

# THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

## Dr. Brewer Becomes First Faculty Member of Color to Earn Jefferson-Pilot Award

Dr. Patricia Brewer will deliver the Jefferson-Pilot lecture next spring, the first Wesleyan faculty member of color to do so.

The award, considered Wesleyan's highest honor for faculty members, is given in recognition of scholarship, teaching, and community service.

Now in her 19th year at NC Wesleyan, Dr. Brewer is an associate professor of education and coordinator of the special education program. She earned a B.S. in elementary education and an M.A. in special education, both from NC Central University; an M.Ed. (educational leadership) at East Carolina University; and a Ph.D. (special education administration) from Southern Illinois University.

Prior to joining the Wesleyan faculty in 2004, the Goldsboro native had served as a school principal and filled a number of teaching and administrative positions in public schools and rehabilitation centers in North Carolina and Georgia. From 1995-98, she took time off from work and graduate studies to be home with her son, now 27.

At Wesleyan Dr. Brewer has taught a range of special education and general teacher education courses. In particular she enjoys teaching Introduction to Special Education; Research-Based Learning Strategies for Math, Reading, and Writing; and Assessment and Program Development in Special Education. A new special topics course, “Unconscious Bias: The Man in the Mirror,” has

become a favorite as well.

The current associate chair of Faculty Council, Dr. Brewer serves as a member of the President's Advisory Council for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, leading the subgroup that oversees student support and advocacy. Over the years, she has remained active in a number of state and national education organizations.

President Evan Duff lauded Dr. Brewer, citing not just her teaching, but her work with an after-school program that she created for area special education students. “I've always found Dr. Brewer to be a strong advocate for exceptional learners,” he said. “She's worked tirelessly in the classroom and the community to make a difference in the lives of others.”

Lois Hart, associate professor of education, echoed the president's praise. Besides noting her work as an instructor and mentor, she also cited the afterschool program. She marvels at her colleague's commitment to special education. “I've been most impressed by her advocacy for the rights of special education students,” Dr. Hart said.

She added that Dr. Brewer often accompanies parents to meetings at their children's schools, serving as an advocate in helping to fashion a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). “She



Jefferson-Pilot recipient Patricia Brewer Photo courtesy of P. Brewer

works hard to ensure that parents of special education children know their rights in terms of accessing schools,” Dr. Hart said.

The Decree interviewed Dr. Brewer in early October for the following profile:

**Q.** Describe your hometown.

**A.** I was born in Goldsboro, located in the North Carolina's Coastal Plain. It's the proud home of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.

**Q.** Tell us about your family.

**A.** I'm the youngest of seven siblings and the only one birthed in a hospital. I have twin brothers and four sisters, two of whom are deceased, along with my mom and dad. A legacy of educational excellence was shaped and molded into me by my mom, who only received a seventh-grade edu-

cation. She was my first teacher, who inspired me with her perseverance, faith, and humble beginnings. Despite having no formal education, she was the pillar of the community and made life sustainable for her children with her entrepreneurial spirit. My mom started a “pork skin business.” She was well known in Goldsboro, surrounding counties, and on the Eastern borders of Maryland, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, New York, and the Persian Gulf for her homemade pork skins and cracklings. She was also a pastor.

I was the first in my family to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees. Three of my siblings matriculated to college and earned undergraduate and graduate degrees later in their careers.

**Q.** Tell us about your son.

**A.** I'm the proud mother of Zachary. He's a 2014 graduate of the United States Military Academy Preparatory School at West Point. His career aspirations evolved, and he enrolled at NC Central University in Durham and the ROTC program at Duke University. He graduated from NC Central in 2018 with a degree in history and then moved right into law school at Barry University in Florida. He's now an associate attorney at the Public Defender's Office in the 13th Judicial Circuit, Tampa.

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

**A.** When I was a college junior, I began to display hyperactive and impulsive behaviors. A formative event occurred during my swimming class. I hadn't advanced to the level of diving, but I went deep into the pool and jumped. The swimming teacher rescued me. Later, I was diagnosed with ADHD and underwent a subtotal thyroidectomy.

**Q.** What kind of student were you at NC Central, and what were your primary interests and extracurricular activities?

**A.** I nearly flunked out of college, as I would stay in the student center and play cards until its closing. I didn't attend classes regularly. I was terrified. I knew this would break my mom's heart, as I was her first child to attend college. I had to remember why I was in college and commit myself to my studies.

**Q.** How did you become interested in teaching and, in particular, the field of special education?

**A.** As I mentioned, my mom was my first teacher, and I observed her impact on people's lives as a community advocate and a pastor. Her church was small, but she was devoted, and she expanded her services beyond the church walls. Also, after I graduated from high school, there were federal programs that provided summer jobs for children from low-income homes. I worked at Cherry Hospital, a mentally ill institution in Goldsboro, for three summers. My supervisor was the perfect mentor. She was well disciplined and interacted with all the medical and clinical stakeholders across North Carolina's 100 counties that brought residents to the hospital. She was so passionate and valued every resident during the admission process.

