

# THE DECREE

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## Fred Sanborn, Award-Winning Wesleyan Professor, Talks Teaching

Dr. Fred Sanborn, past recipient of the Jefferson-Pilot Professorship, a founder of the Teaching & Learning Center, and co-author of a psychology textbook, last year added a new line to his résumé: 2016-17 Wesleyan Exemplary Teacher.

Now in his 14th year at Wesleyan, Dr. Sanborn, 44, came to the college from his native Kansas, where he earned an undergraduate degree from Kansas Wesleyan and a Ph.D. from Kansas State. He teaches courses in social psychology, developmental psychology and media psychology. He is co-author, with Richard J. Harris, of “A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication.”

Besides teaching at Wesleyan, Dr. Sanborn served as the first director of Wesleyan’s Teaching & Learning Center, which, among other functions, introduces new technology to faculty and keeps them abreast of recent trends in the art of teaching. He has been involved with the Psychology Club and “various iterations of LGBT students groups,” including SAFE, the newest organization.

When he’s not working, Dr. Sanborn spends time with his husband, Tony Hefner, an engineer. He likes to attend plays (Hefner is an actor in his free time) and watch movies and TV (some current favorites: “Veep,” “Last Week Tonight with John Oliver,” “blackish,” and “American Horror Story”). The two have spent considerable time renovating their home outside of Raleigh. “It was pretty bad when we started,” Dr. Sanborn said, “but we’re just about done. We’re looking for a new one so we can start the process again.”

The Decree conducted a recent email interview with Dr. Sanborn.

**Q.** How did you become interested in the field of psychology?

**A.** Ever since I was a child, I’ve always thought that people, their thinking and their behaviors were fascinating. When I got to high school and realized I could take courses that would help me understand all of this, I was in. Years later, people are no less fascinating to me. Plus, now I get paid to talk about all this stuff with young people.

**Q.** I’ve long been impressed by your time-management skills. What’s your secret?

**A.** As I get older, I think more and more about my time and how I use it. Over the years, I’ve also figured out what I most want to accomplish with my time (like doing a good job teaching and spending time with people I care about) and what doesn’t matter as much (like spending lots of time on social media, watching stupid TV, or gossiping). I also try to be disciplined with my time. For example, I have specific times and days when I prepare for class, write, grade papers, exercise, and meditate. I try very hard to respect those times and not let other things intrude. However, I’d be lying if I said that never happens—sometimes life interferes with the way I think things will go. In the end, I try to remember that everything will get done (or at least the most important stuff). Also, email spam filters are a great time-saving tool!

**Q.** What’s your teaching philosophy?

**A.** It could fill several pages, but it boils down to a few basics. First, I think learning is fun, and I try to model this for my students. I almost always have fun and use humor when I’m teaching, and I hope that makes learning more fun for my students. The second big thing is that I hope to get my students to see the real-world applications of what they’re learning in the classroom. I’m lucky that in my discipline this is easy—I think students in classes like social psychology, child development, positive psychology, and media psychology can use what they learn almost every day. The last thing is that I hope my students are better communicators after they leave my class. Effective writing and speaking have made a huge difference in my life. I had good teachers who taught me those skills, and I try to carry on that practice with my own students.

**Q.** Describe what happens in one of your typical 100-level courses?

**A.** In Introduction to Psychology, I try to give my students a taste of many different areas of psychology. The common notion

is that psychology is people talking to a psychiatrist on a couch. Students are sometimes surprised to learn that psychology is also about things like how our senses work, how people become prejudiced, and how children think about the world.



Dr. Fred Sanborn speaks with students after class. A. Stern photo

**Q.** How about a 400-level course?

**A.** When I teach Senior Seminar in Psychology, I try to help students get a sense of what graduate school is like, so the expectations are high. Among other things, students give a professional presentation, read original research, write a literature review paper, and become intimately familiar with APA style.

**Q.** How do you know when a class session has gone well?

**A.** I trained for a time to do clinical psychology work. When working with people in that capacity, one of the first lessons is to pay attention to body language. The way people hold their bodies reveals a lot about what might be going on in their minds. I think the same principle applies in the classroom. When I see interested faces and multiple hands in the air, I know things are going well. Even among quiet students, it’s apparent when people are engaged, thinking, and processing information. I try to pay attention to such cues.

**Q.** In graduate school, our education is focused on content more so than the art of teaching. Talk about your teaching influences, as well as the evolution of your style.

