

# CAMPUS LIFE

## NC Wesleyan Welcomes New Biology Professor to Faculty

Dr. Ami Thompson joined the biology department in January as an assistant professor after earning her doctorate in conservation biology.

The Decree prepared the following profile on Wesleyan's newest full-time faculty member:

**Hometown:** Cedarburg, Wisconsin.

**Degrees Earned:** B.S. in conservation from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls; PhD in conservation biology from the University of Minnesota.

**Previous Job Experience:** I've worked as an educator for both the Wisconsin and Minnesota departments of natural resources. I was a national park ranger, and I ran my own environmental education consulting business. I've authored six curricula on using nature to inspire science education.

**Previous Teaching Experience:** I've been teaching science and biology in one way or another since my first high school internship at a nature center in 1997.

**Areas of Specialization:** Generally, I'm an ecologist because I study the interactions between living and non-living things. My passion is for freshwater ecosystems and I have a particular fondness for dragonflies. My dissertation is a description of the natural history of the common green damselfly dragonfly (*Anax junius*) in Minnesota.

**Courses You'll Teach at Wesleyan:**

This semester I'm teaching Conservation Biology, Biology 101, and Methods in Biology. I anticipate I'll be teaching ecology, and perhaps a few other to-be-determined courses.

**What Attracted You to Wesleyan:** I wanted to teach at small college where I could get to know my students as individuals. After interviewing here, I felt confident I would have that opportunity at Wesleyan. I also discovered that I'd have kind, intelligent, and supportive colleagues.

**What about North Carolina Most Appeals to You:** So many amazing habitats to explore—from mountains to ocean! I've been visiting a new state park every weekend.

**What You'll Miss Most about the Upper-Midwest:** I already miss my Minnesota friends and family, of course. I'll miss winter sports; I love cross-country skiing and I was learning to ice skate. I'll also miss hiking along the Mississippi River.

**What You Won't Miss:** I won't miss shoveling snow!

**Your Teaching Philosophy:** It's to teach science skills and repeatedly practice those skills during class in order to build science knowledge. The skills we use in science are very much like the skills needed to be successful at sports or in the arts in that students need to practice them to become good at them. When you gain



New biology professor Ami Thompson is seen here surveying dragonflies and damselflies in a northern Minnesota lake with fellow researcher Mitch Haag and his son Jason. Photo courtesy A. Thompson

proficiency with science skills you also gain science literacy.

**Your Hobbies:** Yoga, hiking and canoeing. I also really love jumping in a creek or lake in my waders with my aquatic sampling net and collecting aquatic baby dragonfly nymphs. I'm

raising some nymphs in one of the biology labs right now. I'm so excited to learn about the dragonfly species that live here! I have a dog, Reynaldo (You can meet him during my "dog walk" office hour on Wednesdays at 8 a.m. this semester. We meet at the fountain and walk the path around campus). I also have a pet blue-spotted salamander that lives in my office.

**Your Dream Vacation:** I'd love to travel to someplace in the world that I haven't been (i.e., Africa, China, Australia) and meet up with biologists who

## MLK Day of Service: 'A Truly Campus-wide Initiative'

By Chasadie Searcy  
Decree Staff Writer

In efforts to continue Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy, 180 Wesleyan students, faculty, and staff participated in community service projects all around Rocky Mount during the national commemoration January 20. Director of Student Activities Elliot



Leah Wright shares a moment with Ada, a Meals on Wheels client.

Smith emphasized how grateful he was for all of the support. "Everyone came together to make the day happen," he said.

The Athletic Department provided the buses. Wesleyan staff members Aaron Denton, Marshall Leonard, and Steve Burrell ferried volunteers to various sites around the city. Other staff and faculty worked side by side with students throughout the day. "It was truly a campus-wide initiative," Smith said, noting that three years ago, during his first MLK Day of Service, there were about 90 volunteers. "Knowing that we doubled the participation in two years is a testament to the wonderful community we have on campus."

Junior Jordan Stephens worked to help clean Battle Park. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, the same fraternity as Dr. King. "Martin Luther King Day means to continue the legacy he left for us," Stephens said. "As an Alpha man it is my duty to keep up what he left for us."

Stephens stressed that the day was special to him because he was able to celebrate "his brother." He didn't let the cold weather dampen his feelings of inspiration.

Senior Leah Wright was one of several students and staff who volunteered with Meals on Wheels at First Presbyterian Church. A member of the basketball team, she drove around Rocky Mount delivering meals to those who would otherwise have a hard time getting food during severe weather.

During her two hours of volunteering, Wright, a sister in Alpha Kappa Alpha, met an elderly woman who was also an AKA member. "Her name was Ada and she seemed very excited to talk to us," Wright said. "It was like she didn't want us to leave."

Wright sat and talked with Ada, and many others that day. "I felt like I was making a difference," she said. "It was more than just delivering food."

Tavon Gregory, the president of the Black Student Association, served with

five other BSA members at Peacemakers Family Center, a community organization for local youth. "MLK Day is a day of pride and strength," the Wesleyan junior said.

At Peacemakers, students worked from 9 a.m. to noon, unloading trucks and helping to move the organization's furniture into new facilities. A history and English major, Gregory plans on becoming an educator; because Peacemakers works with underprivileged children, it was a direct way for him to help a group he wants to serve in the future.

Senior Cody Vazquez was another participant at the Battle Park location. Temperatures stayed in the low 30's during the morning, but he finished his two hours out of a desire to serve. "The day is about unity between the races, getting over conflicts, and realizing common goals as human beings," Vazquez said, adding that he will continue volunteering in the community when the opportunity presents itself again.

