

Carter

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biggest changes he saw the college go through in his tenure.

Along with the school's music program, the college's president at the time, Tom Bertrand, asked Carter to help make the WLEE program a flagship program for the transition to a four-year school.

"I got serious thinking about developing the four-year degree, and am often credited for developing that," he said. "And I guess I did, but I actually did it through synergy and through a lot of pulling smart minds together."

"I contacted programs all across the country that were hiring people in the outdoor industry and said, 'Hey what do you need?' and tried to craft classes that would meet the need of the outdoor industry."

At the time, Carter said, the outdoor industry was going through a shift from a few novel businesses created from a handful of spirited individuals, to a professional industry people could stake their careers upon. The college's WLEE program came right on the cusp of that transition, and has its own legendary creation myth.

"I took one spring break and went up the eastern seaboard all the way up to Maine," Carter said, "just hitting any outdoor agency, any schools that had outdoor programs, and saying, 'Hey, I've got a blank slate. What would you put in an outdoor program?' And really a lot of incredible people ended up in Maine."

"There was a guy named Paul Petzoldt—he was kind of the grandfather of the outdoor industry here in the U.S.... He was the first Outward Bound instructor out in Colorado in the United States, and he started the National Outdoor Leadership School...and then started a lot of professional associations. And (he) just saw this industry changing into a professional field. So, I spent three days up in a cabin with him up in Maine, surrounded with snow. He fed me lobster, and we sat there and wrestled with it."

"We had this blank slate, so we came up with the vision for the immersion semester. We just needed to have some kind of a real strong centerpiece experiential component if we were training outdoor leaders." The WLEE program's immersion semester is a 21-day wilderness expedition, completely planned and led by WLEE students.

Carter said Brevard's was the first of its kind for collegiate outdoor programs and stood out from what was being offered.

Now, the college hangs its hat on "experiential education," or the concept of learning by doing, and the WLEE program was instrumental in developing that identity for Brevard.

Since then, Carter said several other schools have consulted with him to help develop their own immersion semester, and several other schools have created their own outdoor education immersion program.

"The immersion semester is in the sophomore year, so it really is experiential," he said. "We give them the leadership, and we give them the ability to plan trips. And if they fail, they learn from the failure. They learn to, on the fly, be flexible and learn what they're going to do next. And so through all that they're doing it all personally. In their junior and senior years, we really reflect on that experience."

Carter believes the 21-day immersion trip is essential to the program's philosophy and is when many students learn their greatest lessons. In particular, Carter looked back to one moment with a student on immersion as an example of the kind of breakthroughs students can have.

"This guy was a little older, probably 25 when he came to school, and he'd gone through a lot of difficult times in life," Carter said. "Had a rough family background, even was suicidal for a long time. But eventually he got his life together and came back here."

"I remember we were deep in Panthertown Valley—this was on their 21-day trip that they had planned. Usually, this is pretty common when we let them plan, we let them learn experientially from failing. I knew they had bit off pretty long days, longer days than they could probably handle."

"I remember it was just day after day. We had rough weather. It was late one afternoon, and this guy was leader of the day...there was a lot of group tension. Whenever things get hard physically, they also get hard in the group dynamics usually as well. It's during the hard times that a person's true self shows up. So, then, you've got to manage that personally, and as a leader."

"He got really frustrated once and just busted off ahead through briars and what not. I could tell something was up. He was about to lose it. So, I went out there and he said, 'I'm ready to quit, Clyde. I want to take off and go home. Get me out here, I'm done with this.' I was able to calm him down and help him to look at the bigger picture and really reflect. I could see that the students really looked up to him for his life experiences and he was more mature than other students. He wasn't seeing that. He was seeing he was a complete failure, but they really respected him more and were looking up to him."

"It was really an opportunity for me really to have him do some introspection and look at the bigger picture—not what's happening right now, but, what are we going to learn from this? And he really made a turn around there and did a great job the rest of the day, but he was ready to leave."

Carter still has that student's postcard. In it the student referenced that moment in Panthertown as one he reflects on. Carter said the student went on to be an Outward Bound instructor for many years, and later got his master's degree in counseling and has had a successful career.

Carter has many postcards and many stories like that from students he's taught throughout his time at Brevard College. Though he's had personal successes that brought notoriety and recognition to the college, his greatest accomplishments are the accomplishments of his students, he said.

Locally, The Hub bike shop and The Gorge Zip Line companies were started by couples who met in the WLEE program.

Carter said he's had students travel all across the world to work at prestigious guide companies. Several Brevard WLEE students guide at Kennecott Wilderness Guides in the remote Alaskan wilderness, and students went on to work in national parks from Denali in Alaska to the Dry Tortugas in southern Florida. Outside the outdoor industry, Carter said he's had students go on to be judges and work at NASA.

In retirement, he and his wife, Jayne Fought (a Transylvania Times outdoor contributor), plan to take advantage of his connections to students around the world and visit.

The two also plan to keep working the summers at Camp Rockbrook, and Carter says he plans to join Fought in teaching with her outdoor education company, Island Ford Adventures.

Though COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in Carter's final semester of teaching, and much of the world's plans are up in the air, Carter said he feels strongly that the WLEE program will continue to achieve great things for Brevard College.

"I feel like there's more of a need for a program like this," he said. "I think students are generally, across the board, more disconnected with nature—maybe even more disconnected with other people. Even though social media tries to draw you near, it kind of creates a facade of who you are and there's not a real interaction with people, as if you were face to face. Students struggle more with—who I am? Those are the three things that our program really helps students with. It helps them connect with nature, it helps them connect with themselves and it helps them connect with others. I think there's a need for that in the students and there's a need for that in our society."

"I feel like our students are going to have a hard time this summer finding work, but I think after this COVID thing, I think the outdoor industry has been just taking off and I think it's going to continue. I think there's a huge need for what we do."