**A.** I’ve had so many excellent teachers throughout my life. I’m grateful to all of them and often think back on the things they taught me. Sometimes, I can even remember their voices and their exact words. However, I also learned from the not-so-great teachers about what not to do. If I had to pick my one biggest influence, it would be Dr. Richard Harris, one of my professors in grad school. He wasn’t my advisor, but he became my true mentor. There was a time when I thought about quitting graduate school, but he showed me the joy of teaching a college

class. He was also the first one to recognize that I could become a good teacher. One of the biggest lessons I learned from Dr. Harris was the importance of showing genuine care for students. Later, he also became my co-author on a textbook. He’s now retired, but he remains my model for a great professor. I’m proud that we’ve remained friends and collaborators.

**Q.** What do you like best about teaching at Wesleyan?

**A.** The great personality and developmental psychologist Erik Erikson thought that young adults are at the stage of their lives when they’re developing an identity. I’m honored that I get to help students figure out who they are and who they want to be in the future. Sometimes this happens in the classroom, but more frequently it seems to happen in one-on-one conversations in settings like advising meetings, on a field trip, and sometimes just in a hallway chat. It’s especially rewarding when past students return to campus and tell me that something I did helped make a difference in their lives. That has happened twice this semester, and when it does, it truly makes my day a happy one.

**Q.** If you could change one thing about Wesleyan students, what would it be?

**A.** First, I have to say that I love working with Wesleyan students. Many remind me of myself when I was an undergraduate. Like many of our students, I was a first-generation student who wanted to be in college. I just didn’t fully understand what college was all about, at least at first. That being said, I sometimes wish Wesleyan students questioned and challenged things more often. I really like it when students challenge me or ask me how I know something or why psychologists believe something. I love it when I get a question I don’t know the answer to and subsequently have to research. That’s when I know students are thinking and learning. I wish more Wesleyan students would challenge me, the things they see on campus, and the world around them.

**Q.** If you could change one thing about your professional self, what would it be?

**A.** You flattered me earlier in asking about my time-management skills. But sometimes I get stressed trying to get everything done in the way I want it done. So, I wish I worried less about time. I could also stand to be less of a perfectionist and a little less critical of myself and others. The good thing is that these things are less stressful to me now than they were five or ten years ago. Maybe in another five or ten years, I’ll have it figured out!

**Q.** How much time do you spend in a week on social media and which one do you favor?

**A.** I have accounts with most social-media platforms, but I probably interact

with Facebook the most. I don’t spend as much time on social media as I once did because it can become a huge time suck. I’m also irritated with Facebook and Twitter because even their creators no longer seem to understand how to control them.

**Q.** Let’s shift to the TLC. Discuss its genesis.

**A.** About 10 years ago, I was the chair of the faculty Professional Development Committee. Because I was in that role, the Provost at the time suggested that I attend a conference on faculty development. There, I learned about centers like the TLC, and I thought it would be a great thing for Wesleyan. I lobbied the administration for several years to fund the TLC, and eventually they gave it the green light. Dr. Carol Lawrence and I worked hard one summer (and throughout the next few years) to get the center up and running. I think the TLC has become an asset to the college and a great resource for the faculty. I’m glad to see Dr. Heather Louch and Professor Amber Sheeler continuing the mission of the TLC.

**Q.** What did you learn about Wesleyan faculty through your work at TLC?

**A.** Students have probably noticed that the faculty at Wesleyan are varied.

We come from different places, we talk differently, and we teach many different things in many different ways. However, something I think is true of all faculty at NCWC is that we try very hard and only want the best for our students. A school like Wesleyan is not a place faculty go if they are trying to make a big splash in the academic world or to make an international name for themselves in their fields. Faculty come to NCWC because they care about students, love to teach, and are excited to share knowledge of their disciplines.

**Q.** What’s your proudest accomplishment at NCWC?

**A.** I was very honored to receive awards like the Exemplary Teacher Award and the Jefferson-Pilot Professorship. But I think I’m proudest of co-authoring a textbook on psychology and media. That work led me to create a course, Psychology of Mass Communication. I’m proud of all of that because I think the book and the class help give students tools to navigate an increasingly overwhelming media world. I tell students in that class that I want them to become savvy media consumers, so I hope they do.



The Wesleyan men’s soccer team earned its first NCAA tourney berth since 2008. See sports coverage on pages 3 and 4. SI photo

## NCWC Science Majors Complete Advanced Research in Internships

While many Wesleyan students were holding down summer jobs and others were hitting the beach or preparing for fall sports, some science majors were getting a first glimpse of their future careers.

