

Salem College welcomes historic number of freshmen

Women's institution welcomes largest group of incoming students in 245-year history

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

At a place in time when women's colleges are seeing a decline in enrollment, Salem College, the oldest operating educational institution for girls and women in the United States, welcomed the largest class of freshmen in the school's history last weekend.

To help usher in a new era in the institution's rich 245-year history, alumnae and current students volunteered to help the freshmen

class of 200 students move in on Saturday, Aug. 20. While usually reserved for sleeping in, dozens of volunteers spent their Saturday morning hauling boxes of clothes, refrigerators and pieces of furniture into dorm rooms.

Other volunteers, such as 2014 graduate Julianne Still, were on hand to network with students and give them valuable information on college life at Salem. Still, who is a board member for Salem College Alumnae Association, said it is important that alumnae engage with incoming students early because they have a responsibility to show them the way.

"We are trying to start the relationship early because that's where the

full college experience will come from," Still said.

Still mentioned that when she enrolled in 2010, she was part of the biggest class in school history. She said the class of 2020 is a testament to all the hard work and dedication by Salem faculty and staff.

"It's cool that Dean Katherine Knapp Watts has leveraged the community in recruitment as we continue to grow," she said. "We are thriving, and it's great to be a part of that."

Incoming freshman Taylor Smith, who plans to major in exercise science said, she is excited to see what life will be like at Salem. A native of Virginia, Smith said she felt welcomed when she was met by a host of upperclassman and alumni when she

arrived in Winston-Salem.

"I don't really know a lot of people in N.C. but, the campus really has the homey kind of feel," she said.

When asked what she hopes to get out of her experience at Salem, Smith said, "I want to build my leadership skills and confidence as a person. I also hope to get a lot of internships that will prepare me for my future."

Following move-in day, incoming students participated in a number of sessions, workshops, and other activities designed to build relationships, and prepare students for the long, and at times stressful journey that is college.

The first day for students at Salem College was Wednesday, Aug. 24.



Volunteers help incoming freshman Taylor Smith move her belongings into her dorm room during move-in day at Salem College on Saturday, Aug. 20. A native of Virginia, Smith plans to major in exercise science.

From 'lambs' to 'Rams'

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Last weekend more than 900 young people from various parts of the state transitioned from "lambs" to "Rams" on the campus of Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) during the "Through the Archway Ceremony." An annual tradition, the celebration officially marks the beginning of the college journey for incoming freshmen.

The rite of passage also ends Ramdition, a week-long orientation designed help students transition into college life and adulthood. To begin the program, first-year students participated in Ram Walk, a ceremony where students march through the stone archways on campus, erected in 1936 to honor of Oleona Pegram Atkins, the wife of WSSU founder Simon Green Atkins.

While walking behind university officials, faculty and staff, elected officials, and Legacy Leaders (members of SGA), the class of 2020 was filled with joy

and excitement.

"It feels good to finally be a Ram," smiled Naomi Isaac from Charlotte.

She said although she was nervous at first, as soon as she stepped foot on campus she felt right at home. Isaac noted the advice she received from university administrators and upperclassman during Ramdition has fully prepared her for the first day of classes, which began on Monday, Aug. 22.

"The support has just been amazing," she said. "I've met some really great people and got some really good advice on what the first year will be like. It feels good to know that the people here really care."

Donald Vanderhall from Greensboro said, "I've been looking forward to this day for a long time, and now that it's finally here, it feels unreal."

During the procession, more than 2,000 relatives, friends, loved ones, and even a number of alumni lined the walkways of the yard to welcome the newest edition to the family. While holding a sign



On Saturday, Aug. 20, the incoming class of freshmen at Winston-Salem State University participated in the annual "Through the Archway Ceremony," which marks the beginning of the college journey. The Ram Walk was part of the ceremony.

honoring the class of 1994, Althea Scott said she felt it was her duty to help welcome the largest group of freshman since 2008.

"I think I may have been the loudest person here," laughed Scott. "I remember my own ceremony and I just wanted the incoming freshmen to know that they have the full support of the alumni."

The march ended at the K. R. Williams Auditorium where Chancellor Elwood Robinson and SGA President Mona Zahir and others addressed the sea of students that filled every seat in the bottom portion of the auditorium.

"You are coming to a

very special place. A place unlike anything you have ever seen or experienced," said Robinson. "We welcome you to Winston-Salem State University."

Robinson said WSSU sits on an amazing platform that is guided by principles laid down by the founder in 1892. He also briefly discussed the new strategic plan adopted earlier this year that is designed to prepare students for a world that doesn't even exist yet.

"Those principles give us the motivation, strength, and drive to do the work we do here every day," he continued. "When you leave here you will be designers of a new world order."

"We stand ready to provide each student with an education like none other," Robinson said.

Next, Zahir talked about the WSSU experience and the importance of taking advantage of all the opportunities that the HBCU has to offer. She said what she loves most about WSSU is that you don't need a title to be a leader.

"I'm so proud to be a part of a university that allows us to grow and cultivate ourselves in a way that fits us best," she noted. "All the resources you need to be successful are right here at this school."

Before leaving the

stage, Zahir challenged the freshman class to follow their passion.

"Don't be afraid of something you can't see. You guys are the class of 2020 for a reason; take this experience and go beyond the classroom. Find knowledge and intellect in everything that you find."

When asked about the expectations for the incoming class of freshmen, Provost and Assistant Chancellor Brenda Allen said, "When I look at 2020, I want a class that goes on to change the world."

"I want them to go on and do things that are outside of the box and compete globally," she said. "If

Cook

from page A1

schedule changes will give students more than a month's time for extra learning. Principal Paula Wilkins said the goal is to decrease the learning off-time the students experience during both breaks, and summer.

"The fact that we are getting more than a month's time of additional instruction is just great," Wilkins said.

When school board officials first announced that Cook would be adopting the federal Restart model earlier this summer, they received a lot of backlash from parents who were concerned about the changes. Many parents argued that they were not being told what was going to happen to the school. At one point, parents even mentioned they heard rumors that the school was going to close.

While admitting they still have to build more trust with parents, Wilkins noted administrators have been working hard to connect with parents, and other stakeholders by hosting informational sessions designed to let the parents know how the school would operate and to receive feedback.

"We understand that it takes a village to raise a child," said Wilkins. "That's why we have spent the entire summer connecting with students. We've made phone calls and even visited homes."

"We want our students here at Cook to know we care about them when they

are at school and at home."

Cook parent James Thomas said although he had his doubts about the Restart model, after seeing how much effort was put in over the break, he is confident that Cook will improve.

To wrap-up the summer, Cook held a back-to-school cookout during open house for students and their parents. After meeting their new teachers, each student was given a backpack filled with school supplies. On the first day of school, most students walked into classes with a smile on their faces, greeted by teachers they have already seen multiple times over the summer.

Although the effort is still in the early stages, Superintendent Beverly Emory is a strong believer that things will turn around. She noted after seeing students, teachers, parents and others interact during open house and on the first day of school, she knows officials made the right decision to adopt the Restart model.

"Last week at open house, you couldn't move because all of the parents, family, and community members who were there to support the students," continued Emory. "After seeing the support they received, I knew we made the right decision. I am excited to see what the future holds for Cook."



Wilkins

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