courses.

Any major changes to the curricular and degree programs in education and business should be at the discretion of the faculty and influenced by the standards of their respected accrediting body, not because of the need to promote liberal arts. Like the programs in health sciences, professional programs in education and business and economics began an intentional process to integrate student learning outcomes such as critical and analytic thinking into their curriculum in beginning in 1990s and continue that process.

One criticism promoted in the recent years is WSSU admits "poor quality students." What a negative characterization of students! This theory is refuted with a review of the data for applications, acceptance and enrollment of freshmen in the last several years. I noted that a large number of freshmen apply each year and a large number of those meeting both WSSU and the UNC criteria are accepted. Lately, however, only a very small percentage of these accepted freshmen enrolled for classes. The WSSU Fact Book shows, in Fall 2013, 4,194 freshmen applied and 63 percent were accepted, but only 27 percent enrolled. If the students who enroll meet the increased enrollment criteria, why are they being called poor quality students?

The numbers of freshmen that are admitted, as well as (total) enrollment, has been steadily declining since 2008. In 2008, the enrollment was 6,442. From that point, there has been a steady decline to fall 2014, which shows an enrollment of 5,220. Institutional Assessment & Research has received questions from UNC General Administration about the 25 percent decrease in enrollment. These are serious administrative problems not normally discussed that result in reduced state appropriations.

Prospective students and their parents pay close attention to what is being said about their future university. Have the undergraduate and graduate enrollment goals been derailed by the characterization of "poor quality students?"

As someone who knows the significance of WSSU to the community and the students served, our direction must now focus on assisting our students in achieving their educational goals. This is important not only for our students, but also for the future of our county and nation.

Dr. Sylvia Flack heads the Center of Excellence for the Elimination of Health Disparities at Winston-Salem State University.

WSSU and SciWorks partner

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University and SciWorks will begin working together to improve science education for the university's students and increase access to science education for students in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System. SciWorks is a local science-themed agency that offers innovative, educational, and recreational experiences via interactive programs and exhibits, collections, and an environmental park.

Through a memorandum of understanding scheduled to be signed Monday, Jan. 5, the two institutions will explore cooperative, collaborative and creative ways to expand teaching, research and service through both organizations.

"This collaborative effort will include a wide range of opportunities such as working with the SciWorks staff to explore informal STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education as a fundamental part of science education for those WSSU graduates who will be teaching at the elementary and middle school



Walker

fessors and students to conduct research and test ideas with visitors to the center. The agreement would also support WSSU faculty's ability to share research with a wider public through exhibits, programming and communication through SciWorks.



SciWorks is located at 400 W Hanes Mill Rd.

level," said Dr. Corey D. B. Walker, dean of WSSU's College of Arts, Science, Business and Education. "We also will work together to improve access to both formal and informal science education for students in our local school system through joint programming."

Beyond these immediate efforts, SciWorks intends to become a demonstration laboratory for the Department of Education at WSSU which would allow professors and students to conduct research and test ideas with visitors to the center. The agreement would also support WSSU faculty's ability to share research with a wider public through exhibits, programming and communication through SciWorks.

"The role of a science center is not only to engage with students and encourage them to explore and innovate, but to do the same with teachers and potential teachers in our community to deepen their knowledge of science and informal STEM education," says Dr. Paul Kortenaar, SciWorks' executive director. "With Sciworks and WSSU working together to improve access to science in both the formal and informal settings, and research and implement new pedagogies and techniques for dealing with technology in the classroom and the science center, both institutions will benefit from this exciting collaboration — as will visitors to SciWorks, students in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County community at large."

Chavis

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owned newspapers as it marks its 75th anniversary this year — but only if certain strategies are put in place.

First, he said, the Black press must focus on a stronger economic foundation by generating more revenue. African-Americans spend \$1.2 trillion a year, he said, noting that black newspapers must partner with the black church, black banks, black colleges and black organizations to network and support the black press. This strategy would require much unity, Chavis says.

"This is beyond connecting the dots. The dots have to converge...There's too much disunity in our community. And I'm not just talking about organizational disunity. I'm talking about disunity even among the so-called personalities... In my long career in civil rights I've seen what happens when leadership goes in divergent paths...To me, it's a disservice to our community to allow personality conflicts to get in the way."

Secondly, White-owned businesses must be made to understand the value of supporting Black newspapers as businesses and as a sustainable institution, the same as the broadcast media, Chavis says.

Finally, Chavis said, Black newspapers must take full advantage of the digital uni-

verse.

"Technology, particularly digital technology can be a great equalizer. Some people think the digital will supplant the print. I don't. To me, the digital will make more valuable the print press because every day it's about the content. We have the content, but we have not aggregated the content," he said.

Denise Rolark Barnes, who has been publisher of the Informer for 20 years, succeeded her now late father, Dr. Calvin Rolark, a prominent D.C. businessman and Black leader. Barnes recalls how the black press has led America's media when it comes to many of the issues that have now emerged as headline news for White-owned media, such as police brutality, economic justice and voting rights.

"The more you do it, the more stories you realize need to be told; the more you realize that our community, our Black history every day is being thrown away," says Barnes, in an exhibit hall showing historic front pages and photos from the Informer. "I've learned that history does repeat itself and is repeating itself."

The Informer's celebration drew hundreds of people to Carnegie Library in downtown Washington, D.C. Other special guests included radio personality Joe Madison.



Barnes

NCCU

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Technical Community College for their support during his own undergraduate years. He credited his NCCU physics professor, Dr. Kinny Ken, for instilling in him a passion for physics research.

While at NCCU, Cisse pursued experiments involving the packing density of various shapes using objects he had on hand, an approach he dubbed "Eagle ingenuity." By coating his "favorite candy," M&Ms, with household paint, Cisse generated new findings that earned academic awards, including a chance to study physics in Paris. He went on to earn a doctorate in physics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Referencing recent protests over killings by police of unarmed black men, including the chokehold death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, he said: "It is my belief that if one of us can't breathe, none of us can breathe."

"Black lives matter — of course, all lives matter. Period. Regardless of a person's social or community standing," he told the audience.

Saunders-White concluded the ceremonies by saying, "Graduates, as you prepare to take on the challenges of your new or blos-



Melissa Culbreth

soming career, I urge you to remember that your voices and your actions are some of the most powerful means by which you can create positive change."



Dr. Ibrahim Cisse

Dr. L'Tanya Joy Bailey
6425 Old Plank Road Suite 108
High Point, NC 27285
Tel: 336 886 7000
Fax: 336 886 7002
Email: info@drbaileyortho.com

L'Tanya Joy Bailey | DDS, MS, PLLC
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