

Chancellor Talks Openly On Key Issues

The following interview was held on October 12, between Dr. H. Douglas Covington and Sam Davis. The purpose for the interview is to provide the student body of Winston-Salem State University with information from the Chancellor on several relevant issues affecting the university.

The News Argus: Dr. Covington, there has been a lot of talk, both pro and con on the campus concerning the issue of mandatory attendance. What are your feelings on the issue?

Dr. Covington: First of all, the university has the legal authority to define attendance policies. Mandatory attendance was a recommendation that came from various faculty groups, including the education council and was considered by academic officers and Board of Trustees. We requested the input of students on the policy so that we could make a decision based on the total input of students, faculty and administration. As we looked at the facts, we were alarmed by the number of students on academic probation or suspended for academic reasons. We found that many of the students were those that had not attended class on a regular basis. The decision we made was to try a mandatory attendance policy and then evaluate it to see if it had contributed to the improvement of our students' academic performances.

The News Argus: Does that mean the mandatory attendance policy might be short-lived at WSSU?

Dr. Covington: After this semester we will rigorously evaluate the policy. We hope that students will give us input also. The academic suspension and probationary rates are too high here, so we are trying to improve these areas. We respect the opinion of students and faculty, both pro and con, and we hope to evaluate the policy and make a decision based on observation.

The News Argus: Dr. Covington, the News Argus published an article in our last issue concerning low salaries and inequities among administration, faculty and staff at Winston-Salem State University. What do you plan to do to alleviate the inequities and increase the yearly wages of instructors here?

Dr. Covington: First of all, I agree with the fact that salaries are low and this has been a concern of mine during the past six years I have been chancellor at WSSU. One of the things that I have been doing is speaking to our state legislators each biennium, asking them to allocate increased funds to our black institutions, including WSSU so that we can increase salaries here. In recent years, we have been able to boost the salaries of many of our faculty who have been here for many years. But, we have not been able to eliminate all inequities or increase the level of senior faculty to the level it should be. This can not be done in one or two years. It is something that has to be worked on each year, but is still controlled by the amount of funds available to us through the state legislature.

The News Argus: Do you have any plans on how the money currently available to WSSU can be better utilized to compensate instructors?

Dr. Covington: One aspect of salary increase that we are looking at is to award salary on the basis of merit. We want to make sure we reward outstanding teaching performances. This is something that grows out of faculty performance evaluations that are done by each department head. We are also in the process of forming a faculty salary review board. This committee will carefully analyze salary conditions, as well as procedures for allocating salary increases.

The News Argus: As you know Dr. Covington, the students at WSSU along with students at predominantly black colleges and universities throughout the nation expressed their concern for maintaining these institutions during Black College Day. What is being done to prevent WSSU from becoming a predominantly white member of the University of North Carolina system?

Dr. Covington: On the day our students observed Black College Day, I was in Washington at the White House meeting with President Reagan and Vice-President Bush. They signed an executive order pledging more financial support of black colleges. I was also there to witness the President's approval of a college endowment plan for black colleges. This program was developed by Dr. Fred Patterson, former President of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. I have worked with Dr. Patterson and supported it since my days at Tuskegee as Vice-President, before coming to WSSU. This program will increase the number of funds coming to our traditionally black colleges and universities. Also, I am chairman of a committee on black colleges and universities for the Department of the Interior. The purpose of this committee is to increase the amount of grants, contracts and procurements available to black colleges through the Department of the Interior.

The News Argus: What is being done at WSSU to maintain our identity as a "Black College?"

Dr. Covington: We have reorganized and expanded our admissions office so we can boost our enrollment through the implementation of more creative and innovative recruitment techniques. We have developed a five-pronged approach based on the support of several support groups. This includes the involvement of students, alumni, faculty and staff, parents groups and church groups. In addition to a better organized and greater use of these groups, we plan to use the media more in promoting interest of WSSU with prospective students. The best way however, to attract black students to WSSU is by developing a superior educational program and an attractive, functional campus environment.

If we do not work cooperatively and extensively to provide this type of campus, we will lose students, both white and black. I believe there is great value in maintaining black colleges and universities, and I believe black colleges can be racially integrated. In my opinion, it must be done through the development of outstanding programs, physical facilities and through an effective-comprehensive student recruitment effort.

The News Argus: Dr. Covington, there have been a lot of questions raised nationally and locally concerning the quality of teachers graduating from college, especially at traditionally black colleges. What is being done to ensure that WSSU is producing quality teachers?

Dr. Covington: One of the things we are trying to do is strengthen our teacher education program by carefully evaluating our faculty. We are trying to select for our faculty positions the best people we can find, and like-wise we are trying to retain and reinforce the excellent faculty we already have. I think WSSU has a strong teacher education program cur-

rently. Another thing we are trying to do is offer scholarships to outstanding prospective teachers. We are hoping to attract students who are accomplished scholars. Also, we have found that many older students who have worked in other fields can prove to be exceptional teachers. So, we are trying to attract older students who are interested in becoming students. In addition, we have tried to improve to quality of our teacher experience. One of our major projects for the future surrounds the purchase of Anderson School. We have received an appropriation from the state to acquire and completely renovate the building. The facility will provide some 90,000 feet of instructional space and the design calls for its complete renovation in state-of-the-arts equipment, so it will become one of the best teacher training facilities in the state. We believe that all of these approaches will result in a stronger teacher education program at WSSU. So, we are attempting to respond to the growing demand by the public on institutions of higher education to produce better prepared teachers.



Chancellor Douglas Covington chats with The News Argus' Editor-in-Chief Sam Davis. Covington thinks big things are shaping up at WSSU. Photo by K. Hilliard

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