

THE DECREE

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Clark To Seek Second Term as President

Thomas Clark will run for a second term as president of Wesleyan's Student Government Association, he said in early February.

At that time, he was the only announced candidate, according to Elliot Smith, the director of Student Activities and an advisor to SGA.

A quarterback on the Bishops football team, Clark is a double major in criminal justice and history. Following graduation, he hopes to coach high school football for a year before he enters the Marine Officer Candidates School. “From there,” he said. “I hope to be a ground intelligence officer in the Marine Corps and lead Marines on the ground.”

When he was 11, Clark and his family moved from Virginia Beach to Cape Carteret. He spent one year in Austin, Texas, where he played 6A high school football. During the past three years, he has been active on campus in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Christ Covenant Ministries.

The SGA executive board includes Clark, Vice President K J Jefferson, Secretary Rebecca Mitchell, Treasurer Tim Marinos and Parliamentarian James Cheazar.

The Decree interviewed Clark about his time in SGA:

Q. Do you think playing football helps or hurts in your position as SGA President?

A. I believe it's good to do both. One great feature of the SGA executive board is the diversity. Each member can relate to and reach out to a different group of students on campus. This helps us in our efforts to hear every student's voice. In my case playing football makes it easier for me to reach out to a large portion of students on campus.

Q. Describe a typical day last fall when you were both a backup quarterback and president of SGA.

A. I'd wake up by 5:30 a.m. and go through my normal morning routine of showering, etc. I'd have class from 8 to 12:30 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and then a class from 9:40 to 11:10 and 2:40 to 4:10 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Some days I would have quarterback meetings between classes. Following my classes, I'd go to football practice at 4 and would get out between 6:30 and 7. From there I'd eat dinner, or, if there was an SGA meeting that Thursday, I'd leave practice early to prepare for that. After dinner I'd go back to my room, do my homework, and then prepare for bed and my next day. I'd turn in around midnight.

Q. What's been your focus as president of SGA?

A. My first priority was improving the quality of the food and service in the cafeteria. When I first took office, another huge initiative was getting the new constitution passed. While we're continuing to make progress with food, this semester we're trying to address other campus improvements, especially in residence life.

Q. Let's take each initiative one by one. Could you expand on your work with the cafeteria?

A. The list could drag on about cafeteria issues. From portion sizes, to poor quality, to lack of diverse options, the caf was a huge concern last semester. We also had certain issues with food stations and drink machines not being changed and with overall poor experiences in the caf. This semester we've seen improvement, and steps are being taken to continue enhancements. Next we're looking at hours of operation, more frequent surveys, new food options, and a to-go option.

Q. What was done with the SGA constitution?

A. There were lots of minor changes that were made. But the main focus was to clear up ambiguities and vagueness in the old constitution. There was an increase in pay for executive board members and some protections were added for representatives who miss meetings. Some by-laws were removed and some requirements for holding certain positions were loosened. We wanted to make it easier to become a member of SGA in hopes of increasing participation.

Q. And as far as residence life?

A. We're still gathering information on how we can improve in this

area. We're looking for small ways to contribute to better living arrangements and other campus improvements to boost the quality of student life outside the classroom. We're open to suggestions.

Q. What would you say is your administration's most meaningful accomplishment(s) so far?

A. Making progress in the cafeteria and fixing a lot of the issues there as well as passing the new constitution have been huge accomplishments. Much credit goes to my team. They've made my job a lot easier.

Q. What's been most challenging about the job?

A. Balancing my different responsibilities has been a challenge. It's hard to make my schedule match that of many leaders of our campus. While the job is somewhat time consuming, football also takes a lot of my time and energy, as does my schoolwork, of course. It's been hard working it out, but I've really been enjoying the experience, so it's all worth it.



SGA President Thomas Clark

Photo courtesy of Clark campaign

Q. What's one specific area where you can improve as president?

A. I'd like to become more involved with clubs, one-on-one, and attend more events that clubs sponsor on campus. I want the clubs to know that I care about them. I'm invested in how well they do.

Q. What's one change you'd like to see in the student body?

A. Student involvement is a struggle at times, especially when it comes to SGA. It would be nice to see more students get involved with our organization as well as the many great clubs we have at Wesleyan.

Q. If you're reelected, what would be your main goals in a second term?

Melanie Mager Persevered to Graduate

Having just completed her undergraduate degree in Wesleyan's adult-degree program, Melanie Mager intends to take a short break and then continue her education by enrolling in the school's new online MBA.

A Georgia native and now a resident of Rocky Mount, the 50-year-old Mager completed her BS degree with a double major in business administration and organizational administration.

The Decree interviewed Mager just before her graduation in December.

Q. Many APS students attended a traditional four-year school right after high school and then, for various reasons, had to withdraw. What's your story?

A. I did attend college when I first enlisted in the Air Force, and I completed some coursework after that. But family obligations, small children and a husband consumed me. I wanted to enjoy every moment of the kids' childhood, so I put everything else on the back burner.

Q. What attracted you to the Wesleyan Adult and Professional Studies program?

A. I started at Wesleyan (in August 2017) due to the convenient location and class schedules.

Q. What did you like most about the NCWC program overall?

A. The professors! I've had some great ones.

Q. What's one specific change you would make in the program?

A. I would change the drop policy. You should have the ability to drop a class after the official "drop date" when you have a true, validated, and verifiable emergency situation.

Q. What was that first semester like when you began at NCWC?

A. I'd like to continue improving the cafeteria and enhance residence life and student life on campus overall. I'd also want to set the stage for a smooth transition to whoever succeeds me in the presidency.

