

# Cohen wants new student center

(Continued from Page 1)

your life, you don't make your job your entire life, and academics in pursuit of a liberal arts education is just part of growing up. The involvement on campus in extracurricular activities going hand in hand with a liberal arts education is very important for the student in terms of their beginning to form patterns of behavior and beginning to see themselves as an adult they will be in society.

**Decree:** Why did you decide to come to a liberal arts college?

**Cohen:** When I looked for a job, and I knew as I was getting into my second year at East Carolina we had an opportunity to accomplish a hell of a lot during my two years there and I felt like it was time for me to begin to think about that next step. I didn't seek out a liberal arts college, to be candid with you.

What I sought was an opportunity for me to go to a level, the Dean or Vice-President level, of Student Life at a relatively small school. It wasn't important whether it was a liberal arts school, although I like the fact that it is a liberal arts school, but somewhere they would, in essence, take a chance on me and I would take the chance on them and that it would work well together.

The job at Wesleyan was advertised last year and I sent them a resume. I'll tell you this very honestly, although I think about 90 people applied for the job, my background in campus recreation is not the typical background where you'd say we're ready to give this guy the next step to be the Dean. They usually look for a lot of people who work in residence life and things of that sort.

But I feel like I'm a very strong administrator, I feel like I manage people well, I understand students well, and some people at East Carolina made some phone calls over here to some key administrators like Dr. Brooks, and they basically said, "Whatever you do, just talk to this guy. You don't have to hire Steve Cohen, but we think you need to talk to him. You may have overlooked him on his resume because you may think he doesn't have the typical Dean of Student Life background, but understand he was the director of a large campus recreation program through the Division of Student Life at East Carolina. So he understands how our whole Student Life department works."

I came for my first interview. I met with a lot of people, but not with Dr. Garner. He wasn't here yet. I came back and met with Dr. Garner and they eventually offered me the job to be the Dean. So it wasn't a real "let's go and find a liberal arts college," it was more "let's find the right position at the right time and place."

I was also very excited about the fact that Dr. Garner was coming here. I had heard very good things about him, and I felt that Wesleyan was at the time where a lot of changes were going to be made. It was open to new ideas. That's the kind of person that I think I am, and I think Dr. Garner and

I are very similar in that respect. We walk around every day and we look around and we question how we can make this place better. Why did they do it this way? Why can't we do it that way? Why should we not build a building like this or not?

**Decree:** Characterize Student Life when you took over.

**Cohen:** I was not pleased. I inherited, in my mind, a mess. A mess in many ways ranging from the management of this office, the office procedures, and how things are done. It was a lack of professionalism in terms of office management, program development and follow-through, organizational structure somewhat unclear. Not a very professionally run operation, not what I'm used to anyway.

I'm very, very concerned with professionalism. Not just a positive image but the substance behind it. I'm very pick about things. If someone writes a letter, I don't want any grammatical errors or spelling errors. I want it to look good and I want it to read well. So to characterize the shape it was in — not very good. A serious question existed on this campus that may hopefully be changing. In terms of a lack of consistency in the Student Life office in terms of how students are dealt with when they are involved in disciplinary problems. What I'm trying to develop is a very fair system and a relatively consistent system so that students understand that we have certain rules and regulations at this institution just like any other aspect in society.

If you are 45 years old and you live in Raleigh, N.C., or New York City, there are laws in New York City or in Raleigh, N.C. If you conduct yourself within those laws, you have no problem. If you violate them, you are responsible for your actions. So what we're trying to show students is that we're part of a community here and I don't think there was that feeling before. They're part of that community, they are responsible citizens in that community.

There needs to be more financial support in the Student Life area, our office situation is intolerable — lack of space, lack of privacy — and an effort is going to be made here to do the right thing, I hope.

**Decree:** What rules have been changed for this year and why?

**Cohen:** Much to the dismay of a lot of people, no rules have been changed. The thing that may be different this year is there will be a sincere and concerted effort to enforce the rules that are on the books. I came here too late for me, Pam Derrick, and my staff to sit down and look at the handbook and say we don't like this, let's change that, let's modify that.

So I directed my staff in the first meeting I had with them to read that handbook cover to cover, understand the rules and regulations of this institution, and enforce them. That's what we're doing this year. Now as we go through the year, and work with faculty, students, and staff and their per-

ceptions of what we're doing and not doing, we are going to take note of all these things are of concern.

For next year my staff and I will have the opportunity, if need be, to modify, change, etc. For right now, I am taking the handbook and we are going to live with this. This is our bible this year, but let's do the job.

The things that have changed are the style of management. I think my style may be a little different from Dr. McKita's style. Those are the changes; they are more management kind of changes, more administrative changes. But no real rules and regulations have been changed. A lot of students think we have come in here and changed the rules, but we haven't. They just never had them enforced the way we are going to enforce them.

**Decree:** How do you think you are generally perceived by the student body?

**Cohen:** I think the reactions are fairly typical right now. I held a big meeting in the cafeteria about the second week I was here. The majority of students that live on campus showed up. A lot of people came to me afterwards and said you are what you say. You are a straight shooter. You say that your staff is not going out to look for people who are making trouble. We are just going to react to the situations that we encounter. We are not going out to investigate people, to knock on doors, to break into people's rooms checking for marijuana or beer. But if we see people violating the Code of Conduct of this institution we are going to respond.

