

# THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

## After 20 Years AD Relinquishes Post to Focus on Basketball

By Quinn Tobias  
Editor-at-Large

If 1997 graduates visited Wesleyan’s campus today, they would not recognize the athletic department.

In 1998 John Thompson took over the athletic director position from Don Scalf. At the time, the promotion surprised Thompson because he was still new to the staff, having served just three years as the men’s basketball coach.

“I never expected to become an athletic director,” he recalled. “I never gave one thought to an administrative position.”

After 20 years in the AD post, Thompson will give up his administrative duties and concentrate on coaching basketball and adding to his 344 career wins.

“It became increasingly difficult to give the appropriate time to the position, given the growth of the department,” Thompson said when the college



Coach John Thompson

SI photo

announced the change in February.

Over the past 20 years Thompson has guided the expansion and development of Bishop athletics. The college has achieved many accolades during his tenure, highlighted by the baseball team’s 1999 national championship. Among

other accomplishments, Wesleyan has won two USA South Men’s President’s Cups, and individual teams have won more than 50 regular season and/or tournament championships and earned 26 NCAA tournament berths.

Since taking on the AD role, Thompson has overseen the hiring of many full-time assistant coaches. He made the sports information director a full-time position. He helped establish the school’s football program in the early 2000s and added women’s tennis and cross country. Men’s tennis and women’s lacrosse were reinstated during his tenure. Among many improvements to the athletic facilities

on campus, Thompson was instrumental in the construction of The Slick Family Foundation Tennis Center, which debuted in 2012.

Carol Carson has been on the athletic training staff for 30 years and, prior to Thompson’s time as AD, served as trainer for all of the teams by herself. Before Wesleyan built new facilities and expanded her staff to four full-time trainers, Carson had to prioritize the risk of each sport and seldom traveled with teams.

She cited Thompson’s dedication to player safety. “One of his priorities was to better serve and protect his athletes,” Carson said. “I’m very thankful for his support in the improvement of the health and safety of our athletes.”

In conjunction with the addition of the football team, the school built the Vernon T. Bradley Field House, which housed multiple locker rooms, coaches’ offices and an athletic training facility that met the demands of the growing department.

Head Football Coach Jeff Filkovski praised Thompson’s work. “I appreciate that he gave me the opportunity to coach here,” he said. “The last five years we’ve seen the program come a long way with improved facilities and the growth of the roster. Coach Thompson has been the driver in the improvements.”

Bridgette Walker, head coach of the lacrosse team, shared Filkovski’s sentiment. She added that Coach Thompson has been supportive in creating new facilities such as a new locker room for her athletes. “He gave me the opportunity as a first-time college coach and trusts (assistant lacrosse) coach Meadows and me by not micro-managing us,” she said. “He’s put us in a

position to succeed quickly.”

Thompson extended his influence beyond the playing field by establishing the Wesleyan Academy of Athletic Leadership (WAAL), a program designed to improve the skills of student-athletes. He also instated institutional random recreational drug testing that is unique to Wesleyan. Thompson hopes the policy encourages student-athletes to make smart decisions while on campus. “It’s not about catching and penalizing,” he said. “It’s about helping athletes make the right decisions.”

After 20 years as AD, Coach Thompson and the college decided it was time to make a change for the betterment of Bishops athletics.

With fewer administrative responsibilities, Thompson wants to rededicate himself to coaching and family. “My free time is family time,” said Thompson, who lives in the area with his wife, Laura, and their three sons.

Aaron Denton will take over as the NCWC Athletic Director on May 15, after serving in the same capacity for 10 years at Sandhills Community College in Pinehurst.

Denton plans to continue the growth and improvements started by Thompson. “I’m excited to begin my work with student-athletes, coaches, faculty, staff, and the entire Wesleyan community,” Denton said in a statement. “The college’s recent record growth provides both enthusiasm and opportunity. It’s an honor to join those efforts to serve and lead a committed group of staff and students. Together we can achieve academic and athletic excellence while providing the best experience for our student-athletes.”

