

THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Exemplary Teacher Jay Quinan Reflects on 32-Year Career

Psychology Professor Jay Quinan is Wesleyan Exemplary Teacher for the second time since he arrived at Wesleyan in 1986. The first time was in 1993.

A graduate of Siena College (New York), Dr. Quinan came to Wesleyan from the Ph.D. program at the University of Georgia, where he completed a dissertation titled “Recognition Memory for Expected and Unexpected Objects in Scenes.” (“I compared the ability of 6-year-olds and adults to recognize changes in pictures,” he explained.)

Besides teaching a range of psychology courses, Dr. Quinan has advised hundreds of Wesleyan students, chaired the Social Sciences and Education Division and served as faculty marshal at graduation and Founders Day ceremonies. He’s long-term member of Wesleyan Singers. The Rocky Mount resident was just elected a deacon at First Presbyterian Church.

As part of a continuing series, The Decree interviewed Dr. Quinan, a native of the Albany, NY area, about his interest in psychology, his career as a teacher and mentor, as well as his interests outside the classroom.

Q. How did you become interested in psychology?

A. I’ve been interested in psychology since I was a teenager. I spent my summers as a camp counselor and swimming instructor and became interested in the way children learn and interact with each other. When I took the introductory psychology course in college, I was eager to learn more about many of the topics which psychologists study and decided to major in psychology. While at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute I focused

on the physiology of drug addiction, and in my Ph.D. my emphasis was developmental psychology, cognition and learning. At Wesleyan, I’ve had the opportunity to develop and teach courses about all these areas.

Q. Paint us a picture of what you were like as an undergrad at Siena College.

A. I commuted to Siena since it was close to my home. At first I was a biology major, but I changed to psychology in my sophomore year. The library was a quiet and comfortable place to study between classes, so I spent quite a bit of time there. Outside of class I was a member of the Psychology Club and the college’s choral group, the Schola Cantorum.

Q. At what age did you know you wanted to be a professor?

A. It was during my graduate studies at Georgia. I had a teaching assistantship during which I taught my own sections of introductory psychology. I enjoyed working with students and helping them succeed in their courses, while I continued to learn more about the topics that I was teaching. I also participated in a graduate seminar about teaching, which discussed the many roles and responsibilities of a faculty member. I decided that college professor was the right profession for me to pursue.

Q. Let’s talk about graduate school at UGA. Describe your favorite professor.

A. I worked with many excellent professors there. One of the most influential was Dr. Milton Hodge, my dissertation advisor. His research interests were in the areas of memory and perception, and I was a student in many of his courses, including the teaching seminar mentioned. He provided valu-

able advice, equipment and laboratory space for my research, and encouragement during the long process of gathering data and preparing the manuscript. He was an excellent role model for a professor and mentor.

Q. What attracted you to Wesleyan back in 1986?

A. I was interested in finding a position at a small, church-affiliated liberal arts college. A liberal arts curriculum provides an excellent undergraduate education, and a small college provides many opportunities for students to interact with their professor in and out of the classroom. I wanted to teach a wide variety of courses rather than focusing on one or two specialty areas. When I visited Wesleyan to interview for the position, I learned that I would be half of a two-professor department, which would give me the opportunity to teach many courses in the areas of developmental, cognitive, and physiological psychology as well as the introductory course, senior seminars and research methods courses. I would be able to choose the textbooks and develop course content. The faculty here was dedicated to excellent teaching. There was a good match between my interests and Wesleyan’s needs.

Q. Describe your early teaching experiences.

A. My first courses provided lots of useful information in an organized manner, but I didn’t encourage much participation from the students. I soon discovered that lecturing for an hour while the students silently took notes was not very interesting for the students or me. I developed strategies to engage the students such as incorporating



Dr. Jay Quinan

A. Stern photo

short video clips that provided real-world examples of the topics we were discussing. And I began asking students to share their experiences and ideas in class discussions.

Q. What were the students like back in the mid-80s?

A. They were similar to those at Wesleyan today, but there are differences. For example, athletics was an important part of campus life in the 1980s, and the more recent addition of new teams such as the football team has increased the number of athletes at Wesleyan. Back in the 80s, students were more likely to come to my office to discuss course material and other topics. Today they usually send an e-mail instead.

Q. What are the other differences that you see in your students now?

A. Wesleyan students today are a very diverse group. The many international students share experiences and points of view that enrich our classes and our campus. Technological advances make it easy for us to access scholarly reference material at any time; so many students can incorporate this information into their assignments. However, I’ve noticed that some students spend a great deal of time using their personal technology. Instead of talking to other students or the professor in person before or after class, they take every available opportunity to use their laptop or their smart phone. We should take advantage of face-to-face opportunities to socialize with and learn from classmates. These may produce long-

lasting friendships and represent an important part of the college experience.

