

THE DECREE

since 1960 “of, by, and for the Wesleyan community.”

May 11, 2020

NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Despite Pandemic, College Expects to Break Even for 2019-2020

President Evan Duff Expresses Hope NCWC Still ‘Comes Close’ To Fall Enrollment Projections

North Carolina Wesleyan still expects to rebound from last year’s budget deficit, maintain its employee and salary levels and “come close” to its enrollment projections for next fall despite the coronavirus pandemic, President Evan Duff said in a wide-ranging interview.

President Duff responded to Decree questions on email during the last week of April, as the remaining Wesleyan students left campus for the summer, having finished the spring semester by taking exams and submitting papers online. Dr. Duff is nearing the end of his first year as interim president.

Q. Have there been any confirmed cases of coronavirus on campus? That would include students, staff, subcontractors like cafeteria workers, and delivery-persons?

A. To my knowledge, no one has tested positive for COVID-19 while on campus. If anyone felt sick or had any symptoms, they were asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Q. Describe the workings of the ad hoc committee established to help guide the college during the pandemic.

A. The Viral Infection Response Team (VIRT) started meeting early in the semester to help research trends and make recommendations on Wesleyan’s response. It’s met once or twice a week, since early March. VIRT was comprised of Associate Dean Jessie Langley; Molly Wyatt, academic affairs; Steve Burrell, residence life; Wayne Sears, campus safety; Carol Carson, athletics; David Fryar, facilities; and Physician’s Assistant Jessica Brys-Wilson, health services.

VIRT worked in tandem with the college’s leadership team in making decisions that were in the best interest of our students, faculty, and staff. We all used the latest data provided by reputable sources, connected with colleagues at other colleges, and stayed active on higher education message boards.

Q. Describe campus life in the past six weeks.

A. From the moment we announced we would remain on remote instruction until the present date, we’ve had a gradual change in operations. By April 1, we were down to 200 students living on campus and many of our employees moved to telework options. By Easter we had moved into a campus lockdown to continue to protect our students and staff. It was at this time that the back gates were locked and we established a security checkpoint at the front of campus.

During the entire time, students could still walk around campus in groups fewer than 10, pick up “to-go” food from the cafeteria, and access computer labs. The library was open to small groups until the campus went on lockdown. As of April 27, we started to loosen restrictions and we allowed students to leave campus for essential items. Faculty, staff and the community provided our students with a multitude of food and hygiene supplies as well as games, puzzles, and cards for the last six weeks. By the end of the semester, we still had 90 students on campus, and after graduation, 29 will remain on campus over the summer.

Q. What problems, if any, arose when it came to students and employees adhering to the pandemic policies?

A. I thought everyone involved did a phe-

nomenal job with adhering to our policies and all the changes we had to make during this time. I’m so proud of our faculty, staff, students, and the community. As a family, we certainly took care of each other.

Q. We understand that data can’t offer a full picture of the impediments that day students may have faced as a result of the switch to online instruction. But can the college provide statistics on the number of students who failed courses this spring? And how many withdrew for the semester, compared to 2019?

A. The following information was compiled by the provost’s and registrar’s offices: There were a total of 5,853 grades given for courses taken this spring; of that total, 419, or 7 percent, were Fs; this compares with 387 Fs out of 5,121, or 7.5 percent, for courses in spring 2019. This semester there were 42 WFs, or .7 percent, compared to 23, or .45 percent last year (An XF is awarded when a student stops attending classes). There were 218 total course withdrawals, or about 3.7 percent, compared to 189, or 3.7 percent, in 2019. The registrar reports that most withdrawals this year occurred prior to spring break.

Q. Spring commencement was canceled. What’s the plan for holding the next commencement?

A. On December 5th, we’ll hold a special commencement to replace the spring ceremony we had to cancel. Spring 2020, August 2020, and fall 2020 graduates will be allowed to participate. The ceremony will take place in the Rocky Mount Event Center. Future commencements will only be held in the spring, but we will continue to confer graduates every May, August, and December.

Q. Now talk about the college’s employees. What percentage of staff now works on campus? Which employees were required to be on campus on a regular basis?

A. Staff was always welcome to work on campus the entire time. The college is considered an essential business. But if staff had concerns about their own safety and had the ability to perform their job from home, we established a telework policy. When they’re on campus, staff practice social distancing and proper hand-washing policies. At any given time, I would say we’ve got close to 30 staff members on campus.

Q. What extra steps has housekeeping and maintenance taken to ensure the health of students and staff?

A. Housekeeping and maintenance are doing a wonderful job of cleaning and sanitizing. We’ve been using two Clorox 360 machines to help sanitize surfaces and the air in offices/rooms/buildings. Additional measures were taken in April to wipe down most surfaces, and the cleaning crew wore face masks and gloves while disinfecting the campus. Deep cleaning was performed on the residence halls as students came back to remove their belongings.

