

# NEWS & FEATURES

## Wesleyan Profile: Natalya Shorter of Blue & Gold Cafeteria

By Savannah Ekland  
Decree Staff Writer

As I entered the Blue and Gold Cafeteria on a quiet Wednesday afternoon, I walked to the sandwich bar where Natalya Shorter greeted me. Her warm face and magnetic energy filled the empty cafeteria, as I took a seat at the bar. Genesis played on the sound system, and I smelled the aromas of freshly baked chocolate-chip cookies and fudge brownies. I took out my notebook and phone to record my interview.

"How are you doing today?" Shorter said, her bubbly smile and calm voice carrying, as she unwrapped the saran wrap from a block of cheese and began slicing it in half.

"I'm doing great today. How are you?" I asked as she placed the cheese into a small white bucket and set it aside. "I'm good, just tired," she said. "I came in at three this afternoon, and I have to get my station prepared for this evening." She chuckled and adjusted the blue



Natalya Shorter Photo by S. Ekland

gloves on her hands.

Shorter, 30, grew up in Newark, New Jersey, where she attended Technology High School and Bloomfield College. She was raised in a single-parent home, one of four children. Her mom worked a full-time

job as an insurance specialist in a dental office. Money was often tight, Shorter said. Sometimes her mother had to choose between buying food or paying the light bill.

"If we were lucky that month, we had both food and lights," she said. "Once my siblings and I reached 16, we got part-time jobs to support our mom with bills and food."

Her mom was tough on them growing up because she wanted to ensure they had what they needed to succeed. "I'm thankful that my mom was strict because she kept me on the right track," Shorter said. "If it weren't for her, I would have been in trouble, not doing what I needed to do to succeed in my life. That's my best friend and hero."

Shorter recalled many fond memories from her childhood—from creating Destiny's Child dance routines with her siblings, to visiting grandparents in North Carolina. She said holidays were always special, even for a family on a limited budget.

Shorter's family was living on the north side of Newark, when a neighbor's house caught fire. Shorter said that on her street the houses were close together, and the fire spread to their home. A sophomore in college at the time, Shorter was at home taking a shower, when her mother banged on the bathroom door and then ushered the family to safety.

Standing on the street, Shorter watched their home shivel in the flames. It soon became clear that none of their belongings would be salvaged. "This taught me that family was all that we had," she said. "We were already very close, but this made our bonds even stronger since we all had gone through this together. From that point forward, we never took anything for granted."

Soon after the fire—her family now living in a rental near their old house—Shorter was forced to drop out of Bloomfield College. For the first few semesters, she had survived on loans

and a scholarship, but by her sophomore year she needed more funds. She had found out that, due to her mother's income, she was ineligible to receive needed grants and unable to secure more loans. A missed tuition payment led the school to cancel Shorter's registration for the next semester.

Shorter then made the move from college student to college employee, serving as assistant manager of the bookstore for the next six years.

Looking for a change, Shorter next moved to Rocky Mount and found work in the NC Wesleyan cafeteria. She is employed as a deli attendant, making sandwiches, brewing coffee, wiping down tables and serving as a cashier.

She enjoys her job. "I love the students," she said. "My purpose is serving the students. I've made many friendships with students, which is a joy."

Shorter said she still harbors dreams of earning a college degree herself. When the time is right, she would like to pursue a degree in education with a focus on becoming an elementary school teacher. "I want to help children," she said.

When Shorter isn't working or hanging out with friends and family, she loves to spend her time relaxing by herself, or with her boyfriend, and now fiancé, of seven years. To unwind on weekends, she reads romance novels by Omar Tyree. She enjoys shopping at Books a Million and Bath and Body Works. "I love 'smell good' stuff," she said, stating preferences for citrus and florals. "I'm not one for fall and winter smells, even though fall is my favorite season!" she added, with a laugh.

While living in Newark, Shorter related, it was not necessary to own a car. So, it's only been since she moved to Rocky Mount that she obtained her first driver's license and car (named Charlotte), a 2015 Chevy Malibu, which Shorter considers huge accomplishments. She also bought her first home in the area.

When asked how friends and family would describe her, Shorter said, "They always say I'm happy and bubbly. They'll sometimes say, 'You're always so happy! Are you ever sad?' Or they'll say 'I wanna be like you and be happy all the time!' I always tell them that it's just who I am." Shorter smiled. "I don't let the little things in life bother me."