Q. What’s a typical Jay Quinan class like now?

A. At the start of class I typically make a few announcements about campus events such as writing workshops or guest speakers that may be of interest to my students. I pass around an attendance list and encourage students to write questions (anonymously, if they prefer) on the back. I address the questions later in the period. I may then give an informal, ungraded “practice quiz,” asking questions about topics we’ve been discussing in the course and invite students to share their answers. This “self-testing” strategy is an effective way for students to review material, and it provides an opportunity for me to review concepts that some students may find difficult. I create my own PowerPoint slides for each class, including a detailed outline of information from the text, pictures and diagrams to illustrate concepts, and relevant information which I’ve found from other sources. I post the slides in advance on the my.ncwc course page and encourage students to bring a copy to class so they can take notes which elaborate on the material instead of copying every word on the slides. I often ask questions for small- or large-group discussions, which encourage students to relate the concepts to their own experiences and share their ideas and questions about the material.

Q. Describe your research interests.

A. My interests are in cognitive, developmental and physiological psychology, and I’ve taught many courses related to these topics. I’m especially interested in helping students master these topics, so much of my professional reading focuses on instructional strategies and current research that I can share with students in my classes.

Q. Students can often be heard discussing your interest in sleep as a particular research area. How did this become an interest?

A. I am interested in sleep. Many people find the topic of sleep fascinating since we spend about a third of our lives doing it, and we often don’t remember much about what happened during that time. As an undergraduate and a graduate student, I led class discussions about sleep, and I continue to discuss this topic in several of my courses.

Q. What’s a common misconception about sleep and the human body?

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Winter Is Coming and So is Flu Season

One year after a severe strain of flu hit the Wesleyan campus, Wellness Director Jessica Brys-Wilson said the college is taking steps to prepare for the upcoming season.

She answered the following Decree questions in early November:

Q. When does flu season begin and end?

A. In a typical year, it’s from October through April.

Q. What has the federal Centers for Disease Control said about the upcoming flu season. Along the same lines, what have you heard about the current flu vaccine?

Based on the most recent data released by the CDC (for the week ending October 27th), North Carolina is still listed as having “minimal” flu activity. It’s expected to increase over the next few weeks and it tends to peak sometime in December through February. Flu often presents with fever, cough, headache, and body aches. Some will also experience nasal congestion and a sore throat.

Q. Besides a flu shot, what steps can we take to prevent the flu and lessen its effects?

• wash your hands with soap and water, often

- cover your cough/sneeze
- eat a healthy diet with five servings of fruits and vegetables
- get enough rest
- keep your hands off your face
- stay home if you’re sick

Q. Who should get the flu shot? Where is it available and how much does it cost?

A. Available you’re allergic to the vaccine, the CDC recommends an annual flu shot for all Americans over the age of 6 months. We held a flu shot clinic on campus at the end of September. If a student wishes to get a flu shot, he or she now can check with their primary care provider’s office or with most major pharmacies. Depending on the pharmacy and your insurance, the flu shot costs between \$0 and \$30.

Q. Compare last season’s flu season to the previous year.

A. Last year was a bad flu season for our community. The NCWC Health Center treated 140 flu cases, up from fewer than 20 cases in previous years. My best estimate is that 20 percent of our community was impacted by influenza last year, when most patients also seemed to have more severe symptoms.

Q. What steps has the college taken in advance of flu season?

A. The maintenance staff has installed hand sanitizers at all entrances of the Braswell Building and in the residence halls. We’re also using our Clorox disinfecting machine to cycle through the buildings on campus to treat all areas multiple times from October through March and then hitting hot spots that I notice based on flu or other contagious illness cases.

Q. What should one do if she/he catches the flu? Is it necessary to visit the health center? What’s the normal treatment you administer?

A. If you suspect you have the flu, you should rest and stay well hydrated. Don’t leave your room unless you’re seeking medical treatment or using the restroom. You can get a meal ticket from your RA or from the Health Center to have a friend pick up food from the cafeteria to prevent exposing other students to illness. Tylenol and other over-the-counter medicines can help to lessen your symptoms while you wait for the virus to resolve. Contact your professors to let them know you’re sick. You can schedule an appointment with me by calling 252-985-5186 or emailing jbrys@ncwc.edu. At the health center, you’ll fill out paperwork, be examined, and given a diagnosis. If appropriate, a prescription for an antiviral medication, like Tamiflu, may be written for you.