Q. How would you characterize the performance of the housekeeping, maintenance and cafeteria staffs?

A. Exceptional. They were always hard-working, positive, with smiles on their faces.

Q. Talk about the switch to online instruction. How has it gone? What are the most significant obstacles faculty and students have encountered?

A. Many faculty have taught online or hybrid classes prior to COVID-19, and I would say they were the most prepared to move to 100 percent remote instruction.

This was a new concept for other faculty members; however, they all spent countless hours ensuring our students received the same, high-level education that we deliver face-to-face. I witnessed faculty doing video lectures and dissections, while others quickly learned Zoom and MS Teams to hold synchronous

lectures with their students. Our faculty are passionate about what they teach, and COVID-19 would not get in the way of that.

Q. The first summer session has been converted to online instruction. What’s the plan for the second session?

A. At the present time, the plan is to offer seated courses in the adult program. If that happens, we will take precautions to ensure safety. We’ll limit class sizes, require social distancing and encourage students and faculty to wear face masks. This may change and we’ll be prepared to meet the needs of our students through some seated and some on-line classes or 100 percent online, if needed.

Q. Should the stay-at-home rules remain in place through August, what options is the college considering for fall? And when will you and the provost need to make a final determination regarding fall semester?

A. The provost, faculty leaders, and I will be meeting about this next week and we’ll devise a plan that will be communicated soon.

Q. And what steps do you expect the college to take to prepare for more full-scale online instruction?

Louisburg Administrator Jason Modlin Named Dean of Students

NC Wesleyan has selected an administrator at Louisburg College as its new Dean of Students.

Effective June 1, Jason Modlin will succeed Molly Wyatt, who has held the post of Interim Dean of Students following the departure of Ed Naylor last summer. Dr. Wyatt will continue to serve as Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs.

In announcing the appointment, NCWC President Evan Duff highlighted Dr. Modlin’s extensive experience in student affairs. For the past 15 years, he’s served as Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Louisburg, which, like Wesleyan, is a small private school affiliated with the Methodist Church.

“Dr. Modlin understands the culture and needs of the students we serve at North Carolina Wesleyan College,” the president said. “He’s very student-centric, and I feel he’s going to do an outstanding job advocating for our students.”

A native of Belhaven in Beaufort County, Dr. Modlin earned a BA in English from the University of Mt. Olive, where he was a resident advisor.

Following graduation, he accepted a position as an account manager at Rent-A-Center. His retail experience was, in his words, “short-lived.” He then returned to his alma mater to serve as a residence director.

“I got into student affairs because I didn’t like retail,” he said. “I thought I would work as a resident director for a couple of years until I figured out what I wanted to do for a living.”

He soon found that he enjoyed serving and building relationships with students. “I’ve been blessed to have been able to turn that into a career,” he said.

After five years at Mt. Olive, he moved to Louisburg, a two-year college. In his first four years, he was an assistant and then associate dean. When he became dean in 2005, he was given responsibility for all areas of the student life program, including housing/residence life, health and wellness services, student advocacy and accountability, campus safety, student engagement, and campus dining.

He said he’s proud of steps Louisburg took to meet the evolving needs of its students. Among the new programs the college introduced under his leadership were the National Society for Leadership and Success; “Know Your Worth,” an educational series to address student relationship issues; “Louisburg Listens,” a bi-weekly community forum; the Office of Student Advocacy and Accountability; and “Living and Learning Communities,” which grouped students with common interests in specified areas of Louisburg residence halls.

Dr. Modlin said commencement has always been his favorite day on the academic calendar. “We get to see each

A. If that’s the case, yes, we would provide some more large-scale training for our faculty in small groups this summer with our instructional technologist.

Q. What’s the latest on enrollment projections for fall in the traditional program? Besides providing numbers, try to explain the trends you’re seeing so far.

A. Deposits are coming in slower than the same period last year, but applications are higher. Students, especially local students, aren’t rushing their decisions. They too are trying to see how this will all play out. I suspect we’ll find that local students who may have planned to attend ECU, or a college farther away, may attend Wesleyan in the fall to be closer to home.

We projected to start with 375 new students next fall, and while we may not hit that goal, we’re confident we will come close. We’ve already developed multiple projections with our 2020-2021 budget, so we’ll have a plan regardless of the actual enrollment numbers.

Q. Would you agree that the college stands to see a steep decrease in international students, due to travel restrictions, etc.?

A. It’s hard to forecast this. As we’ve

seen over the last six weeks, information and situations change daily. I do expect some students to have visa and travel issues, which will impact their ability to come back or to start at Wesleyan. At this time, I wouldn’t characterize it as a steep decrease.

