

THE DECREE

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May 12, 2016

NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Many Wesleyan Graduates Overcame Adversity

By **Dustin Midgett**
Decree Staff Writer

Editor's Note: Before the usual raucous crowd, 225 students graduated from the traditional-day and ASPIRE programs April 30 at the Dunn Center.

Motivational speaker Walt Wiley delivered a well-received commencement address, while Chaplain Barry Drum led the baccalaureate. Among the other highlights, major awards were given to students Dillon Moore (the President's Cup) and Jasmine Edgren (Algernon Sydney Sullivan), and Michael Toreno and Joshua Simmons were commissioned as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army.

History Professor Jonathan Sarris was named Exemplary Teacher.

In the weeks leading up to graduation, senior Dustin Midgett interviewed several graduates about their memories of their alma mater as well as their post-graduate plans.

Christasha Ballard

If you have experienced college, you know there is no easy path to graduation. To Christasha Ballard, 26, it has been a difficult road. Just before graduating from high school, Ballard had her first child, which hindered her from immediately starting college.

First, the Wilmington native had to focus on taking care of her baby and finding work. After working a few jobs here and there, she decided to become a probation officer. She had already had a second child at this point, so it took a lot of hard work and a rocky road to get her associates in criminal justice from Cape Fear Community College (CFCC). While there, Ballard saw advertisements for NCWC. She decided she needed to get her bachelor's degree in criminal justice to become a probation officer.

Her first step was taking NCWC classes through CFCC. "After about six months of taking Wesleyan classes through CFCC and finding out I would eventually need classes only offered at the Rocky Mount ASPIRE site, I decided I would move away from my hometown and start a new life in Rocky Mount while attending NCWC," said Ballard.

During her time at Wesleyan, life was not easy for Ballard. She had been working, taking care of her children, and trying to get her degree all while carrying her third child. "The most challenging obstacle in trying to get my degree was the death of my baby," said Ballard. "I went into labor while in class, and Mrs. Vivian (Martin, the professor) stayed with me."

After being rushed to Nash General by a classmate, within ten minutes Ballard was informed by the doctor that her baby was stillborn. She gave birth to Taj Hakim Allen on October 1, 2015. This news crushed her, leaving her wondering if she could finish her degree. "That day changed my life forever and I wanted to quit school right then," Ballard said. "But I pushed on for him."

In addition to personal difficulties, she had struggles in the classroom. "My path was a roller coaster. I thought I would never make it to graduation," she said. "I had what seemed like a million research papers, a trillion tests and even classroom speeches." By the time she could see the end, Ballard was "exhausted, mourning, and looking for a way out."

Ballard found the Wesleyan staff to be very helpful during her time of need. She liked the class availability because it fit her hectic lifestyle, and she found the staff to be supportive, especially when she lost her son. She received multiple phone calls and cards after she lost Taj, and felt she was a part of the Wesleyan family. "I don't think I could've chosen a better place to go," said Ballard.

Ballard is proud to be graduating with honors, Magna Cum Laude, and as a member of the Alpha Phi Sigma Honor Society.

Aubrey Motley

Ideally, college should be a good experience. For Aubrey Motley, this has not necessarily been the case.

Motley came to NCWC in hopes of pursuing his bachelor's in theatre. He has done that and more, but says his overall experience at Wesleyan has not been what he had hoped. Speaking about his college career, Motley said, "It has generally been one disappointment after another."

Motley's biggest issue has been with his

major program, Entertainment. "I enjoy the one full-time professor that we have but I'm disappointed by the amount of attention my major has been given," said Motley. "At a school with deans and presidents who say they enjoy the arts, this program is completely taken for granted here." His primary concern is that his major only has one, hard-working professor (Roger Drake), who, Motley says, is worn out.

Motley thinks it is time to get Professor Drake some assistance because he is responsible for teaching upper-level and general education classes, producing and directing plays, and performing multiple other tasks. Due to the lack of help, the low number of theatre students is left to do

extra work as well. "When you have one man leading the whole department, it leads to disorganization. And it's unfair for the students" who pay tuition, Motley said.

As Motley made his way into his final two years, he found that most of his theatre classes were independent studies. That did not sit well with him either. "Once you reach the upper-level courses, you're practically taking nothing but independent studies," he said. "I'm paying for someone to teach me and to offer his full knowledge and experience in school, not to teach myself."

Motley does not blame Drake for the problems; rather, he is upset with Wesleyan's lack of attention to the Entertainment program. He thinks it unfair

that other majors are expanding, while his area of study is largely ignored.

Despite the disappointment that Motley has faced while at Wesleyan, he has stuck to it, made many friends, and joined many campus organizations. A work-study employee at the library, Motley was a member of Alpha Psi Omega, Alpha Sigma Phi (Fraternity), Wesleyan Players and the Film Club. And he has participated in S.E.A.T. (Student Entertainment & Activities Team), the Psychology Club, and the Anime Club.

