

THE DECREE

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Graduates Reflect on Time at Wesleyan, Look to New Challenges

By Chasadie Searcy
Decree Staff Writer

As the semester ends, seniors are getting ready for their last goodbyes. Following graduation on May 4, they will be heading in various directions to take on their respective careers and accomplish specific goals.

Following are mini-profiles on some seniors who will be leaving Wesleyan this spring.

Weslie Young

Weslie Young, a sociology major with a minor in sports administration, was a star basketball player on Wesleyan's women's team. The forward-center averaged 8 rebounds and 6 points per game last season, while earning honors as a scholar-athlete from the USA South Conference as well as Wesleyan.

Since the end of her final hoops season, Young's been focusing on getting a job in social work or a related position in government.

She said her field is so broad that for now she's keeping her options open. While working, she intends to apply to various graduate programs.

Like many students, Young said she'll miss her friends the most. She said she's relished the fact that so many friends live in proximity to her on campus. She noted that she's still close with many of the friends she made during her freshman year. They helped to make her four years at Wesleyan memorable. "They'll be in my wedding one day," she said. She added that she'll miss her teammates and the team



Weslie Young

dynamic from the past four years.

The Maryland native said she enjoyed living in the South and away from home. What she won't miss is waking up for morning classes. "Classes and the school work were fine," she said, noting that the workload was heavy at times. "It's the getting up for classes that I won't miss," she added with a smile.

As for her indebtedness level, Young said she's obligated to pay off only one "small loan." She expressed gratitude for the scholarships and grants that covered the rest of her tuition.

Asked to offer advice to underclassmen, she urged them to make the most of every day. "Go to class and be active on campus," she said. "It's important to get serious in your first two years. The better you do, the better off you'll be in the long run. You won't need play catch up at the end."

Shreya Tharkuri

Shreya Tharkuri, a double major in business and computer information systems, just earned an "Outstanding Student" award from the business administration program.

After graduation, the Nepal native plans to work in information technology or help underprivileged children in her native country as part of a United Nations initiative. Her long-term goal is to pursue a Ph.D. in computer science.

Tharkuri is from the Nepal capital of Kathmandu. She reports that she's from a royal family and can be considered a princess (Her father's family are descendants of the royal family, but because Nepal isn't a monarchy, her title doesn't hold much weight, she said.)

A member of the college's dance team for the past two years, Tharkuri said her Wesleyan friends have become her family and Wesleyan is her "home away from home." "It's not the place, but the people that make the place," she said.

Among her most enduring memories was

the college's first Global WesFest. It was during her junior year and her friends had worked extra hard to make it a huge success. During the event, she did a presentation on her home country and taught others about her culture, which gave her a sense of accomplishment.

Tharkuri came to NCWC as a transfer student from East Central University (the other ECU) in Oklahoma. Due to the appealing professor-to-student ratio at Wesleyan, she's glad she made the decision to switch schools. While here, she received scholarships that included a presidential honors scholarship, an international scholarship, a transfer student scholarship, as well as a dance stipend. She reports that she must only pay off one semester's tuition.

She encouraged younger students to "step out of your comfort zone. You shouldn't worry about what others think."

Tharkuri regrets that she didn't take more risks in her years at Wesleyan. "The time flies, so enjoy it," she said.

Sheriff Secka

A captain on the soccer team, Sheriff Secka is graduating with a major in sociology and a minor in political science.

After graduation, Secka would like to continue playing "the beautiful game." If a professional soccer career fails to materialize, he plans to attend graduate school or seek a job with either the African Union or the United Nations, in a position that will allow him to work in international affairs.

The Maryland native was an attacking midfielder on the Wesleyan team, scoring 17 career goals. He earned a senior award, and in 2017, the team won USA South tournament and advanced to the NCAA playoffs. That team was 15-6 and 10-1 in conference matches.

He admitted to a little sadness that his

four-year career has ended. "I'll miss my dawgs (friends) the most," he said, adding that he enjoyed meeting and connecting with Bishops—teammates and non-athletes—from different cultures.

On this list of things he won't miss are "waking up for 8 a.m. classes," the cafeteria food, and 15-page papers.

The recipient of scholarships covering half of his college tuition and expenses, Secka joked that he hopes to win the lottery to pay off the balance of his debt. "Then I can pay them (loans) off all at once," he said.

He related that he once considered transferring to a different school, but that he's glad he stayed at Wesleyan. He felt that the small campus and small class sizes were integral to his success.

He advised underclassmen to focus on their classes, to stay on "top of their work," and seek help when it's needed. "Get involved and stay involved," he added.

Kayla Lavan

It's hard to imagine a student packing more into her four years at Wesleyan.