Carolynn Davern, a chemistry major, spent ten weeks in the labs of North Carolina State as part of a program sponsored by the National Science Foundation’s Research Experience for Undergraduates. Her experiments and research focused on the building of peptoids.

Davern explained: “I was building peptoids, which are peptide mimetics with the R group on the nitrogen rather than the carbon. I incorporated a benzaldehyde hydrazone side chain in ‘sandwich sequences’ with eight different amine groups. I also had a computational part of my project where I modeled and calculated the energies of my peptoids with different dihedral angles using Gaussian software.”

Did you get all that?

Here’s a translation: Davern did sophisticated work with substances used in many biomedical applications.

The Wesleyan senior credits Drs. Pamela Patterson and George Whitwell for helping to guide her through the application process. She was encouraged to seek a research internship to prepare for graduate school. “My professors really emphasized that summer internships would be great experience for me,” she said.

Another REU participant was Caleb Rose, a biology and environmental science major, who conducted research and lab experiments as part of the University of Oklahoma’s Biological Survey project.

For 14 weeks, his responsibilities included collecting data at the Aquatic Research Facility on OU’s campus, collecting mussels for the experiments, performing lab work, and completing his own guided research project led by a postdoctoral fellow and a principal investigator.

He was urged to apply for the REU program by Dr. Joseph White, a former visiting professor in biology. “While Wesleyan is a fantastic school for a one-on-one experience

with your professors, your undergraduate adviser, and the staff, there’s little (opportunity for) research,” Rose said.

The REU program allows undergraduates to gain research experience, as well as exposure to graduate school, Rose said. It confirmed what his Wesleyan professors have told him, that “research is grueling and difficult, but rewarding and fun!” he said.

Like Davern, Rose intends to pursue doctoral studies after he graduates from Wesleyan. He said the summer internship was a confidence boost; it proved that he could handle the rigors of graduate school.

“It only reinforced my love of science,” he said. “After working in a lab all summer, I’m more inspired for a future in science. I had doubts about whether I would be successful in a long-term academic setting, but my REU has put my mind to ease.”

In her REU internship, Kayla Lavan immersed herself in lab work for ten weeks at Georgia Southern University. She reported that her research concentrated on materials nanoscience and organic chemistry. “I spent most days trying to optimize the experiment, which consisted of making small tweaks in protocol,” she explained, adding that her adviser gave her the freedom to plan and execute her daily activities.

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Carolynn Davern

A. Stern photo

## Tuition, Other Costs To Rise 3 Percent Next Year

NC Wesleyan has announced a three-percent increase in tuition and other costs for the next academic year.

Jason Edwards, Vice President of Finance and Administration, provided more details in an interview with The Decree:

**Q.** Please break down next year’s cost of tuition, room and board, and other major expenses.

**A.** Returning students will see the following rates for tuition, room, and board:  
• \$30,600 – Tuition will increase \$850 or 2.9%  
• \$4,800 – Room (for double occupancy) will increase \$150 or 3.2%  
• \$5,600 – Board will increase \$200 or 3.7% (Freshmen will pay a different amount, Edwards said, under a new meal plan that the college will introduce next fall.)  
• \$150 – The Student Activity Fee will remain unchanged  
• \$41,150 – The total for tuition, room and board, and the student activities fee will increase \$1,200 or 3.0%

**Q.** Where possible, provide reasons for the increases.

**A.** Inflation continues to factor into the overall increase along with focused

attention on student enhancements such as investing in our Internship & Career Services Center, the WOW Café, Eli Hall, classroom improvements, and athletic facility improvements.

**Q.** Estimate what the college is saving by going to the new low-cost lighting system.

**A.** In a typical office building, lighting, heating, and cooling represents 70 percent or more of total electrical and gas usage for our climate, making those systems the best targets for energy savings. Most of our energy-saving initiatives have come in the form of replacing antiquated lighting with LEDs and replacing older heat and air units (HVACs) and boilers/chillers with more efficient units. On average, a newer LED light fixture will consume 1/3 to 1/4 of the wattage compared to an older model light fixture. During fiscal year 2015, the main campus electric and gas expenses were \$732,000 and during fiscal year 2017 they were \$688,000. During that period, we’ve added a couple hundred additional students and one residence hall, and we’ve expanded usage of areas on campus while recognizing energy savings.