Motley's most memorable Wesleyan moment was getting initiated into Alpha Sigma Phi his freshman year. He plans to get more experience in theatre, then apply to graduate school in the future.

Laurie Middleswarth

From the time she was young, Laurie Middleswarth was exposed to Wesleyan. As a kid, she would take trips here to tour the campus, and now years later she is receiving a degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology.

At first, the new ASPIRE graduate did not attend NCWC; instead she joined the Marines straight out of high school in 2005. While in the Marines, she served two deployments during a four-year contract.

After her time in the military, she enrolled in Nash Community College to get her Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice. She then transferred to Wesleyan

while working with the Rocky Mount Police Department as a Gang Unit/Violent Offender investigator. As an investigator, Middleswarth said, she "pursues higher charges against violent offenders in hopes to make federal cases against offenders." She hopes to stay with the Gang Unit because she enjoys it too much to transfer to another agency or a federal job. If she were to pursue a federal job, she would like to work for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF).

Working in law enforcement has kept her very busy sometimes, making it difficult to complete class assignments. She noted that this was not an easy time in her life. "I worked a job that often needed me to stay overtime," she said, "There were so many times I would have to stay up till 0300 hours finishing assignments."

After preserving, she is happy to be finished with school, at least for the time being. In the meantime she is always taking additional hours of training, whether it's classes or fitness training with the police department.

Middleswarth said she was attracted to Wesleyan by its Methodist affiliation, its location, and the simplicity of transferring her credits. "I loved the idea of attending a Christian College," she said. "And I live and work fairly close to the campus."

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Wesleyan honored its student-athletes at the annual Athletics Department banquet. From left: Ciro Norzagaray (baseball), Student-Athlete of the Year; Sebastian Sikh (tennis), co-Athlete of the Year; Malik Adams (football), co-Athlete of the Year; and Jasmine Edgren (softball), Athlete of the Year and Student-Athlete of the Year. SI photo

NC Wesleyan To Introduce CJ, Communication Programs

By **Decree Staff**

Wesleyan has approved a new undergraduate major, Communication, and its first-ever graduate program, in Criminal Justice.

Commenting on the Communication major, Associate Provost Molly Wyatt said that next year the college expects to hire a full-time faculty member with a terminal degree in that field. The hope is that Wesleyan will begin to offer courses in the new major by fall 2017.

A Communication program would address a need that Wesleyan recruiters have identified in recent years, said Judy Rollins, Vice President of Enrollment Services and Marketing. Along with engineering and nursing, Rollins said, "Communication is one of the most commonly asked-for degrees that we see in recruitment."

She pointed out that most of Wesleyan's competitors offer a Communication degree. "While we have the Liberal Studies option with a Communication concentration, many students want a full-blown Communication degree," said Rollins, who noted that the new program should help to attract more female students to Wesleyan's male-dominant campus.

Dr. Wyatt said that the program will help prepare students for professional communication fields that emphasize writing and speaking—public relations, advertising, marketing and journalism (traditional and new media). Such fields are growing, she said, "due to a reliance on social media sources and the prevalence of media-based commerce."

Rollins predicted that many students would double-major in Communication and either Business or Marketing. "We believe that can significantly improve the job prospects for students," she said.

The new program will take advantage of existing course offerings in English (e.g., Journalism and Writing for New Media) as well as Commuter Information Systems (Web Authoring

& Publishing), Entertainment-Theatre (Oral Communication), Marketing (Integrated Marketing Communications) and Psychology (Psychology of Mass Communication). The new faculty member will teach such courses as Introduction to Mass Communication, Communication Theory and Communication Research Methods.

Through the college's popular Film Club, Dr. Wyatt said, students have demonstrated strong interest in media production and related areas, elements that the college may add to the Communication program in the future.

The Criminal Justice master's program will begin in fall 2017 at the earliest, according to Dr. Gail Marsal, the CJ program coordinator, who noted that courses will be 100 percent online.

Wesleyan plans to market its program throughout North Carolina, with an emphasis on the eastern part of the state. Dr. Marsal said that Criminal Justice faculty will use their current relationship with the state Department of Public Safety in its recruitment efforts. The Wesleyan program will focus on law enforcement administration as well as management and practice, she said.

Dr. Marsal said the program will begin with an initial cohort of 10-15 students, with plans to increase enrollment by 5-10 students each year. "The ideal student will have a minimum of two years of experience in criminal justice or a related field," she said.

But Dr. Marsal added that the program is not limited to professionals. If accepted into the program without practical experience, a student would need to complete a graduate-level internship as an elective.

