

THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804



Junior Sebastian Sikh was one of 32 athletes to take part in the NCAA singles championships in Chattanooga, TN. Turn to page 3 for coverage of tennis and other sports.

SI photo

Jason Buel Excited to Begin New Communication Major

Fresh from graduate studies at North Carolina State, Jason Buel is excited to join the Wesleyan community as the college introduces a new major next fall.

Buel, 30, was hired as the first faculty member in the new communication department. Born in Sarasota, Florida, he was raised in Boone, where he attended Appalachian State, earning a degree in psychology and English with an emphasis in film studies. He then studied for a masters in English/film studies at NC State and just finished his doctorate there in communication, rhetoric and digital media.

He comes to Wesleyan with extensive teaching experience. He has taught courses in writing, film, business communication and applied communication at NC State

as well as schools such as Vance-Granville Community College and Durham Tech.

The Decree conducted a recent email interview with Buel about his plans for the new major and his life outside the classroom.

Q. What about the NC Wesleyan job appealed to you?

A. It seemed like a perfect opportunity for me. I want to be at a small school that emphasizes teaching, and I love living in North Carolina. I also like the idea of getting in on the ground floor of a new major, having a hand in curriculum development, and teaching a variety of courses across my discipline.

Q. Describe your teaching style.

A. I try to be a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage.” Sure, I know lots of things. But simply telling you about things I know isn't terribly helpful to you. Instead, I want to learn about your interests in the course and guide you as you research them for yourself. This approach can be uncomfortable for many students at first, because it means I'm not going to tell you exactly what you need to know or give you any easy answers. However, it will help you improve as a researcher, communicator, and critical thinker in addition to helping you learn specific course content.

Q. What can a student expect to do in a typical week of your class?

A. Students will encounter new ideas through our assigned readings and videos outside of class. You might demonstrate your understanding of new material by contributing to a class Wiki page or by writing a blog post on a topic covered in the readings. In class, I want us interacting with one another as much as possible. Sometimes this means class discussions. More often, it means tackling small-group projects in class. We might have a conceptual workshop where we test the limits of our understanding of new ideas or a virtual scavenger hunt where we track down examples of some media phenomenon out in the “real” world. We might debate a controversial topic raised in the readings. We might craft our own communication strategies in response to historical conditions that others have faced. As much as possible, I like to design activities that give students room to be creative and learn from one another.

Q. What's the most important lesson you've learned so far about teaching?

A. 1) As much as I personally enjoy nerding-out and listening to a good 90-minute lecture, most people would rather have a root canal.

2) Shame and fear structure an awful lot of students' actions (or lack thereof) in class. We have to make room for each other to take risks and make mistakes if we want to learn. If we're not occasionally failing, we're not really learning.

Q. Describe your dissertation.

A. My dissertation is called “Whose Screens? Our Screens!: Digital Documentary and Social Activism.” It's an examination of amateur and independent video practices in the context of social media and contemporary social movements. It looks at how digital media technologies complicate what we know about documentary film/video and political communication.

Q. What will be the focus of your future research?

A. In general, it will focus on how digital media practices shape political expression and the democratic exchange of ideas. What new potentials do they open? What new limits do they place on us? What old patterns do they recreate?

In addition to revising my dissertation into a book, I've got several projects in various stages of development: a book chapter on amateur video practices in Canada's Idle No More movement, a journal article on the use of networked digital media around Moral Monday here in North Carolina, and a conference paper on citizen journalism connected through the #NoDAPL hashtag. Early next year, I'll have an article out in “Public Culture” about alternative modes of archiving

developed during Occupy Wall Street.

In the past, I've collaborated with students and faculty to produce multimedia showcases (websites, interactive video installations, curated screenings, etc.) to share our research with the public. I hope to continue such collaborative, public-facing research in the future.

Q. Try to make connections between your research interests and your work with students in the classroom.

A. At the heart of my research are two questions that are central to the classroom: How do different communication practices facilitate the free exchange of ideas? How can communication help to build community? Effective communication isn't just about having a “good” idea or the “right” answer to a problem. It's about packaging your ideas in a way that not only makes sense to other people but also makes them feel that you share common interests—that your idea will benefit both of you.