Financial aid officer ReOtis Anderson worked with Meals on Wheels. He has been serving with Meals on Wheels for the past four years, but this was his first time he participated through the college.

"MLK is a day about linking the older and younger generations, to create a mindset of moving forward," Anderson said.

He said he would continue with the tradition of community service. "You may never even get to see the person you helped, but just to know you had an impact is all that matters," he said.

Sophomore Savion Young volunteered with the Exercise Science Club. "Martin Luther King Jr. inspired me to help others and be a beacon of light in this dark world," Young said. "I know I can beat the odds just like he did."

His service had a positive impact on him. "It shows me not to take things for granted and give back to the community," Young said. "No matter the place, we all should serve."



The Black Student Association volunteered during the MLK Day of Service. From left: Adam Tillery, Tavon Gregory, Diamond Allen, Jadèjah Robinson, Joseph Turner and Arron Alston.

## Wesleyan Junior Releases Album

Will Plyler, a junior communication and music production major, has recorded and released a CD of original music.

Titled "From the Ruins," it includes 12 songs and runs 55 minutes.

The Decree interviewed Plyler in late January soon after the CD's official release.

**Q.** When did you start writing and recording music?

**A.** I started writing songs when I was 12. I used to mow my grandparents' grass to make some extra money, and I used to just make up little tunes in my head to pass the time. I really got into recording when I was 15, and my dad gave my brothers and me an iMac that had GarageBand recording software on it.

**Q.** What are some common themes in your work?

**A.** The album title is "From the Ruins," and it talks about my struggles with anxiety and depression. For at least two years, I wrestled with these issues almost constantly: insecurities, hopelessness, panic attacks, all seemingly for no reason. I had to ask God about why He was allowing me to feel these things and what He wanted to do with it. So, this album represents my thoughts as I'm engaging with God over these things and trusting that, however difficult my situation may be, my God loves to make something beautiful out of brokenness. That's where I got the picture of a "Castle from the Ruins."

**Q.** Who are your musical influences?

**A.** When I'm looking for inspiration, I like to listen to David Crowder, Lifehouse, and For King and Country. I write mostly indie-rock/alternative. I've also recently been trying to branch out my style and I've been listening to a bunch of Twenty-One Pilots as I start to write for my next project.

**Q.** Describe your song-writing process, step by step.

**A.** This has always been a difficult question to answer because every song is different. Some songs start with an idea, a hook, a poetic phrase or a melody, that I hum into my phone and come back to later. These songs can either take five minutes or five months, depending on how long I have to wait before I have free time to sit down and write.

Other times I love to take some time alone, grab a guitar or sit down at a piano, and just play and sing whatever comes to me. Sometimes it's a bunch of gibberish, but other times these moments create my greatest songs. These are usually my favorite moments that I spend with God. The album's last song is called "Praise the King," and it came from one of these private sessions.

**Q.** Talk about recording. Were other Wesleyan musicians involved?

have passions for different creatures (birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, insects, plants...). I'd explore wild and natural areas with them while we all learn from one another.

**Favorite TV Show:** Right now, I'm watching "Sabrina" on Netflix.

**Favorite Movie:** "Lake Placid." It's a really, really bad movie that came out in 1999 with Oliver Platt and Betty White about a giant, man-eating crocodile. I don't have great taste in movies!

**Favorite Books:** I recently listened to "Where the Crawdads Sing" on Audible and thought it was fantastic. I also really enjoyed reading "Lab Girl."

**Favorite Teams:** I grew up in Wisconsin, so I'm a "Cheese Head Packers Fan."

**Preferred Social Media:** I've been using Facebook and Snapchat to stay in contact with my Minnesota community. I use Instagram to share my research and outdoor adventure photos.

**One Interesting Thing about You:** I'm passionate about opening the door to science and research for anyone who wants to enter the field because that's what my mentors did for me. My childhood and young adult life didn't give me experiences that made me feel like scientific research was something "for me," even though I loved the natural world and had a relentlessly curious mind. It wasn't until my mid-30ties that I entered graduate school, after I had met my academic advisors who saw the potential in me and invited me to work in their labs and earn my PhD. I'm motivated to help and inspire my students in the same way that my advisors helped and inspired me.

**A.** I did most of the recording in my bedroom at home over the last year and a half, tracking whenever I had free time to do so. I recorded a little bit of piano and some group vocals with some friends here at the Wesleyan studio as well.

**Q.** What happens after you record all the songs?

**A.** After all the recording is done, the songs must be mastered. This is a process where we listen to all the songs together and add final touches to make sure they're all at relatively the same volume and flow well together. This can take several hours. After that, I buy a bunch of CDs and cases and do the burning myself.

**Q.** How do you intend to promote it? And what have you done so far?

**A.** I promote my music on my social media pages @wpmusicofficial. I hosted a special album-release concert here at Wesleyan on January 10, and I have several local shows lined up for the rest of the spring to play my songs and sell CDs.

**Q.** Where is your music available?

**A.** You can buy a CD from me, or you can find me on Apple Music, Spotify, iTunes, Amazon.



Will Plyler has released a new CD.

"Though the storm is dark and frightening / All the thunder and the lightning / All your tools to build my trusting / And kill my worldly lust / Your desire and Your purpose / Is to show me I'm not worthless / 'Cause I am the one You've chosen / With a love as deep as oceans"

--From track 4, "Romance Me"

"Your blood covers yesterday's me / Your great love is all that I need / Leave what I have been for what I'll be / So much more than yesterday's me"

--From track 10, "Yesterday's Me"

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