By taking 12 hours per semester, a student could finish the program in a year and a half, Dr. Marsal noted.

Freshman Recounts Day College 'Changed Forever'

By **Grace Lee**
Decree Staff Writer

March 21, 2016 at 8:30 p.m. North Carolina Wesleyan was changed forever. That night we Bishops lost four family members. I can remember what I was doing at that exact moment; I was on the phone with a family member. After the call was finished, I went to Nash Hall to visit a few of my friends. That's when I heard about the crash. I walked into the lobby and saw everyone texting all the people in their contacts list, asking them if they were okay. I pulled out my phone and started to do the same. My heart was pounding so hard I was sure everyone else could hear it, as I waited for replies. Every millisecond counted.

I was with my friend Jay Li in his room in Nash when I got a text from my friend Rex, saying it was my old roommate Dee Scott, and three of her friends, Kandis McBride-Jones, Donyell Brown, and Robyne St. Claire-Barnes. My heart sank. It was like I couldn't breathe. I went downstairs to ask Rex, to yell at him "Is it true? It can't be. I saw her yesterday!" When I got there, however, nothing came out. I just reached for him, for an embrace I needed so badly.

On the other side of campus in Collins Residence Hall, Emanuel Williams was in his room studying when the crash happened. "When I heard it involved Wesleyan students, I was shocked. I didn't know at the time if anybody was hurt or lost their life, so I prayed asking God for mercy," Williams said.

Desmond Rashad was in the middle of campus, the library, when he heard about the crash. "Some of us came outside of the library to see the many emergency vehicles," he recalled.

Beverly Aneau, a close friend of Kandis, reacted in a similar manner as I did. "I remember saying 'no,' as in, 'no, that can't be true,'" said Aneau. "It seemed way too unrealistic. I was horrified. I've never had someone I knew so well die, so I just couldn't believe it. Even while we were all talking about it outside of Nash, the idea of her being gone just wasn't completely sinking in. It was only the next day that it fully hit me in the Chapel and on the way to lunch. That's when I started crying."

Rashad was in denial as well. "When I found out that they were the victims, I didn't want to believe it. And to be honest, I still don't," he said.

Rex, Dee, Madai (Maddy) and I had all attended orientation together and had gotten really close before school started, so I knew who I had to tell, even though it broke my heart. Madai is a commuter so this news hadn't reached her. But before I could even finish my sentence I could hear her crying on the other end of the phone.

After that, I stayed at Nash for a bit until the news got around about the meeting in the cafeteria. Not even two hours after the accident and there, in the cafeteria,

were over 100 students and staff crying on each other's shoulders as they listened to the Gospel Choir sing for their fallen sisters. The three Edgecombe RAs, Rhoda Agyei-Boateng, Sarah Jeffers, and Raelin Davis, were sobbing. I remember talking to Rhoda and she told me that, in all her years as an RA, here and in her home country, she had never dealt with anything this hard.

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Counselor Alan Harper was trying to reassure everyone that we were going to get through this, and if we needed it, we had help available. A few students and staff talked, and Reverend Drum prayed for the families and friends of the girls. This lasted for almost two hours but it felt like longer. I kept drifting between my thoughts and the reality of the situation.

That night I stayed in Nash with one of my best friends, after we got an email that Wesleyan was cancelling our Tuesday classes. It just didn't feel right staying in the same room that Dee and I once shared; the same room where I had often heard her and Donyell's laughter. I couldn't go to sleep; I was emotionally and physically exhausted. I just kept reliving memories.

The next morning you could feel it in the air: the campus was changed. My friend Beverly and I went to the chapel, because praying felt like the only way to take back what little control we had over the situation. When we walked into the chapel, there were four pink, floral-scented candles lit. The Nu Gamma Phi sisters were there to cry and pray with us. It wasn't just that we lost treasured Bishop family members; it was the thought of their families back home. We didn't pray for the girls. Everyone knew they were right with God, so we prayed for strength for the families. How do you bury your child? Every hope and dream that their families had for the girls, every pictured wedding dance, or grandchild, was gone in that instant. That's what tore me up the most about the situation.

We must've stayed at the chapel at least an hour. Then at lunch we just stared at the table where the girls always used to sit. There were people around us laughing and going on like it was a normal day, and I was angry at them. Angry that they weren't as shocked as the rest of us. Didn't they care?

Lunch was short lived, as hardly any of us could eat. Right after we left the cafeteria and went back to Nash, that's when we all got an email from Emily Bower: "Students, staff, and faculty are invited to gather in the Dunn Center at 3 o'clock this afternoon. Voices of Triumph will be performing in honor of Kandis, Donyell, Donesha, and Robyne. Let's all take some time to lean on each other and remember four of our friends."

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