Q. Earlier in winter, the college was predicting a break-even year. What’s the latest year-end projection for the budget?

A. We’re still anticipating a break-even year. Spending has certainly decreased across campus and savings have been captured with the close of the spring athletic season. We’ll incur additional expenses with some room and board refunds, but our savings should help to offset that.

Q. Is the college considering partial refunds to students for room and board? If so, how would that work?

A. The calculation will be based on when the student left and how much institutional aid (internal grant funded by the college) was used to pay for that room and board. The difference will then be applied to the student’s account. There is also assistance from the Department of Education through the CARES Act that will directly benefit students eligible for Title IV funding. Once this money is received and the final guidelines are provided, we can start to issue credits and refunds to students.

Q. Around the country, you hear reports that colleges and universities have furloughed employees and/or cut salary. So far, has the college furloughed employees? Is the college now considering furloughs or pay cuts?

A. We’re extremely fortunate and blessed that we have not had to furlough any employees. We’re not considering furloughs or pay cuts, and we just gave faculty and staff a raise for their dedication over the last year. We’re able to do this with smart and realistic budget forecasting and then by meeting our goals. It takes the entire college to meet goals for admission and retention as well as fundraising. We are and will continue to work as a team and a family to reach our goals.

Q. Related follow-up: Given the situation, do you feel Wesleyan’s small size gives it advantages over larger colleges and universities?

A. I really do. While we don’t have a large endowment, we have hard-working faculty and staff who collaborate to lift up the college, to meet the needs of our students, and to thrive in a time when that’s not the norm. We’re nimble and, without bureaucracy, we can make decisions to protect our faculty, staff and students.

Q. Does the college intend to hire new staff, in direct response to the pandemic, prior to fall semester?

A. This fall we hope to add a few positions that will include housekeeping and maintenance as well as some services to assist with counseling.

Q. If the college suffers significant financial strain in the months ahead,

see PANDEMIC pg 8



Dr. Jason Modlin, NCWC’s new Dean of Students Photo courtesy of J. Modlin

student that we’ve served and helped along the way to earning a college degree,” he said. “For me, it’s very rewarding to know I played a small role in helping them to achieve that goal.”

The new dean said he’s been impressed by the commitment of Wesleyan’s student affairs staff. He recognizes the impact a small private school can make on students.

“I’m an example of the type of success a student can realize as a result of attending institutions such as NC Wesleyan,” he said.

Dr. Modlin holds an MA in education from East Carolina University and a doctorate in education and educational leadership from UNC-Wilmington.

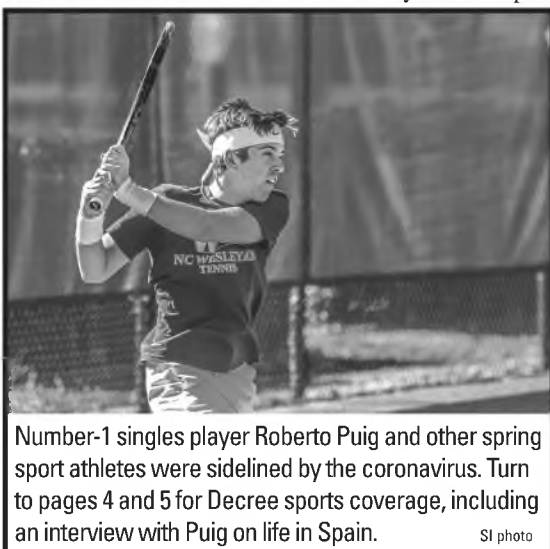
Health Services Urges Students Not to Become Complacent

Jessica Brys-Wilson, the college’s Director of Health Services, has been closely monitoring the health of the Wesleyan community, as colleges across the country deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

A physician’s assistant, Brys-Wilson was interviewed by the Decree in early and late April.

Q. At least in the early going, there was a perception that coronavirus was only a concern for the elderly and Americans with underlying health problems such as diabetes and asthma. What would you say to the average 20-year-old who feels immune to the disease?

A. The most recent number I’ve seen was that 45 percent of people affected are between the ages of 20 and 49. Twenty-year-olds are not immune. There have also been recent reports of significant adverse effects in young adults who didn’t even know they were sick. This means that a student could catch the coronavirus without even knowing it and then, days to weeks later, suffer a life-threatening complication. The safest thing to do is to just follow the guidelines that are in place to prevent catching the virus.



Number-1 singles player Roberto Puig and other spring sport athletes were sidelined by the coronavirus. Turn to pages 4 and 5 for Decree sports coverage, including an interview with Puig on life in Spain. SI photo