Just then the dining hall was beginning to swarm with students for the dinner rush. As she placed the remaining cheese into the white bins, Shorter wiped down the counter for the line of students who approached her station. One by one, she greeted them in her sweet, generous tone.

## Health Center Issues Flu-Prevention Tips, Cautions against Vaping

NCWC Health Director Jessica Brys-Wilson offered suggestions for avoiding the flu this winter.

She was interviewed in mid-November. **Q.** What illnesses have you seen this fall in the health center?

**A.** So far this semester, we've seen 774 patients. I'm mostly seeing viral illnesses, such as colds. We've had a particularly unpleasant stomach virus going around campus. I've seen a handful of bacterial infections like sinusitis, pneumonia, and throat infections. There's been no flu (yet!)

**Q.** According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, what kind of flu season is expected this year?

**A.** The CDC just says that flu seasons are unpredictable.

**Q.** What are specific steps we can take to prevent the flu?

**A.** 1. Get your flu shot! Most pharmacies can do them and most insurance companies pay for it.

2. Wash your hands frequently. Use soap and water and scrub for at least 30 seconds.

3. Eat a healthy diet. It helps keep your immune system functioning at its best so you can fight off the flu (and other illnesses).

4. Get enough sleep. Again, it helps keep your immune system working its best.

5. Take steps to reduce your stress. Being "stressed out" can make you more likely to get sick.

**Q.** What do you recommend for students and staff who catch the flu this winter?

**A.** Rest, drink a lot of fluids, and eat a healthy diet. Tylenol can help with fever and body aches. Avoid contact with others until you've been fever-free for at least 24 hours.

### Vaping

Brys-Wilson also responded to questions on the proliferation of

electronic cigarettes. "Vaping" has made national headlines in recent months as health-care providers point to an alarming number of illnesses and deaths associated with the practice.

**Q.** How concerned are you about the increased vaping among teenagers and young adults?

**A.** I'm very concerned about vaping in adolescents. Brains don't stop developing

until young adults reach their mid-twenties. Nicotine is known to harm brain development and to be highly addictive. Vape cartridges also contain other cancer-causing particles that are inhaled directly into your lungs. There have been no long-term studies to evaluate the health effects of vaping. Further, we're now seeing cases of vape-related lung injury that are quite serious.

**Q.** Vaping has been presented in the

marketplace as a way to kick the cigarette habit. What's wrong with that?

**A.** There are a few limited studies that suggest vaping might be better than placebos at helping adults quit smoking. But we're seeing that the majority of people that use vaping to quit smoking are still smoking cigarettes. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force has concluded that there's insufficient data to recommend vaping as a smoking-cessation aide. Vaping is not approved by the FDA as a way to quit smoking.

**Q.** What are the health problems that have arisen due to vaping?

**A.** Most notable is a breathing condition known as EVALI (e-cigarette, or vaping, associated lung injury). As of Oct 29, there have been 1,888 cases and 37 deaths reported to the CDC. Most cases seem to be caused by using THC-containing vape products. Some early data indicates that the presence of Vitamin E acetate in vaping products may play a role in developing EVALI.

**Q.** What are misconceptions users have about vaping?

**A.** There is a common assumption that vaping is a safe alternative to smoking. This is simply not true.

**Q.** Have you seen students in the health center who have developed vaping-related illness?

**A.** Most vape-related illnesses progress very quickly. With the rapid decline, patients are typically hospitalized, sometimes even requiring a ventilator. For this reason they often don't present to me initially. I'm more likely to see these patients in follow-up after they're discharged from the hospital.

**Q.** Have you seen students with common ailments that seem to be aggravated by a vaping habit?

**A.** Yes. As with smoking, vaping commonly exacerbates asthma.

**Q.** What's your current motivation for vaping?

**A.** I typically vape on the way to campus while drinking my morning cup of coffee. I then vape on the way to and from work to relax.

**Q.** Have you been following recent news reports about illness and even the deaths (more than 40 at last count) of vapers around the country? If so, what's been your reaction?

**A.** I have kept up with the news and the possible vape-related illnesses. It doesn't bother me, because most of the illnesses are connected to aftermarket THC vapor pods that have been laced with Vitamin E oil, which is not meant to be ingested.

**Q.** What do you see as the health risks associated with your vaping habit?

**A.** The only adverse symptoms occur if I haven't changed my pod/coil in a while. When that happens, I'll get the burnt taste in my mouth.