**Q.** What prompted you to enroll in the Ph.D. program at SIU back in the mid-80s? And what was your research emphasis?

**A.** I wanted to advance my expertise in special education at the administrative level. My emphasis is reflected in the title of my dissertation: “The Development and Evaluation of a Cooking Skills Training Program for Mentally Retarded Adults: Acquisition, Generalization and Maintenance of Skills from Residential Facility to Potential Community Home Placement.”

With considerable attention on the normalization principle, community-based programs, and functional skills training, professionals were advocating instructional programs for mentally disabled individuals that would promote optimal functioning in the community. My study was designed to develop and evaluate a cooking skills program for four mentally disabled adults identified for community placement. At the time of the study, the adults lived in a residential facility. The study also evaluated the effectiveness of training on the acquisition, generalization, and maintenance of boiling, baking, and broiling cooking skills across the community-based settings. A multiple baseline design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the cooking skills training program.

**Q.** After an extensive career in public school teaching and administration, you joined the faculty at Wesleyan in 2004. What attracted you to the school?

**A.** The greatest attraction was the opportunity to develop the special education major within the teacher education program. That was completed in 2006, when it received authorization from the state Department of Public Instruction. It earned CAEP national accreditation in 2016 and national reaccreditation by AAQEP last June. The special education major requires the students to take the North Carolina Licensure PRAXIS Exam: Special Education Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate. Our special ed program graduates have enjoyed 100 percent licensure passing rate since 2009.

**Q.** What do you like most about teaching at Wesleyan?

**A.** I enjoy building student relationships and creating excitement in the classroom. My goal is to make learning a very positive experience with the active engagement of students and a focus on critical thinking. The following quote best describes my teaching philosophy: “The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery” (Horace Mann).

**Q.** Many readers may have a false or incomplete idea of what special education is. What's the definition you use?

**A.** Special education is a specially designed program to meet the unique needs of exceptional children.

**Q.** Tell us more about your afterschool program, which in 2018 was recognized by the National Education Association and the Student NC Association of Educators.

**A.** I launched the Students Helping Students Afterschool Program Initiative with the Association for the Learning Disabled and Handicapped (ALDH) in February 2015. The initiative was in response to an outcry for additional, intensive services for special needs children in Nash/Rocky Mount schools, grades K-12.

**Q.** See BREWER pg 2

## Women's Teams Travel to Scotland in 4th Overseas Trip

A pro soccer match and tours of ancient castles were among the highlights of a trip taken to Scotland by a group of Wesleyan athletes last May, the fourth such trip since 2010.

The women's soccer and volleyball teams get the opportunity to travel overseas once during their four years at the university. The athletes pay their own way, with some costs defrayed by fundraisers during the school year.

While visiting the country, Bishops compete against local clubs, attend professional matches, and take in the sights. A Wesleyan faculty member accompanies the athletes and guides them through a one-credit course. Past trips, organized by Soccer Head Coach Beverly Biancur and Volleyball Head Coach Vicky Gentile, have taken Wesleyan athletes to Italy, Germany and Spain.

Mary Cat Davis, an MBA student and member of the volleyball team, described the Scotland trip as a unique experience, noting “We

had some girls who had never flown before, and many of us had never left the country. Not only did we play together against an international team, but we also got to learn about another country's culture and make memories that most student-athletes don't get the chance to make.”

Asked to identify their favorite part of the trip, Mariah Berkovich, Mary Alice Butler and Rhea Wilder all said it was the professional soccer match between Celtic FC and Motherwell FC. The Bishops were treated to seats near the front row. “Inside the stadium the atmosphere was unlike anything I've ever experienced,” said Berkovich, a senior midfielder/forward on the soccer team. “We were surrounded by tens of thousands of Celtic fans who chanted and cheered for their team without a moment of rest. When one chant ended, another one began.”

Calling the experience unforgettable, she related that at the beginning of the match, several green smoke bombs were released

by the Celtic fans. “At one point, it was hard to even see the field,” she said. “Fans showed their support for their team in every way possible. Not only did the stadium go wild with each Celtic goal, but it was high energy throughout the 90 minutes. I would be an honorary Celtic fan any day.”

Butler, a middle/right side hitter on the volleyball team, was on her first trip overseas. Like Berkovich, she liked the pro soccer match most of all. The Wesleyan junior noted that she played the sport in her youth. “I've always loved watching soccer,” she said. “And I've always wanted to attend a pro match, so I was looking forward to this event the whole trip.”

She said the rabid Scottish “football” fans made an indelible impression on her. “It's amazing to see a sporting event bring such excitement and rivalry within the community,” she said. “The closest thing that the U.S. has to that feeling would be the Super Bowl.”

She reported that the fans were invested in every aspect of the game. “When we were checking in with our tickets, the opposing team's fans were entering and the atmosphere completely changed,” she said. “The excitement, suspense, and rivalry were very high. It was an amazing experience and I would love to do it again someday.”

Wilder, a defender on the soccer team, characterized the atmosphere at the match as “electric.” She described the stadium as a sea of Celtic green and white, with dots of gold and crimson, Motherwell's colors. She said fans for the visiting team were surrounded by police officers for their safety.

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NCWU's women's soccer and volleyball teams mixed sight-seeing, coursework and athletic competition on a recent trip to Scotland. From left to right: Rhea Wilder, Sophia Sweeney, Mary Cat Davis and Mary Alice Butler. Photo courtesy M.A. Butler