

THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

New MBA Graduate Excited about Future Opportunities

Amy Elizabeth Ashmus, one of Wesleyan's first MBA graduates, is ready for her next challenge.

The Leland native is a senior accountant for Genesys, a California-based software company. She earned an accounting degree from the APS program in 2017 at the age of 47. Four years later she finished her MBA. She was interviewed by the Decree, weeks before she finished her graduate degree.

Q: Take us back to the year of your high school graduation. What were your goals at the time? What did you do in the years following high school?

A: I graduated from a small private Christian high school back in 1988. My dream had been to attend Appalachian State University. But my friends enrolled in a small Christian college in Tennessee, so I decided to follow them. It was very expensive, so unfortunately, I had to leave before I finished my degree. I got married in 1991 and had two children, a son and a daughter (I'm now a grandmother of two, a 5-year-old and an 18-month-old!). Since my spouse was in the U.S. Air Force, we lived in England, among other places, and traveled all over Europe. It was an amazing experience, but I always dreamt of going back to school.

Q: Provide details on your current job.

A: I'm a contract employee at Genesys. As a senior accountant, I work on the general ledger team; we handle accruals, prepaids, bank reconciliations, and payroll for the U.S. and Canada. I came on board at the beginning of a “month-end close” so it was challenging to learn and meet deadlines at the same time. But I love being an accountant and I love to learn, so there was no hesitation in taking this contract role. I use all the skills and past experiences to help me maneuver and I earned some high praise from my manager.

Q: What do you like to do in your free time?

A: Recently I've picked up the violin again. I started playing when I was 9 years old and stayed with it through college. I stopped playing the day my grandmother passed away back in 1996. I can't explain why. I guess she was my biggest supporter, and it broke my heart when she died. But something woke up in me last fall and I decided to begin playing again. I am far from where I used to be, but the music speaks to my heart and I hope to use my gift at church. I also love to read and kayak. I used to love running, but due to years pounding the pavement, I had to hang up my running shoes and now, for exercise, I walk and ride my bike.

Q: How long had it been since you last took classes? What was it like to be back in the classroom that first semester at Wesleyan?

A: I completed my undergraduate studies 29 years after I graduated from high school. Coming back to college later in life, I appreciated my education more. I had a purpose and a desire to learn. I earned a BS in accounting with a 3.84 GPA and became a member of Sigma Beta Delta.

Q: What was your favorite class in the undergraduate program?

A: Hands down it was any class taught by Dr. Wendy Achilles. I took classes from her both in my undergrad and MBA program. Students always joke that accounting classes are so textbook-based and don't prepare a student for real-world scenarios. Well, those students did not have Dr. Achilles. She was by far my favorite professor. She made sure everything we learned could be used outside the textbook. I've always loved numbers and accounting, but she helped me appreciate the value I could bring to a company with my skills. She also taught me never to back down and never let my fear of the unknown ever stop me from pursuing a job that interested me.

Another influential faculty member was Dr. Seodial Deena. During my senior year (undergrad), I was met with an unfortunate layoff from Caterpillar. I ended up having to move to find adequate work, which forced me into taking two of my writing classes as independent studies. I needed a professor willing to work with me, and Dr. Deena was my guardian angel. He not only reached out to me during a mission trip he made to India; he helped me get over my fear of writing. Without his kindness and understanding, I would have been forced to postpone my accounting degree. He was the answer to a prayer.



Amy Elizabeth Ashmus

Q: Talk about other challenges you faced in balancing work, family life and school.

A: I attended a college right out of high school, but due to financial issues, I had to leave. Once my kids were older, I decided to start back and no matter where we were stationed, I would take classes at a local community college. In 2015, life sent me down a path I didn't see coming. I knew I needed to finish my degree if I was going to have job opportunities that would allow me to take care of myself. I did research and came across NCWC. I loved that it was a Christian school and that it offered seated and online opportunities for adult students. I applied there and started my journey that year.

It was hard. I would wake up at 3 a.m. every day to do schoolwork. I was working full-time and my work weeks could be 40-60 hours. I followed that routine for two years. I had to move several times—even out of state—to find career opportunities that allowed me to pay the bills. But NCWC worked with me and if it wasn't for the flexibility and the dedication of my professors, I wouldn't have graduated in 2017. I look back over my educational journey. It wasn't conventional, but I never quit. When I walked across that stage back in December 2017, it was one of the greatest moments of my life. I tear up now thinking about it. My degree has opened doors and allowed me to provide for myself. It's also shown others that, regardless of your age and circumstances, dreams can always be accomplished with gumption, discipline, and faith.

Q: What's one change you would make to the college's new MBA program?

A: As MBA students, over the last year, we've taken classes that helped us learn about management styles, accounting strategies for corporations, and even the ways to market a new business idea. In

our last semester, we examined ways to be creative in the workplace. Our main assignment was to study a corporation, pull its financials and write a research paper. Students looked at well-known companies like Apple and Johnson & Johnson.

