

CAMPUS LIFE

Homeschooled Students Flourish at NC Wesleyan

By Chasadie Searcy
Decree Staff Writer

When college students say that they were homeschooled, often they're instantly prejudged. Many think that if students are homeschooled, they will have been deprived of the chance to form friendships and may have suffered in their social development.

Many parents may choose homeschooling because they fear that the public-school system won't allow their children to form their own opinions and become independent, or will taint their religious views. Noted British science writer Roger Lewin once said, "Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve."

According to the National Home Education Research Institute, over 2.3 million students are homeschooled at some point between kindergarten and 12th grade. Indeed, homeschooling is more common and, at least according to its proponents, more effective than one might think.

Wesleyan Students

Will Plyler, 21, is a junior who is a double major in communication and music production with a minor in religious studies. A native of Lenoir, Plyler moved to Rocky Mount at 15. He said his parents chose to homeschool him in order to have a direct say in his education. As devout Christians, they wanted him to learn about topics like the history of evolution and sexuality from them.

Junior Blaise Gourley, 21, a native of Walnut Cove, is a marketing major at Wesleyan. He's one of four children, each of whom was homeschooled. His parents felt it would allow better opportunities for him and his siblings to learn and think on their own.

Hailing from Red Oak, freshman Colin Long, 19, is majoring in English and minoring in Hispanic studies and religious studies. He said his parents thought a homeschooling program would be more challenging than public school. From 8th-12th grade, he did an independent study with 15 other students who were homeschooled in his area.

Another homeschooled student is Natalie Larson from Evergreen, Colorado. Larson, 21, is a double major in sociology and organizational administration, with a minor in religious studies. Larson comes from a Christian family, which disapproved of the fact that God was excluded from the school curricula. Both Larson and her sister were homeschooled.

Day-to-Day Learning Activities

As one might expect, homeschooling often involves a flexible curriculum, tailored to the needs of the individual

students. Gourley's schedule was based around his life. It was less structured and he was able to focus on whatever subjects he thought needed the most time. He kept records of his notes and the work that he'd completed, and his parents would occasionally check his progress; his grading system was mostly based on his accountability, he said.

There were four ways he completed lessons. He used a textbook/workbook combination, an online CD program, an online video class with a teacher and workbook, and a co-op class where he met with other homeschooled students in his hometown area for labs, quizzes and tests.

Larson was enrolled in an umbrella school called CHES (Colorado Heritage Education School System). She got all of her assignments at the beginning of the school year, worked on them throughout the week, and submitted it all at the end of each semester.

During high school, Plyler's typical day started at about 6 a.m. He could roll out of bed and start work in his pajamas! Working from a manual, he'd complete lessons until the early afternoon. Once he finished his lessons, Plyler had the rest of the day free for leisure and work.

He used Saxon Manuals, workbooks designed to teach lessons at home. When it came to grading, he would consult the answer key himself to check his work for subjects like history. For complicated subjects like math, he relied on a video teacher; much grading was on a pass-fail basis. His mother would grade some of his other work.

Long's regular school day was from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. He said he would take turns among subjects like history, science, Latin, and math. He used combinations of textbook and workbooks to complete his work.

Pros and Cons of Homeschooling

For Larson, homeschooling had more pros than cons. Among the benefits, she said, homeschooling allowed her to learn responsibility, become more flexible and develop time-management skills. She was able to strengthen bonds with her family and build her resumé. In her free time, she volunteered in the community, compiling more than 400 hours of service.

Larson also traveled with her family and because she was homeschooled, their trips were often educational. She said she's visited 38 out of the 50 U.S. states. Including Canada, she's traveled to 11 countries and she's gone, on her own, to Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Germany, France, Czech Republic, and England.

Larson acknowledged the downsides to homeschooling. The most significant is the loose schedule. Because her assignments were due at the end of the semester, she said she often procrastinated.

Like Larson, Plyler feels the advantages of the homeschooling experience outweigh the disadvantages. He said it was beneficial to him that he learned at his own speed. Instead of forcing him to "sit in a classroom all day long," his flexible schedule gave him time to teach guitar lessons, to earn and save money.

He was not subjected to the bullying and peer pressure that can be common in public schools. Nor did he feel isolated, because he had friends from church and outside engagements. Though he conceded that he "was a bit sheltered" through high school, he felt homeschooling "was worth it because of all of the benefits."