## Internationals React to Shooting, Reflect on American Gun Culture

Bijaya Lamichhane  
Decree Staff Writer

Following the February 14 shooting rampage at a Florida high school, Wesleyan international students shared their insights on the root cause of gun violence in America, regulations for stricter laws for gun purchase, and other possible changes America should implement to ensure protection for its citizens.

David Chang, an Australian, recalled that he felt “shocked and emotional” when he heard about the shooting. “It was a tragedy that no one should have to experience,” he said. “It was heartbreaking.”

He believes that the root cause of gun violence in America is the easy access to firearms. “It shocks me as a foreigner, that citizens are able to purchase guns at the same place they get their groceries,” he said.

Chang used to believe in the ban of all guns from the hands of civilians. But he said that living in the United States had changed his position. “Not only is it

impractical (to ban all guns) due to the population, but in the right hands—and only in the right hands—a firearm makes me feel safe in the case of an emergency.”

Although Chang does not support a ban on all guns, he does believe that the sale of assault rifles should be exclusive to military and security personnel.

He suggested that gun violence could be prevented by implementation of strict rules for gun buyers. “They should be required to take extensive classes, as well as physical and written exams to make sure that the gun owner is capable (of handling a gun),” he explained. “The gun owner should be required to take exams every few years.”

Chang mentioned that after 35 died in the Port Arthur Massacre of 1996, Australia implemented a law that banned ownership of automatic rifles and shotguns, a law that was opposed by many of his countrymen. Since its implementation, there has been a substantial reduction in gun violence nationwide.

“Gun violence is not something I had ever thought about before I arrived in the U.S.,” Chang said. “The only firearms I had ever seen in my life were on a police officer. Even the police were very careful with the use of firearms. They mostly resorted to Tasers.”

Talitha Rowan, a freshman from England, found the U.S. gun violence unbelievable. Like Chang, she thinks the solution lies in tougher laws for gun buyers. She suggested prohibition on sales of all guns, unless they were used for agricultural purposes. Even then, she said, “there should be rules and regulations on how they’re kept and used.”

Rowan noted that in England it is illegal to carry firearms in most instances. One exception is shotguns used by hunters. Even that’s uncommon, she said. “Most police officers don’t even carry firearms because it’s unnecessary,” she said, citing the low level of gun violence in her country.

Rowan struggled to remember a school shooting in England. She’s found the gun culture in America to be jarring. “It was very concerning for me to come here and know people are allowed to carry firearms,” she said. “Having to practice drills on our campus to prepare for an event of an active shooter is crazy to me.”

Rowan recalled a recent class when she expressed her opinion on guns. “When I said that I believed guns are dangerous, the American students looked at me funny,” she said. “To me that’s obvious, but their response was that people needed guns to protect themselves.”

Shanidhya Khanal, a junior from Nepal, said he was saddened by the Florida shooting. He believes civilians should be prohibited from using guns. “We never know when a person might go crazy,” he said. “Here, having guns is seen as a way of protection. But people who don’t know about the

dangers of weapons can easily buy one. I think this is the biggest problem.”

Khanal asserted that being from a military family, he had always maintained that providing security to the citizens should be a federal responsibility. “Giving civilians arms to protect themselves would be like them taking the laws into their own hands,” he said. “Then the defense department wouldn’t be necessary.”

He pointed out that in Nepal, only police personnel and the military are allowed to carry guns.

Risa Kawamura, a sophomore from Japan, said authorities should have taken seriously the warnings against the Florida shooter, Nikolas Cruz. There were multiple times when people reported their concerns about the troubled teen. All were discounted or ignored, she said.

“In Japan, they have to check your mental health before you can get guns,” Kawamura stated. The Japanese have guns for hunting purposes only. “I was surprised when I saw they sold guns at Walmart,” she said. “It’s so usual to have guns” in her country.