But I think I would handle the last project a little differently. Hear me out. It would have been great, I think, if we could have taken all the information we have been taught and applied it to “real life” companies in our communities. Each student could adopt a small business struggling with Covid-19 or other financial problems and helped them with a company makeover. Think of it as a Gordon Ramsey Kitchen Nightmare spinoff, but on a corporate level. We could have adopted a company at the beginning of our MBA journey and in each class used our new skills and applied them to our adopted company. We would have gotten a chance to see everything from a business owner's perspective, and I can tell you, that type of MBA program would have not only made me a better student but also would have allowed me to give back to my community.

Q: How will the Wesleyan degrees affect your career trajectory?

A: I'm hoping my MBA will open the doors to a full-time position with my current employer. I moved back home to North Carolina due to a Covid-19 job loss. Everyone

thought I was crazy to make the move, but I knew that God had amazing plans for me, and I wanted to be back home close to my family and friends. Even though Genesys is located out of state, it's allowing me to work remotely. I'm saying prayers that this contract role will eventually become permanent.

Q: What have you learned about yourself in the last six years?

A: That I can do anything if I set my mind to it. I don't back down from challenges. But I have also learned to stop and

breathe. I've always been an over-achiever, setting the bar ridiculously high. The last six years showed me that it doesn't matter how many budget spreadsheets I had, life will happen and sometimes taking that “Path less traveled” can lead to amazing opportunities. I've been thinking about earning my CPA certification. At my age, many people are ready to slow down, but not me. I love to learn and as long as I have the ability and the energy to do so, I'll continue reaching for the stars.”



Senior Derrick Carter and the Bishops claimed the East Division title by sweeping a double-header against William Peace May 2 at home. The 17th-ranked Bishops got an at-large bid to play in an NCAA DIII regional tournament in Marietta, Ohio.

SI photo

‘It's Been a Busy Year,’ But Brys-Wilson, NC Wesleyan Made It through 2020-21

NC Wesleyan completed its spring semester. While students continued to contract the Covid-19 virus and many were quarantined during the term, classes were held, both fall and spring sports teams played (in some cases abbreviated) seasons, and the academic year culminated with graduation ceremonies May 1 at the Rocky Mount Event Center.

The college reported 102 cases of Covid among students (95) and staff (7) between January 21, the first day of classes, and the last day of the semester. As of April 26, there was one active case involving a student.

Health Services Director Jessica Brys-Wilson guided the college through the pandemic. A licensed physician's assistant, Bry-Wilson co-chaired (with Wayne Sears) the college's Viral Illness Response Team (VIRT). For her efforts, she was awarded the inaugural Charles Taylor Leadership Award.

Provost Molly Wyatt lauded Brys-Wilson for her steady guidance during the past 15 months.

“Jessica has put in 24/7 service to the college

to keep our campus community members safe,” Dr. Wyatt said in a statement. “She had a very difficult task in managing the nuances of symptom monitoring and contact tracing, and following up on sick or exposed students, faculty, and staff. The campus was able to function well and stay open due largely to her leadership and her pragmatic guidance to individuals facing the real everyday challenges of Covid-19.”

Brys-Wilson was interviewed by The Decree in early May.

Q: Will the college require that all students get a Covid vaccination before returning? It should be noted that Wesleyan already requires shots for measles, etc.?

A: This decision has not formally been made. Other than the flu shot this semester, we only require the shots that are required by state law. We don't otherwise have any shots required solely by the college.

Q: Has the college been monitoring APS students for Covid during the past year?

A: Yes, and when we're aware of them, we've included them in the numbers I've been reporting. It's a bit more complicated because the APS students don't live on campus and not all of them report their condition to me. But I think that I was made aware of most cases. Faculty was really good about referring students to me if they knew of an APS student in quarantine, which was helpful.

Q: Looking back over the past academic year, is it possible to trace the origins of Covid outbreaks on campus? What were the trends that you saw when there were outbreaks?

A: Yes. Very much so. We had zero cases transmitted during classes, which I think is fantastic! Most often cases were traced back to individuals eating meals together or being a household contact/roommate to someone who was infected. We did have a few instances of friend groups having get-togethers that ended up spreading it to multiple people, but our spread was largely not related to students breaking the rules.

Q: When it comes to Covid, what were some initial concerns of health professionals—or all Americans, for that matter—that turned out not to be true?

A: So much guidance has changed over the course of the last 15 months. This was a brand-new virus so, as more data became available, the

Students Coped with Mental Health Issues in Quarantine during Pandemic

Mental health was a concern on the Wesleyan campus during the past 15 months, as many students dealt with anxiety, relationship issues and family illnesses, while quarantined students struggled with “low mood” and diminished motivation.

The Decree interviewed Quenetta Johnson, Director of Counseling Services, in early May just before she left the college to pursue other professional opportunities.

Q: Did you find more students seeking your counseling services during the past 15 months?