Some people, I think, have a very good perception. They say the guy is fair and he's different from what we've had before. Some people hate my guts. Some people say the school has made the worst decision in history bring this guy in here. So I think it's a mixed reaction. But I don't worry too much about that. The main thing I'm concerned with is that when I look at myself in the mirror I feel I'm being fair.

**Decree:** Characterize the student body at Wesleyan.

**Cohen:** We have to be realistic here. This is not Chapel Hill. This is not Harvard. This is not Princeton. This is a school where a lot of people come in who were not high academic achievers in high school or they were not leaders of student government in high school. We have a good cross section. I've been very, very impressed by some students that I've met and quite frankly, I've been very disappointed in the behavior of some students that I've met.

One of the things that I have said from the start is we're not going to pamper people. We're not going to cater to people. We are in the business of providing students services and we know that is our business. But that doesn't mean we treat people like babies. Some people were spoiled at home or they're not used to having some expectation put on them in terms of their behavior. They're going to get a rude awakening here

because we're holding people accountable.

**Decree:** What are your priorities while in the position of Dean of Student Life at Wesleyan?

**Cohen:** Number one. There is a distinct and immediate need to begin to plan and then construct a student activities building. It is a must on this campus and I know that I have the complete support of Dr. Garner on this issue. We must build a building that can address the physical and cultural recreational needs of the students here.

It is really a disgrace that we have one building like Everett Gymnasium, as small as it is, that is supposed to serve the athletic, recreational, and physical education needs of this institution. There needs to be a place where students, when they are not involved in classes, can go and recreate. They could play a little racquetball, swim in a pool, play some indoor tennis, some volleyball, badminton, watch a movie, watch some TV in a more comfortable environment than they have now, play a game of backgammon, or listen to some music. That is critical.

Typically at a large university, you would build a physical recreation center and then you'd have another building that's your student union. That would be ideal — to do something to this building and also to build a physical recreation center. We may have to look at combining the two, but we definitely need that kind of facility.

There's some talk about renovating the power plant and making it more like a theater. What Dr. Garner and I have talked about is incorporating that into the notion of the construction of a student activities center. I would like a building that could really be looked at as a recreation or activities center in the fullest sense of the word, culturally and physically. And I think at a school this size, meaning a not very big one, we can probably accomplish that in one building and one renovation of the physical power plant. And if we do that, we are going to attract more students and the students that are here will feel happier about being here. Right now you can have a tendency to get depressed around here, there's not a lot to do. We need to start doing some of these things.

We also need to better develop Student Life programs like student activities — have more trips, have more cultural opportunities. We are working at developing a better intramural and recreational sports program. We are working at managing the housing situation better. It used to be that we exterminated one residence hall in October, then another one in November, then another and we rotated back and forth. Well, Tina DeLaine and I don't agree with that. We say we want every residence hall exterminated every month. When it is exterminated we want every single room in that residence hall exterminated.

So we're making progress. We want to upgrade the quality of things

we do. We want to upgrade it, and then expand it. The quality is not good, the professionalism is not there. We are going to upgrade the caliber of what we do and then we are going to expand what we do.

**Decree:** If you could change one thing immediately, what would it be?

**Cohen:** If I could change one thing immediately, I would walk into this school tomorrow morning and there would be a new student activities center. The physical facility would allow us the capability of all these other things that I'm talking about — the better programming, the expanded programming, we'd have to hire more staff, better opportunities for student involvement, employment opportunities, more recreation opportunities. So if I could do one thing now, it would be to turn around one day and see a new student activities center that can meet the physical, cultural, and recreational needs of our school.

**Decree:** What is a timetable for these priorities?

**Cohen:** Dr. Garner and I just talked about this last week. He would like, and I would agree, that by the end of this academic year we'd have the plans of this kind of facility. There are different ways in which you can finance this kind of a building. Dr. Garner has some very distinct ideas of what to do, and I agree with him. I think this building needs to be built in the next two to 2-1/2 years. That's realistic. I wish it could be done tomorrow, but that's realistic.

**Decree:** As Dean of Student Life, is there a message you would like to give to the students?

**Cohen:** I look at students, and I want them to look at themselves this way, as consumers. They are paying, or their parents are paying, a good deal of money for them to come to this educational institution. They have every right, and I stress that, every right to question their environment. To look around and say I think we need better this or more of that, etc. I will be more than happy, and my staff is more than happy, to hear from students about their concerns for the quality of the environment in which they live and go to school. But when they complain, they need to come in and not just complain, but offer suggestions for improvement.

Don't just come in here screaming and yelling about this or that. Offer alternatives. Offer suggestions. Involve yourself on campus in different student groups and activities. And also try to understand what I'm trying to accomplish here with my staff, and that is to help prepare you for your life as an adult in what is referred to as the real world out there.

Because in many ways, I feel that the way many students were handled here before was not like the real world. They may not like some of the things we do now, but maybe they'll look back on it five years from now and say, thank God there was a guy like that here that made me wake up and take responsibility and accountability for myself and my actions.