In response to various media outlets praising the Japanese gun regulations in comparison to ones in the U.S., she commented, “It’s not relevant comparison. It’s a different environment. If people want to be violent, they won’t need a gun. In Japan, mass murder has happened with a knife.”

She questioned whether a serious gun ban would work in the U.S. “The government would have to raid guns from so many gun owners,” she said. “There are already gangs and bad guys who have guns. To protect our lives from these guys, we need guns in America.”

Kawamura also believes that, as in Japan, American students should not be allowed to carry guns. She supports a ban on assault rifles and machine guns. “Guns should be used for protection, not killings,” she said.

When I approached Gabriel Guzman, a freshman from Venezuela, to talk about gun violence in America, he seemed uncomfortable. “Oh my God! This is such a controversial topic,” he blurted.

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## Student Petition Leads to Expanded Library Hours

The college has extended the hours that the library will remain open, acting in response to a petition signed by 200 students.

Provost Evan Duff announced the change in March after meeting with two students about the issue. The library has pushed back closing time Sunday through Thursday from midnight until 1 a.m. On Friday the library closes at 7 rather than 5 p.m., while it will continue to close at 5 p.m. on Saturday.

Together with Sidney McCall, Jeremiah Handlon met with the provost after getting students to sign a petition that called attention to what they see as limited hours.

“I thought the meeting went very well. The two students had well-thought-out

and organized ideas on the matter and they had suggested solutions,” Dr. Duff said, noting that he was able to explain the costs involved in extending the hours.

Handlon agreed that the meeting was productive. “It went very well,” he said. “Dr. Duff seemed very receptive to our request and I believe he took our suggestions into account when coming up with a solution.”

Though pleased with the college’s decision, Handlon and the petition signers had requested a 2 a.m. closing time Sunday through Thursday and expanded hours on Friday and Saturday nights from 5 to 8 p.m.

Dr. Duff noted that the college “met the students almost halfway” by adding seven hours over the course of a week

rather than the 16 sought by the petitioners.

“I appreciate the college moving quickly to find a solution to student concerns,” Handlon said. “Even though the new hours were implemented as the semester winds down, it will give the administration a chance to see that making the changes was a step in the right direction in helping students succeed.”

Handlon said students had wanted the change because so many rely on library resources. Besides providing a quiet place to study alone or in groups, the library is vital for many who need access to computer and printer services. Along with day students, Handlon singled out the needs of ASPIRE students, many of whom work during the

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## Flu Cases Dwindle

Like many schools around the country, Wesleyan was hard hit by the flu in 2018. But the college’s Wellness Center director reports that the number of cases has subsided since spring break.

Jessica Brys-Wilson, a certified physician’s assistant, said that there were 84 cases of the flu in the three weeks prior to spring break. In the three weeks after break, she saw just two.

For this academic year, the Wellness Center treated a total of 140 patients, with most reporting the typical flu symptoms of fever, body aches, headache, cough and nasal congestion. In an average year, Brys-Wilson noted, the Wellness Center sees just 10-20 flu patients.

Wesleyan took an all-hands-on-deck approach to combating the flu. There were frequent reminders about the importance of thorough hand washing, and the college provided hand sanitizer bottles in every building. The maintenance department played a significant role in preventing the spread of illness. It used new disinfectant equipment to sanitize many common areas around campus.

According to Director of Facilities Raymond Thompson, his staff covered restrooms and other common areas of the residence halls, fieldhouse, Dunn Center, business office, and classroom buildings.

Brys-Wilson said the equipment allows maintenance staff to disinfect large areas within just a few minutes. And it enables them to treat hard-to-reach areas such as under desks and chairs, she said.

She said she worked in close coordination with the staff. “If we see an outbreak of flu or other contagious condition, I can direct them to disinfect a particular area of campus in a moment’s notice,” she said. “The new machine is going to be very effective at preventing the spreading of germs among the Wesleyan community.”