A: Before the pandemic I was constantly booked and that didn't change during the pandemic. I did see new students and a high percentage talked about changes that they experienced during the pandemic. But I wouldn't say that was the bulk of my sessions.

Q: What was the range of pandemic-related concerns that students were bringing to you?

A: Low mood, anxiety, and interpersonal struggles were common issues. I had virtual sessions with students in isolation/quarantine and they went through an array of moods—mostly low moods—due to their confinement to one room. Many students expressed anxiety about going into larger settings such as classrooms and stores. As for the interpersonal problems, there were roommate/housemate issues and students dealing with the end of relationships.

Q: Based on your interactions, what has life been like for students who were already experiencing feelings of anxiety and depression even before the pandemic?

A: They seemed to be doing better than I had expected. Students were able to utilize the coping skills that they've been developing over time.

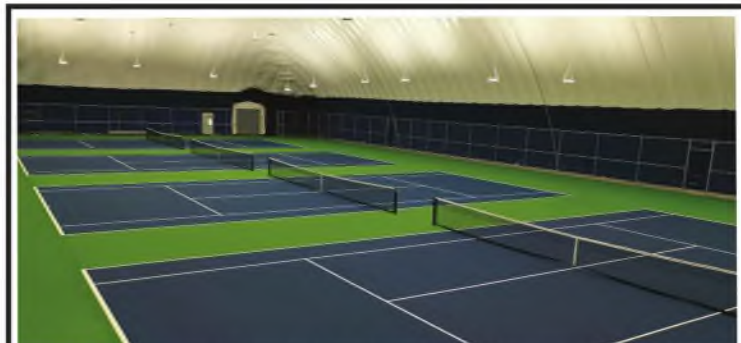
Q: Health Services Director Jessica Brys-Wilson has pointed out that while some quarantined students were able to stay current

with their schoolwork, others floundered, fell behind. Does this align with your observations?

A: I have to agree. Some students had one of their best years, while others struggled. Some students found it hard to complete their work due to low mood or depression, and some were suffering from grief after losing a loved one.

Q: As more and more Americans get vaccinated and we return to “normal life,” what advice would you offer to students (and staff and faculty) who feel anxious about reengaging more with others?

A: Be aware of what triggers your anxiety. Ask yourself, what is the worst-case scenario regarding your reengagement? After you've identified the worst possible outcome, then you ask yourself, what is the likelihood of that happening? If it does happen, what can you do to handle the concern? Other helpful coping techniques include deep breathing and positive self-talk. I suggest you slowly increase the number of people that you engage until you feel comfortable.



Wesleyan's new indoor sports and education facility is nearing completion.

NC Wesleyan PR photo

guidance has changed repeatedly. Masks are an example. At first it was thought that cloth face masks wouldn't help prevent Covid. We now see that they have been hugely beneficial in preventing the spread. This is how science is supposed to work—we give our best guess as to what might happen and then adjust that as data shows us otherwise. It's been interesting to watch it play out in real time.

Q: We have the spring semester data from the web site. By the end of the academic year, were there any deaths or Covid-related hospitalizations among Wesleyan students and staff/faculty?

A: No, not to my knowledge.

Q: What specific steps will the college take over the summer to prepare for the return of students in fall?

A: VIRT will continue to meet and to stay in nearly constant contact. At this moment, we're monitoring vaccine and infection trends at the local, state, national, and international levels so we can make informed decisions before fall semester. With guidance changing so frequently, we're hesitant to make decisions too early. We're also following local and state guidance changes and making adjustments to our on-campus policies as appropriate. Hopefully, we'll be able to continue to loosen restrictions as the summer progresses.

Q: Think back to the busiest period of the past year. What was a typical day like for you? You say your life is “boring,” but we think it might impress readers to see your level of dedication.

A: On a typical day, I would wake up around 4:30 and spend about two hours responding to emails/team messages and managing the various lists of who was currently infected/in quarantine. I would get myself and my three kids ready for school and then typically spend another hour responding to messages before heading to work. Most days, I would get early-morning calls from diligent college employees with questions before they came to work. My workdays were spent seeing sick patients, performing Covid tests, and doing physicals. I would run the Campus Clear report daily and then contact any students who needed evaluation to give them appointments, move them into quarantine, notify their faculty, report positive results to the state, and contact trace. Between patients and during lunch, I would return messages from students, parents, faculty, and staff.

After work, I would help my own kids with their homework, feed them dinner, and pack their lunches while again answering emails, texts, and phone calls, some of them in the middle of the night. In my free time, I would check for any new data, guidance changes, or state restriction changes. If a student tested positive in the evening, I would need to get them moved into quarantine and complete contact tracing and then follow up with any subsequent contacts. Depending on the number of contacts, this could sometimes take several hours. I would usually go to bed as soon as I had everyone safely where they needed to be and all questions/concerns addressed. It has been a busy year, but we made it through!