Is It Just about Jobs?

What’s the purpose of a college education?

That was the question posed to 114 Wesleyan students, or about 10 percent of the enrollment in the traditional day program. Respondents were asked to limit their statements to a single sentence.

In their responses, 69 students (about 60 percent) wrote that one of the main purposes is job preparation or attainment of a higher income.

Of that total, 51 (45 percent) stated improved job prospects or earning power as the only purpose.

Such responses were along the lines of: “To prepare students with knowledge and opportunities for their future professional career” (a senior business and marketing major); “To gain an edge in a competitive job market” (sophomore, computer information systems); and “To prepare students for what will be necessary to succeed in the work force” (sophomore, CIS).

Junior Catelyn Cink typified students in this group of respondents. The chemistry

major said the purpose of a college education is “To gain knowledge to perform a job.”

In their responses, 18 students combined career motivations with other benefits, such as attainment of “an independent life” (freshman, CIS) or the “American Dream” (senior, criminal justice). One student sees a college education as a way to “follow his dreams” (freshman, business administration). Another wants to become “a productive member of society” (freshman, sports management), while a senior accounting major hopes a four-degree will help her provide for her family and “not have to worry about money.” A senior English major said a liberal arts college allows students to meet students “with different ideologies from your own.”

The informal survey was conducted in late October and early November. Responses were solicited in common areas such as the library and cafeteria, as well as in three general education classes.

As might be expected with an open-ended question, there was a wide range of views expressed. Following is a sampling of other responses:

Senior Jeremiah Handlon (English): “A college education is meant to help you develop a stable sense of self.”

Senior Trevor Harris (biomedical sciences and psychology): “A college education lays the foundation for our youth to bring about change in our communities and the country as a whole.”

Senior James Parrish (business administration and marketing): “Education is important because I want to better myself for my future family.”

Junior Shamon Wright (theatre/entertainment): “To prepare the youth for the uncaring reality of the world.”

(The following staff writers contributed to this report: Brooke Bayse, Cameron Beal, Ali Cucinotta, Jovan Pope, Rex Sauls, Chadacie Seary, Qa’lexus Taylor, Gianni Teal, Bryant Versprille, and Tanisha Williams.)



Antonio Johnson was named conference Defensive Player of the Year. For sports coverage, turn to page 3. SI photo

Wesleyan Profile: Vickie Davidson

By Bryant Versprille
Decree Staff Writer

When you walk into the NCWC Welcome Center, you’ll be greeted by Vickie Davidson, the admissions liaison.

When I interviewed Davidson, she answered a phone call using her sweet, soft voice to say the same thing she always does: “Hello, thank you for calling North Carolina Wesleyan College. This is Vickie, how may I help you?”

Born in Burlington, Davidson said she had a “fantastic” childhood. Growing up, she considered herself to be a “tomboy.” She loved baseball. She remembered bonding with her father over baseball and going to watch the Burlington Indians, a former minor league affiliate of the Cleveland Indians. Davidson told me her first crush was a pitcher for the Indians, Dick Beres. “I can remember his nice blue eyes,” she said. She also recalled her “magnificent” baseball card collection, which, sad to say, has disappeared over the years.

Davidson has been married for 42



Vickie Davidson

B. Versprille photo

years to Herb Davidson, or, if you’re in the Rocky Mount area and listen to the 98.5 Morning Drive, you might know him by his alias, Ron Eric Lundy. The Davidsons have two sons and two grandsons. Noting that her family means the world to her, Davidson said she goes through her family photos on her computer in her downtime at work.

Davidson attended The University of North Carolina-Greensboro and majored in secondary education and French and then returned to UNC-G for her masters. After her schooling, Davidson taught English and French for seven years at a high school.

Following her teaching career, Davidson took the opportunity to work in Rocky Mount as MBM’s Director of Customer Service. In her job, she oversaw the customer service departments of more than 30 distribution centers. She would help hire and train customer service representatives. She said she liked making training videos for them.

She worked for MBM Corporation for 29 years. “Me and my husband used to ride and walk through (the Wesleyan) campus and I used to tell him ‘I want to work here,’” she recalled, adding that she fell in love with the college the first time she stepped on campus.

She got the opportunity to work here when a job opened for admissions liaison in 2013. “I knew it’s what I wanted to do next,” she said.

Davidson likes the sense of community that a small, intimate campus offers to both students and staff. “I love how when you’re here at Wesleyan, you’re not just another number,” she said. “That’s what attracted me to this place.”

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