

THE DECREE

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

May 27, 2022

NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Dr. Wyatt Completes Last Year as Provost, College Names Successor

Dr. Molly Wyatt has decided to step down from her current post as interim provost and return to her previous role in the administration.

President Evan Duff praised Dr. Wyatt's efforts during the past three years. “She's assumed many leadership roles when the university needed her most,” he said. “And she's done so without hesitation.”

The president singled out her work during the 2019-2020 academic year, when she served in two critical roles, interim dean of students and academic dean. “The trustees and I are grateful for her steady leadership during this transitional time while overcoming the challenges of a global pandemic,” he said.

Wesleyan has appointed Joseph Lane as its new provost. He will take office in June, and Dr. Wyatt will resume her post as associate provost.

Dr. Lane, 54, comes to Wesleyan from Bethany College (W.Va.), where he served as provost and dean of the faculty. A political scientist by training, he earned

his undergraduate degree from Hampton-Sydney College (Va.) and his Ph.D. from Boston College.

“Wesleyan is an exciting institution on the rise,” Dr. Lane said in an email. “It is uniquely well-positioned to do very interesting work for students from a variety of backgrounds with many different reasons for entering higher education. I am thrilled to be in a position to advance curricular innovation and community engagement for the university.”

Dr. Lane noted that his parents and his brother and his family live in Raleigh, while his in-laws reside in Wilson. “So, this move brings us close to family,” he said.

The new provost is married to Dr. Julie Wilson, who served as professor and chair of sociology at Emory & Henry College, where both she and her husband once taught. More recently she was Bethany's Director of Corporate, Foundation and Academic Grants. The couple have two daughters—Grace, 16, and

Miriah, 14. The family intends to live in northeast Raleigh, Dr. Lane said.

Dr. Wyatt, 45, arrived at Wesleyan in 2006 as an assistant professor of sociology. In 2012, she was named associate provost, a post she held until 2019.

The Decree interviewed Dr. Wyatt in May for the following profile:

Q. Describe the place where you were born and grew up?

A. I was born in Jamestown, New York, a small, rural town in the southwestern corner of the state. When I was eight, we relocated to Albany, the state capital, after my mom took a job with the state tax and assessment office.

Q. Tell us about your family.

A. I'm the youngest of my four siblings. I have two older brothers and an older sister. Both my parents came from working class backgrounds—my mother's heritage markedly British and my father's German and Swedish. My parents met at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. My father was a political science major who eventually went to law school at Syracuse (around the same time as Joe Biden did!), and my mother earned a degree in European history. In the 1980s, after my parents' divorce, my mom went back to school to get a computer science degree, which eventually qualified her for the job in Albany. I'm the third female in my family to earn a Ph.D. My aunt Judith Weise earned a Ph.D. in English from SUNY Binghamton and taught at Potsdam College for 30-plus years. My sister, Beth Moeller, earned a Ph.D. in rhetoric and technical communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and has owned a web development business for 25 years. My brothers, both math majors at SUNY Potsdam, taught me everything I ever needed to know in high school to pass New York state exams in math. They're now a network engineer and a jazz guitarist.

Q. Describe a lasting memory from childhood.

A. My first concert was seeing Melissa Manchester at the Chautauqua Institution.

Q. What's the most adversity you've faced in your life?

A. When I was 27, I was diagnosed with Lyme Disease. The disease and its treatment caused some early-onset health challenges one might not expect in their 30s, such as chronic fatigue and autoimmune conditions.

Q. What kind of student were you in college, at Syracuse, and what were your primary extra-curricular activities/interests?

A. I was not the best student in college. I knew I was capable, but I struggled balancing the freedom from being away from home with the responsibilities and obligations of my academic pursuits. I loved being at Syracuse, especially in the marching band where I played the baritone horn for four years. I also joined the sorority Tau Beta Sigma. I did do well in my upper-level major classes and upon that success, I was eager to continue toward graduate school.

Q. As an undergrad, you majored in public relations. What were you planning to do with your degree as you prepared to graduate?

A. I initially wanted to work in sports public relations. Between my junior and senior year, I interned for Ed Lewi Associates. This firm held accounts with the New York Racing Association



Dr. Molly Wyatt Photo Tammy Harrell

(horses) and the U.S. Olympic Fencing Team. I also had internships in radio promotions and special events planning. I intended to get a job in my field somewhere in upstate New York.

Q. Then you worked in business for a year, at NEC and Barnes & Noble. What prompted you to apply to graduate school in sociology?

A. In March of 1999, my father died unexpectedly. At 22, I was reeling from his death and sought to understand his life and how it affected our family. He'd been a recovering alcoholic for 18 years, and his illness and recovery shaped quite a bit of our lives. Overcoming addiction is something that's so unfathomably difficult and so profoundly impactful. It almost led me to go to graduate school in counseling for substance abuse. Instead, I chose a related field—family studies/human development. I went to the University of North Texas to study that and also to be closer to my oldest brother, who lived there in Denton. While in my master's program, I became interested in demography and generational characteristics/influences. This led me across town to Texas Woman's University where I applied to the Ph.D. program in sociology.

Q. In grad school what was your specialty area as far as research?

A. My Ph.D. program introduced me to feminist literature and I actually spent the first couple years writing and researching men and masculinity as a sociology subfield. Post 9/11, and the Iraq War, I became very interested in cultural characteristics of populations and what caused conflict among them. For my dissertation, I focused on the confluence of religiosity, biblical literalism, and political affiliation and how it impacted the re-elections of Republican incumbent presidents in 1984 and 2004.