Any good communication course will not only give you practice doing this, but it will also give you space to critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of other paths you might take as you shape your message. In some courses, that might mean analyzing the word choice of a political campaign speech. In others, it might mean breaking down a scene from a movie shot-by-shot to understand how the camera placement, set design, and lighting contribute to its overall impact on viewers. In still other courses, it might mean collecting data on a Twitter hashtag to understand what factors impact its spread. In each case, what we're doing in the classroom is effectively a smaller-scale version of what I'm doing in my own research.

Q. In the past, communication has often been called a “jock major.” Argue against this impression.

A. Like any major, it's exactly as serious and intellectually deep as you make it. In terms of methods, we draw on work in history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and political science. In that sense, we're similar to most humanities and social science majors in terms of the workload and type of work you can expect to be doing in your classes. The “jock major” stereotype, like most stereotypes, has little to no basis in reality. (And “jocks” can be serious students, too!)

Q. Describe your ideas for building the communication major at Wesleyan.

A. I see the major focusing on media history and emphasizing a strong liberal arts foundation in communication theory. I want to develop courses that blend theory and practice to give students a broader understanding of problems in communication so that their skills will remain useful to them long after graduation. To that end, centering media history and communication theory will allow students to anticipate trends by understanding not just our present media environment but also the forces that shape it—and the forces that will continue to shape the media of tomorrow.

Q. What classes will you teach next fall?

A. I'll be teaching COM 195: Film Analysis, COM 200: Introduction to Mass Communication, and COM 495: Documentary Media.

Q. What courses would you like to add to the communication curriculum as it's now constituted?

A. I'm interested in adding courses in political communication, the history of media technologies, and contemporary media theory, where we can critically examine the ways that media practices shape our world. My background is in film studies, so I also anticipate offering special topics courses in film history—perhaps on topics like American independent cinema, revolutions in world cinema, North Carolina on film, etc.

Q. Imagine I'm a student still not sure if communication is the right major for me. Persuade me to give it serious consideration.

A. Listen: it might not be right for you.

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‘Fiddler’ Cast Shows Collaborative Spirit

By Jessica Brown
Senior Staff Writer

“Fiddler on the Roof” was a resounding success with performers drawing standing ovations from the more than 1,100 who attended three showings on April 7 and 8 at the Dunn Center.

The musical, a collaborative effort by The Wesleyan Players and Faith Christian School, was directed by Danelle Cauley, an instructor at both schools.

In Cauley's words, “Fiddler” “tells a timeless story with an important message and it's a much recognized theatre classic.” It focuses on a poor Jewish dairyman (Tevye) and his family. While living in Czarist Russia at a time of mounting anti-Semitism, Tevye tries to protect his five daughters while instilling in them traditional values.

The first two performances went well, but in the third performance, Wesleyan student Aleksandr Shiriaev, playing Fyedka, stumbled and appeared to be favoring one leg. After the scene ended, it was announced that he had sustained an injury and would be going to the hospital. The students wanted to go on with the show so Fischer Vaughan took on Fyedka's role. Sainabou Jallow thought that Vaughan did a great job. “He had a script in hand, but he acted and didn't just read out lines,” she said.

Trey Russell played Perchik as well as an ensemble member. He said costume changes were a challenge. “I've never done a show with costume changes, so this was new,” he said. “It seemed like during the show I was either on stage or changing costumes.”

Savannah Flanagan played one of the Russians and one of the bottle dancers. She was nervous taking on such a dance-heavy role. “I'm not a great dancer,” she explained. “I got to improve my skills and I'm proud of how I did on the bottle dance.” She added that this was her first time playing a male character.

Many audience members loved the bottle dance. Eleven actors put a glass bottle on their head while executing an elaborate dance. Many thought the dancers had put Velcro on their hats to keep the bottles attached, but there was no trickery involved. The first and third performances resulted in a few broken bottles. Toni Tutt, one of the villagers, revealed that the bottles were custom-made from sugar glass by a teacher at Faith Christian. A handful of rice was poured inside the bottles to keep them weighted, but the dancers relied on skill to keep them from falling. They had to attend more rehearsals than the other actors to practice.