Long also believes that there were more pros to homeschooling than cons. He liked that he picked his own curriculum, permitting him to concentrate on subjects that interested him. There were also fewer distractions, so it was easy to stay on top of his work.

One downside was that, working alone, he was unable to exchange views and debate with other students. Such debate can help you refine your ideas, he noted. In a traditional classroom, he said, you get the opportunity to argue your beliefs with other students, interactions that Long was denied as a homeschooled.

Another con was that Long missed out on extracurricular activities such as sports. But he did play the tuba in his town's band, he said.

Assessing his homeschooling experi-

ence, Gourley identified increased free time as the greatest benefit. With the extra time, he played football, worked at a job, and participated in programs at his church. He attended Winston-Salem First Assembly of God, where he was a part of the Youth Leadership Corps and the Fine and Performing Arts group.

For Gourley, the most significant downside was that he lacked access to guidance counselors, who could have helped him in filling out college applications and seeking scholarships.

Assimilating into College Life

With a few exceptions, each student said the transition from homeschooling to NC Wesleyan was pretty smooth. All were involved in community organizations of some sort, dispelling the notion that homeschooled youth are anti-social.

Long explained that his engagement with his independent study group strengthened his ability to interact with kids his age. Besides performing in a band, he was active in his church youth groups, he noted.

Now finishing up his freshman year, Long has become an officer of Wesleyan's GEN-UN and a member of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society, among other organizations.

Gourley said his transition was seamless. The only bad part related to his football career, which ended after his first season at Wesleyan due to concussions. Since football was such a significant part of his life, Gourley mourned the fact that he needed to quit the team.

With added free time, he could focus not just on his coursework, but his friendships. It made it easy for him to have a double major and join the Taylor-Crocker Honors Program. Active in several extra-curricular activities, Gourley is an alumnus of the Leadership Wesleyan Program, as well as a member of the National Society of Leadership and Success. He's a founder and current CEO of IMPACT-Wesleyan business society, an organization consultant for Refuge Campus Ministries, and a resident advisor (RA) in Petteway Hall.

Gourley also helps with Young Adults Ministry and acts as a mentor with the Youth Theology Institute. Outside of college, Gourley serves as an ambassador for Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce and volunteers with young adults at Church on the Rise.

In contrast to Gourley, Plyler admitted that his transition to college was somewhat difficult at first. He was unaccustomed to living with peers who smoke and drink. Instead of "freaking out," he said he learned to cope.

Because he was raised in a Christian household, he also was shocked at the profanity used by some of his peers. He said he's never heard a family member curse. Once he got past the foul language, he said his transition became easier. He said he feels fortunate that his group of friends respects his values and don't use profanity in his presence. "I'm not nearly as rattled by it now that I'm a junior," he said.

When it comes to academics, the transition has been much smoother, Plyler said, noting he's maintained a solid GPA, finding a place on the President's Lists several times.

Like others in the homeschooling cohort, Plyler has embraced extra-curricular activities at Wesleyan. During his sophomore year, he was president of the Student Government Association. He serves as the Worship Leader for Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He's also a member of Englewood Baptist Church in Rocky Mount where he sings and plays the electric guitar in the orchestra.

A self-described "people person," Larson said her homeschooling experience prepared her well for college and life after graduation.

Besides doing volunteer work back home, she played organized soccer, performed with theatre groups, and participated in many church activities. It was not hard to make new friends at Wesleyan, she said.

She did confess to nervousness about moving from Colorado to a new region of the country, so far from loved ones. But she stressed that her family was more apprehensive than her.

At Wesleyan, Larson became an

honor student, received the Freshman Leadership Award, and earned a spot in Phi Eta Sigma National Honors Society. She also serves as the secretary of IMPACT Wesleyan business society and, for the past three years, the president of Refuge campus ministries. She studied abroad in 2018 with The Global Leadership Exchange Program and received nine credits for the six weeks.

Like Gourley, she attends Church on the Rise where she's involved in the women's ministry, Rise Young Adults, and the worship team.

"The stereotype is that homeschooled kids aren't social," she said, "but I'm a social butterfly."

Wesleyan Students Adapt to Online Instruction During Coronavirus

By Colin Long
Decree Staff Writer

For some students, it was an easy transition to online instruction. For others, there were technical impediments and a significant increase in workload that made the last five weeks of the semester challenging.