Q. Why should your peers vote you back into office?

A. I care about our students and issues pertaining to student life on campus. I've worked hard to make improvements and I've listened to the voices of the student body. I believe my leadership skills and my personality give the student government a solid foundation to continue doing good work.

Smith said that interested candidates may apply to run for SGA offices by contacting him in the Student Activities Office. The application deadline is February 28. The campaigning will begin in early March, and on-line voting will take place from March 12 to 19.

Wesleyan Friends Helped Strausser Cope with Tragedy

By Will Plyler
Decree Staff Writer

Every Monday at 8 p.m., a group of Wesleyan students meet in the Wesleyan chapel. The brick walls reverberate with the combined sounds of a guitar, a piano, a cajon drum, and at least two dozen voices singing along. The low-lighted chandeliers and strands of lightbulbs that hang from the ceiling fuel the joy and poignancy of the moment.

This is a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). Their president is senior and history major Joshua Strausser. Strausser, 22, combines his love for music with his love for sports at FCA, where he preaches, and sings and plays on the worship team. He is rarely found here without his distinctive grin on his face.

Strausser has also performed for three years with the Spectrum Popular Music Ensemble. In April, he will be the first student to graduate with Wesleyan's new music production minor.

The Decree met Strausser for an interview in the Taylor Center conference room. “I kind of miss this room,” Strausser said as he found a seat at the table. During Strausser's freshman and sophomore years, FCA met here as a group with three or four members.

Today, FCA has outgrown the conference room, and its 30-plus members have their weekly meetings in the chapel. In his four years here at Wesleyan, FCA has helped Strausser face a great deal of challenges, not the least of which was the death of his mother in 2018.

The room full of trophy cases and retired



Junior guard Kayla Johnson leads the second-place Bishops into the USA South Conference tournament. See sports coverage on page 3. SI photo

sports jerseys seemed a fitting place for Strausser's interview as he began to share his story. Strausser grew up in Claremont, the middle of three triplets. Along with his brother, Lee, and sister, Erica, Strausser attended Bandys High School in Catawaba. His father, Eric, drives a truck for Tyson Foods, and his late mother, Lori, owned a hair salon.

A lover of sports, Strausser played football, wrestled, and competed in shotput and discus at Bandys. His mother used to come to all his games and ring a cowbell. “The thing is, she didn't know anything about football,” Strausser mused. “Even though I played for like 10 years...she used to cheer when the other team did something good and we'd have to turn around and be like ‘Mom, no!’”

He came to NC Wesleyan in 2016 to play defensive tackle. During his freshman year, he sustained two football injuries: a concussion during training, and a foot injury in one of the first games of the season. The latter sidelined him for the rest of the year.

Over the following summer, Strausser became disenchanted with the competitive nature of college sports. “It's not the same feeling as Friday-night football,” he said, remembering how he was usually too worried about which players were better than him to really enjoy playing. This anxiety, combined with his injuries, led him to decide not to play football his sophomore year.

Without sports taking up his time, Strausser turned his attention to his love for music. He had begun playing the acoustic guitar

when he was 12 years old, but he had “only really played at church” before coming to college. He decided to enroll in Wesleyan's new music production program during his sophomore year. As part of the program, Strausser joined the popular-music ensemble known as “Spectrum” as a guitarist.

Life was good and then, a few months into the school year, Strausser received a phone call that would change his life forever. Strausser's mother had suffered from heart palpitations for most of her life, having been born with just two working heart valves as opposed to the normal four. In October of 2018, Strausser received a phone call from his brother, Lee, that his mother had been taken to the hospital and that her heart had had to be shocked back into rhythm.

He made the three-hour drive home to Claremont that weekend to be with his mother and stayed until the following Tuesday, October 23, when his mother was scheduled to have open-heart surgery. “The doctor said that the surgery went perfectly,” Strausser recalled.

But after the surgery, his mother fell into a coma and remained in that condition the rest of the week. Having been away for an extended period, Strausser came back to Wesleyan to resume class on Monday, October 29.

It was at a Spectrum rehearsal that afternoon that Strausser received the news: Lori Strausser had flat-lined. He rushed home again, arriving shortly before his mother passed away at 12:30 on the morning of October 30.

Strausser remained home with his family until his mother's funeral on November 2. His friends, Beau Sharpe, Grey Clark, Paul Bunch, and Toby Sharp (all members of FCA), made the trip to attend the funeral.

After the funeral, Strausser faced the daunting task of making up for two full weeks of missed classes, but he said the Bishop family offered him a great deal of help.

“Wesleyan has good professors,” Strausser said, explaining that his teachers allowed him to push assignment deadlines back so he could catch up. “(Professor) Ross even offered to put an incomplete on (his) course,” he said, “and (let me) finish it next semester.”

But Strausser declined the offer. “I put my nose to the grindstone,” he said. “Sitting in a hospital waiting room for 12 hours a day gives you plenty of time to read.” With help from professors and friends, he passed all his classes.

Strausser credits his faith for helping in his emotional recovery. “I have a God who never leaves me,” he said, “so I wasn't an emotional wreck when I came back to school.” He's also very grateful to have friends by his side. “I have some great friends,” he said, “(and so many) great memories... You should form as many relationships as possible, because you never know when you'll need their friendship or help.”

Strausser will graduate in April with a major in history and minors in music production and English. He hopes to work in music (possibly in live sound), marry his girlfriend of nine months, Natalie Larson, and raise children who serve God. “Everybody needs money,” Strausser said. “But if I can leave an impact on somebody's life, I'll be happy. Ultimately, I want to make God proud with my life.”