**Q.** Would you like to quit vaping?

**A.** I think the only reason I vape now is as a method to relax after a long stressful day. My vaping increased when I was at Campbell. It was a smoke-free campus, but vaping was permitted. I had a very stressful experience at Campbell.

**Q.** When did you start vaping?

**A.** I started in 2014 while I was a senior in high school.

**Q.** What led you to try it?

**A.** I was hanging out with friends who smoked and vaped. I was curious and tried it. My best friend let me try her SUBOX with Watermelon Ice and I liked it. I was already a social, and stress-motivated, smoker. I was looking to do something different. When I used tobacco, I never smoked a whole cigarette, so I felt like I was wasting my money.

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## Is Generation Z Too Dependent On Mom and Dad?

By Chasadie Searcy  
Decree Staff Writer

There's a common perception that the young adults of the current generation, Generation Z, are the products of "helicopter parents."

This means that their parents are over-protective and have an excessive interest in controlling their child's life. The term helicopter refers to the constant hovering. But there's some evidence that this generation is more independent than many may think. The Decree looked into the issue by interviewing a range of students—from freshmen to seniors, from North Carolinians to Africans—in the traditional program.

Pauleta Mugabo is 7,361 miles away from her home in Kigali, Rwanda. She says she communicates with her family every day through text messages or phone calls. A freshman, she will often ask her family for advice about her classes as well as major decisions in her life.

The same goes for Hana Funakdaiku, a junior from Kanagawa, Japan, which is 9,938 miles away (a 17-hour plane ride). She talks to her parents every day or two. They tend to communicate by phone calls, text messages, and video chats through an international connection app called

Line. When it comes to buying groceries or other trivial matters, she'll handle all the decisions by herself. Funakdaiku also makes major decisions for herself, consulting with her parents afterwards.

Sophomore Kayla Harrison lives with her boyfriend in Rocky Mount, about 10 minutes from campus. Talking to her mother every day through text and Facetime, she discusses "adulting" and other mundane topics—everything from how to transfer a car title to recipes.

Harrison feels as though moving away from home helped her build a stronger relationship with her mother. She said it helped her to become more independent.

Blaise Gourley, 21, is a junior and native of Walnut Cove, which is three hours away, near Winston-Salem. On average he'll talk to his parents once a week via phone calls and, on occasion, text messages. Gourley said he tends to phone his parents to update them on school and other news. As one of five children to two working parents, he's learned to become independent.

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Although senior Rebecca Burch once went two months without talking to her mother, the Georgia native tends to call home every few days to once a week.

They use either Facetime, iMessage, or phone calls. They usually discuss classes and family gossip, and, when needed, her mom will send her money.

Sophomore Keyonte Williams takes advantage of the proximity of Wesleyan to his home, 15 minutes away. He said that his mother sometimes buys his groceries and other items he may need for his room. He also makes two trips a month back home to wash his clothes.

He related that he receives "good morning" text from his mother every day and that they'll "check in" with Facetime twice a week. "I only call if I need something important," he said, noting that they most often talk about his classes, sports and work schedules.

Samantha Godsey, a staff member in the registrar's office and a former freshman advisor, disputes the notion that students call home too often. She said it's important for students to maintain regular contact with their family. "There's no such thing as too much communication with one's parents," she said.

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one. He shared stories from his experiences in A&R and provided valuable tips on how we should pursue a career in music.

At Sony our final stop was for a tour of a recording studio called "The Orchard." The room seemed to tell stories of the hundreds of talented artists who had created and recorded there. We saw this in the microphones, cables, and guitars strewn across the room, and the control panel on the desk with thousands of buttons and knobs. Even the candles seemed to smell of artistry.

That evening we dined at a cathedral-turned-pizza restaurant. If you can imagine eating pizza while looking up into the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, then you've got an idea of what the experience was like.

Our final adventure was to see Steely Dan in the Beacon Theatre. The theatre was adorned with golden architecture in the likeness of ancient Greek soldiers. We were in the nosebleed seats in this great underground theatre that could seat 3,000 spectators. Steely Dan's band was huge, with 11 musicians on stage at one time. Their three female background singers showed incredible vocal skill, and the four-man horn section was a really nice touch. My favorites were the two guitarists, who each played several excellent solos.

As the three of us flew back to North Carolina on Saturday afternoon, I couldn't help feeling that my world had exploded in life and color. I'm so excited for what the future could hold after this incredible experience.