Abigail Wooten saw the experience as positive. "They've done a pretty good job of making this transition smooth," said Wooten, a senior majoring in math and CIS, adding that some professors are recording lectures, and others are doing video conferencing. During this period of campus closure due to COVID-19, professors have been forced to turn to online instruction

HEALTH from pg 1

Q. Restate the basic steps that all members of the Wesleyan community should take to stay well.

A. Follow the rules that have been put in place for your protection. The limitations were not enacted without a lot of research and consideration about what's in your best interest. We all should practice social distancing (staying at least six feet from each other.) People should stay at home unless they must leave the house. Wash hands frequently. Avoid sick people. Don't touch your face. If you must leave the house, wear a mask. If you get sick, please contact your primary care provider or the local health department for guidance.

Q. What are some overlooked issues that we should consider to prevent spread of the disease?

A. We don't always think about disinfecting commonly touched surfaces, like door handles and light switches. And any shared food or drinks should be off limits for the time being.

Q. Should we be concerned about food (i.e., pizza) and other items delivered to our dorm, office or home?

A. There is the small possibility of contamination through ordered food. But the most recent recommendations indicate that it's no riskier now than it was before the pandemic to order take-out food.

Q. What are some reliable, authoritative sources of information about coronavirus on the internet?

A. www.cdc.gov and <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina>.

Q. Describe the importance of basic health measures as part of an effort to prevent the disease.

A. Maintaining a healthy immune system helps you fight off illness, including the coronavirus. You should eat a healthy diet with at least five servings of fruits or vegetables a day. Avoid a lot of sugar as it makes it harder for your immune system to work its best. Get at least eight hours of sleep per night. Whenever possible, minimize your stress level.

Q. What other message would you like to impart to members of the NCWC community?

A. This is a hard time, but it will pass. Just relax and stay at home. Wash your hands frequently and avoid sick people. Follow the rules that have been put in place. On federal, state, local levels—and even here at NCWC—much time, energy and research has been put into developing regulations that will keep you as safe as possible.

DECREE SPECIAL FEATURE

First-Person: Stories of Life amid the Pandemic

Ten staff writers present vignettes of life since the coronavirus led to the cancelation of face-to-face classes and spring sports and other campus activities.

Turn to pages 6-8.

and video conference calls to continue providing the best education possible for their students. "They've tried to make this as painless as possible," Wooten said.

The change has given Wooten more flexibility since she can work on assignments while watching or listening to the lectures. But she acknowledged that the videos have been a struggle for her at times since she is not able to ask questions directly.

Another student, Grace deMontesquiou, a sophomore majoring in criminal justice, said that her professors were managing to stay in touch with her and her classmates. "They've been good at emailing us," she said. However, she added the caveat that two of her professors had not released updated syllabi.

Students agreed that the school had done a good job but disagreed on the best approach to online learning.

While Wooten liked the video lectures, Adriana Perez, a sophomore majoring in criminal justice and psychology, did not. She prefers in-person classes or the current alternative: Zoom. Many professors have elected to conduct video conferences alongside forums, a feature on NCWC's website.

"I feel like forum posts create a greater amount of pressure than a Zoom call," Perez said, relating that for many of her classes she's required to answer questions and do work in the forum chats.

By contrast, deMontesquiou prefers the forum posts because "I can complete them in my own time." With Zoom calls, her main issue is that they cannot be viewed earlier and "the students' cameras and background sounds are distracting."

Following the move to online instruction, some students lamented a sudden increase in workload. Perez said this has made her courses decidedly harder. She believes that professors have been striving to fit in schedules and deadlines but ultimately giving students more homework to fulfill their requirements.

Further clarifying she said that "professors have added too many assignments ... I probably have had, on average, five papers due each week since this has started."

Demontesquiou agreed that the workload has been onerous at times. "My schedule is gone," she said. "I used to wake up early and go to bed at the same time. Now I wake up late and am tired all the time."

Before ending the interviews, students showed appreciation for the college's Viral Infection Response Team, which decided to stop face-to-face classes and move to online-only curricula. "They didn't panic or cause others to panic," Wooten said. "When the time came to make a decision, they were quick and decisive."

Demontesquiou added that, "President Duff has done a great job in his position." She especially liked the way the administration had been staying in touch and keeping students entertained.

"I like the email with dinosaur TikTok," Demontesquiou said, referring to a video from President Duff's office that was designed to lighten the students' mood.

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