Graduating senior Kayla Lavan double-majored in chemistry and biology and earned a "double minor" in math and environmental science. She was a member of the dance team and tutored peers in math and science. She held various jobs around Rocky Mount—at Dunkin' Donuts and Books-A-Million—to supplement her scholarships.



Sheriff Secka

The Raleigh native's immediate post-graduation plan is to work and save money while applying to various graduate programs.

Lavan said her best memory was a week-long trip taken to Bermuda by the college's cheer and dance teams, where the Bishops made numerous beach visits and won first place in a major competition.

Graduation will be "a bittersweet" event for Lavan, who said she'll miss her friends and the campus that has become home the past four years. "I grew a lot as a person here," she said.

What she won't miss are the "nasty caf food" and spending all of her free time completing her homework.

Lavan said she appreciates the scholarship money that she received from the college. She reports that she graduates debt-free.

The senior urged underclassmen to work hard and "be proactive in getting the opportunities you want."

Ben Dorfman

Ben Dorfman loves football. "If I'm not lifting, I'm hitting the field," he said.

Though he graduates in May with a degree in organizational administration (sports concentration), the Charlotte native still has one year of eligibility left. He's exploring the possibility of enrolling in one of Wesleyan's new graduate programs, which would allow the USA-South first-team tight end to play for the Bishops in the 2019 season.

After he leaves Wesleyan, Dorfman plans to continue his education, with hopes of securing a graduate assistantship, which would permit him to pursue his passion for football as a coach.

While Dorfman said he will miss his teammates after he's gone, he criticized the Wesleyan students who lack ambition and drive, attending college only because "it's expected of them." He's eager to leave behind such negative influences, he said.

Asked to name his favorite Wesleyan memory, Dorfman recalled the first football game of last fall, against Thomas More College. Predicted to lose by two touchdowns, the Bishops won 35-28, as Dorfman hauled in four passes for 72 yards, one a 31-yard touchdown catch.

Dorfman said he's glad he attended Wesleyan. "Absolutely!" he exclaimed, crediting Coach Jeff Filkovski for recruiting him and helping to make his time at the college both profitable and enjoyable.

He related that he is graduating without student loan debt, due to the scholarships and grants he received while enrolled at Wesleyan. He's grateful to his parents for helping him make up the balance.

As he looks to the May 4 graduation ceremony, Dorfman offered the following advice to underclassmen: "Find something you like and stick to it. Apply yourself. Don't just skate by; try to get something out of what you do. Look for improvement in your work and make the most out of everything. As the saying goes, 'If you're not getting better, you're getting worse.'"

(Editor's Note: The Decree will feature more seniors from the traditional-day program, as well as ASPIRE graduates, in its May issue.)



Sophomore Beth Braswell was named to the first team of the USA South Conference after she hit .323 with 8 home runs and 30 RBIs. As an anchor of the pitching staff, she posted a 2.08 ERA and led the team with 12 wins and 116 strikeouts in 114 innings. For sports coverage, turn to pages 3 and 4. SI photo

For Theatre Seniors, 'Proof' Is in the Collaboration

Four Wesleyan students produced and starred in a three-performance run of the Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Proof" at Powers Recital Hall in April.

With direction from Wesleyan instructor Danelle Cauley, the play represented a collaborative effort by seniors Dakota Casey, Anna Dick, Savannah Flanagan and Trey Russell.

Set in an old Chicago home, "Proof" focuses on the relationships of four characters—Robert (Casey), a brilliant math professor with mental problems; Catherine (Flanagan), his care-taker daughter with talent, academic aspirations and possible mental issues of her own; Hal (Russell), one of Robert's former students whose two passions include math and Catherine; and Claire (Dick), Catherine's take-charge older sister. Including flashbacks, the play takes place over a couple days around Robert's death and funeral.

The four Wesleyan seniors were interviewed by the Decree following the April 6 matinee performance. Their responses have been edited for brevity.

Q: Why did you four want to work together? And what attracted you to "Proof"?

DC: We had some entertainment courses together as a group. When one of us found "Proof," we decided to do it because the cast, set, and environment fit well.

AD: We've been in productions together and at first we thought we'd do a musical called "Romance, Romance" or a production of "Green Bird." After meeting with Ms. Cauley and Mr. (Professor Roger) Drake, we decided on "Proof." Even though it had already been done at Wesleyan, we decided to go with the play because we had such a small cast of seniors to produce a show.

SF: We all wanted to do a play because our theatre department hasn't been able to do a lot of full-length shows. I wanted to leave my mark and perform one last time. I liked "Proof" because it gave all four of us a role and suited our production needs. The story jumped out to me, and I wanted to share it with the community.