Two NCWC alumni, Katherine Crickmore and Kaitlyn Davis, returned to help out. Crickmore played Chava, one of Tevye's daughters. Tevye was played by Jacob Smith and Golde, Tevye's wife, was performed by Victoria Thompson. Both are Faith Christian students.

There were few technical difficulties and, other than Shiriaev's injury, the show went off without a hitch. The set gave off the vibe of a small village. There were large stage pieces that looked like houses and that could be turned to resemble businesses. Tevye's house could open and close, making set changes quick and easy.

Stephanie Garrett enjoyed the play. “The actors definitely put in some serious hard work,” she said. “I had friends on the stage, so I saw how hard they worked.”

Cast members commented on the

great chemistry of the ensemble and it showed when they pulled together after Shiriaev's injury. “We finished the performance strong,” Russell said. “It was nice having such a talented cast and crew that could keep going even with the challenges in the production.”

Flanagan agreed, stating the cast was a team and a family. Having one of them go down was scary and it affected all of them, she said. “I'm proud of how we pulled together,” she said. “Fischer picked it up and handled it beautifully. I think it showed how close we got to each other.”

Wesleyan Profile: Brian Moody

Brian Moody was enjoying a busy mid-April day. He had met with his professors about upcoming final exams. He had attended an open house for students interested in criminal justice careers. And he had participated in a meeting to discuss his role as director of a Boy Scout camp set to take place on campus in June.

In less than a year, Moody has become a popular figure at Wesleyan. It's not just his friendliness and sense of humor. Many Bishops have been drawn to Kate, his seeing-eye dog, which, until retirement in May, led the blind 41-year-old Moody around campus.

Dean Ed Naylor has been impressed with Moody, one of the few blind students to attend Wesleyan in the past decade. “Like other students, he's just trying to get the best education he can,” the dean said. “He really adds to our campus in an interesting way, because a lot of people aren't exposed to others who are different from them. The fact that Brian is able to live his life like everyone else, even though he doesn't have eyesight, is an inspiration to me and to most people who come in contact with him.”

Moody dislikes the label “handicapped.” “That sounds like something major. To most blind persons, it's not a handicap, just a lost sense,” said Moody who lost his sight in his early twenties.

Born in Charlottesville, Virginia, Moody has lived in western North Carolina since his family moved to Lincolnton when he was in fifth grade. A lover of camping and fishing, he grew up a dedicated Scout.

During his senior year at West Lincoln High School, Moody had considered enlisting in the military. Then a car wreck led to a change of heart. Driving a 1982 Datsun 200 SX, he tried to buckle his seat belt after the car was in motion. Losing control, he broadsided four pine trees and sustained a serious knee injury. While his girlfriend, a passenger, was not injured, her father, the owner of the vehicle, was incensed. “Boy, was her daddy mad,” Moody said. “The car looked like a W.”

Rather than military service, Moody entered the construction business after high school. He was a multi-skilled craftsman, performing electrical, roofing,



Brian Moody A. Sundbom photo

and glass work for three years. He specialized in commercial construction in the Carolinas, while he pursued one of his other passions, volunteer firefighting, which he had discovered in his early teens.

It was in November 1998, while working at a construction job in Greenville, South Carolina, that Moody was struck by a serious illness. He recalled that his then-employer had brought chicken plates from a local fundraiser for the work crew. “I felt like crap,” Moody said. “At first, I thought I had the stomach flu or food poisoning because I was so sick. It just came on that quick.”

Moody thought he'd feel better in a few weeks, but by Thanksgiving, he was weak, achy, still very sick. “I just thought it was a virus,” he said.

He went back to North Carolina the first week of December and remained in the hospital for six weeks. He soon noticed his vision fading. In a week it was gone.

The eventual diagnosis was meningitis and permanent blindness.

Had the doctors been more aggressive in the early stages of the illness, Moody believes he would have retained his sight. But he's not bitter. “I'm not mad about it,” he said.

Moody said that he's become more open-minded over the years. As one might expect, he said, he experiences life in a new way. Less judgmental about the way a person looks or dresses, Moody has befriended “folks I wouldn't have liked” in his previous

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