Q. You joined the Wesleyan faculty in 2006 as an assistant professor of sociology. What attracted you to the college in the first place?

A. I wanted to be at a teaching-focused institution in the Southeast. I applied for 46 positions the year I landed at NCWU.

Q. What have you enjoyed most about teaching at Wesleyan?

A. Building lasting relationships with students.

Q. What prompted you to move into administration, first as associate provost in 2012 and then as interim vice president of academic affairs (2019-2020) and interim provost (2020-2022)?

A. I felt like I could help the college in broader ways. I never sought to be an executive-level officer of the college, but I did want to lead collaborative efforts to advance areas like advising, academic programs,

and accreditation. I opted to serve the institution in the last three years because I wanted to help provide continuity in academic affairs, as Dr. Duff transitioned to the president's role.

Q. Describe a typical day for you as provost.

A. There is no such thing as a typical day! Much of what I do is try to solve problems—for faculty and students.

Q. Estimate the number of emails you receive and send in a typical day.

A. It depends on the time of year. Probably hundreds per week!

Q. When a faculty member moves from full-time teaching to administration, she invariably must oversee and manage former colleagues, some of whom are older, with longer tenures. How difficult has it been for you to navigate this? Have the power dynamics ever become uncomfortable for you?

A. I see myself as a facilitator and not a manager. Faculty, as a corporate body, should be self-governing and there are many “management-like” mechanisms in place. Very rarely do issues escalate to me needing to facilitate or interfere in faculty or student issues. I have relied heavily on school chairs to work with faculty and on student issues as a first line of response. They've all been fantastic at this. I've seen us operating as a team.

Q. What's the hardest type of decision you've needed to make in the past three years?

A. At times, students would come to me with impassioned appeals to overturn suspensions or personal conduct decisions. It's always hard to sit with an emotional student while upholding difficult, but important sanctions.

Q. What have you learned about yourself in the past three years?

A. Having peace is important.

Q. Why are you leaving your post and returning to the associate provost position?

A. The last three years have been more stressful than I think anyone could have predicted, not just for me, but for everyone. It's most important to me that I spend time doing what I enjoy and contribute to the institution in ways that will help. It was never my goal to be the provost, but I stepped into a leadership role during a transition time.

Q. You husband, Ken, is a professor at ECU. What's the best part of having a spouse who works in academia? What's the worst part?

A. The best part is we can relate to each other's industry—academia is not a normal industry and it helps to have a spouse that knows that. The worst part is when I play devil's advocate

See WYATT pg 3

Wesleyan Profile: Graduating Senior AJ Upchurch

By Caitlin Leggett
Decree Staff Writer

With her psychedelic “You Matter” hoodie pulled over her short haircut, AJ strolled into the library with a guilty look on her face. Knowing she was 11 minutes late, she admitted she had forgotten about our little interview session, but her cheesy grin accentuating her shining septum nose piercing was apology enough. Completing the last year here at Wesleyan, I know the struggle of “senioritis” and that the motivation to do anything other than graduate is slim to none. At first glance, one may mistake Aydriyan (AJ) Upchurch for a boy with her androgynous style of dress and faded haircut. Upon introductions, the mistake may be corrected by the sound of her voice but after a conversation or two, you may just label her a question mark. The truth is, AJ is all these things.

AJ's pronouns are all of them. “I was 18 when I figured out that I was nonbinary and pansexual,” they said. “Nonbinary meaning I'm a human, not taking on any gender. Even the pronouns they and them don't really resonate with me. I'm just my name. As far as sexuality, I'm pansexual which means I'm in love with a person's soul. If y'all's souls resonate with the same energy then you're Gucci,” they said.

AJ has known they were different for as long as they can remember. Growing up in a single-parent household with a supportive mom was helpful. However, their dad wasn't as present and easygoing as their mom. “He's a gig-based musician,” they said. “He was living his dream and truth, but he wasn't providing for his family. We had lots of fights and screaming matches at the age of only 10.” AJ describes him as narcissistic in character which drove a wedge in their relationship at an early age.

With the strain of that relationship wearing on them, AJ was able to appreciate the relationships they did have even more. “My mom and I didn't have



AJ Upchurch Photo courtesy C. Leggett

much, so it was always about the quality time with us,” they said. “We even had junk-food Fridays.” Growing up in a predominantly Black and brown neighborhood, where AJ and their mom lacked monetary wealth, they made up for it by being rich in love. For AJ and their mom, this was a way to bond and ensure they spent time together eating chips, candy and all the things one shouldn't have as a meal... for dinner.

As AJ's mom became more successful in her career as a microbiologist working in labs to test medicine, plasma and more, quality time became more and more scarce. “By 11, my mom and I stopped having Thanksgiving together because of her work... and Christmases were on and off,” they said. “I remember the first time that, after a while, we did spend a holiday together. I cried because of how much I missed her.” Even with this, their mom remained a pillar of importance in their life.

Even still, they were not alone. AJs met their two half siblings from their dad at around the age of 10 so strong bonds were formed there. They recalled aunts and uncles whose policy was “Don't ask, don't tell,” but this didn't stop AJ and their mother from being their most pure selves. “My mom was always a live-laugh-love type of person,” AJ said. “She wanted me to have fun and go for the things I

See UPCHURCH pg 2



Juan Vallejo and the men's tennis team headed into the NAAs after winning their 13th consecutive conference title. See sports pages 4-6 SI photo