TR: I knew I wanted my senior project to be a production. I loved acting (as Perchik) in "Fiddler on the Roof" and other productions. At first I considered performing in a one-man show and focusing on my acting, but when I realized that the other three seniors were looking to do production work for their project, it just made sense to collaborate. We're all actors, but we've also had



Cast of "Proof" l-r Anna Dick, Dakota Casey, Savannah Flanagan and Trey Russell C. Lewis Photo

the opportunity to be designers and stage managers and directors and all the other roles of a production, so a collaborative production became the most exciting option.

In many ways "Proof" was perfect. It was a full-length play with a cast of four actors, two male and two female, a unit set, and contemporary costumes. It allowed for enough room for design and technical opportunities without presenting insurmountable challenges. The story resonated with us as well.

Q: Besides performing in the play, detail all the other functions you performed in the lead-up, etc.

DC: I was head of set construction and lighting design. I served as production manager, supervised the volunteers, and handled the timeline for striking the set.

AD: I was in charge of getting the costumes together as well as the furniture and the props.

SF: I did the dramaturgy (historical research) and handled the advertising. But just like in any true collaborative theatre experience, I helped in every area. I helped with building the set and working on props.

TR: Short answer: artistic director, production manager, assistant stage manager, sound designer, set construction crew.

Q: At your busiest, how many hours a week did you invest in the project?

DC: Fifty-seven hours was my longest week.

AD: At my busiest I spent 30-ish hours during tech week working on the show. A non-busy week was like 10 hours.

SF: It's really hard to figure out hours! During the two weeks before the show opened, I spent every spare minute with my script between classes and every night. I believe during tech week I spent well over 30 hours on the show.

TR: My busiest week was tech week/performance week. I invested close to

30 hours that week between rehearsals, performances, load-in/set build, and last-minute solutions to production issues.

Q: What was your most anxious moment, either prior to or during the performance?

DC: The most panic I experienced was the final week of set assembly. The Dunn Center booked two last-minute events in our space, limiting our ability to move in the set and other items and utilize the time we needed to build.

AD: My most anxious moment was the week right after spring break because I still hadn't gotten all my lines memorized. I was worried that I wouldn't be off book. We also had problems finding the right furniture pieces and there were costuming issues. There are so many elements that make the show come together. It always seems like a struggle in the beginning, but it all comes together in the end.

SF: During one of the performances I had two prop malfunctions that had me panicking! We were lucky that it didn't affect the performance and the audience wasn't aware of the problems. It just gave me a heart attack!

TR: The most anxious moment was the week leading up to the performances. Because we were working on so many different jobs with the production, it was overwhelming to try and balance all of our production tasks with learning lines and working on our acting work. It was difficult in the early technical rehearsals to switch to "actor mode" when we were the designers and artistic directors of the show.

Q: What was most challenging about your role?

AD: What was most challenging about Claire was how much I related to her on a personal level. I'm an older sister myself. In general, it was challenging for me to think in "actor mode" separate from "producer mode."

SF: Catherine is so complex. I was worried that my performance would come off as just

a sad and crazy girl. I wanted to make sure that the audience saw her as an intelligent and strong young woman while making them aware of how the horrible circumstances of her life affected her.

TR: For me, it was creating strong, clear relationships with Robert and Claire because I interact with them less. Catherine and I play multiple scenes together, but it was more challenging to build a relationship with Claire as we had only one scene together. This was the most rewarding aspect of playing Hal.

Q: In your opinion, which night's performance was best?

DC: The final performance.

AD: I think closing night was the best, just because we gave it the last little push we needed and it really turned out to be a great show!

SF: I'm very partial to the opening night. The audience's energy was amazing. It was the moment of truth. It was a magical experience to share our project with an audience.

TR: Each night's performance was different, but it's hard to pick one as the "best." Different audiences exude different energy. The theatre experience is adapting to the audience's reactions and performing the work as if it's the first time it's been done.

Q: Describe Ms. Cauley as a director.

DC: She's a very efficient, straightforward, and honest director who will do all she can to get you as far as she can.

AD: She will push you to a place. It might make you a little uncomfortable, but it's always the place you need to go. From her, I learned some more in-depth relaxation methods for actors as well as physical and vocal warm ups. She gave us different ways to work. She gave us choices for approaching a scene and let us make our own acting decisions.

SF: Danelle uses the Stanislavski method of acting and coaching. There was no method acting on that stage. She led us to become the characters by thinking their thoughts and understanding the motives.

Q: How will completing your project help you in the future, whether it's an acting career or other facets of your life?

DC: This may be the final piece of theater in my life. I'm entering a history graduate program. The project's helped me to handle responsibility, developed my managerial experience, and honed my public speaking ability. My theatre experience has taught me a lot about construction, lighting, and painting—skills I can use as a future home owner.

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