

# THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

## Profile: Dr. Joe Lane--Scholar, Cyclist, Family Man, Phish Fan

Dr. Joe Lane joined the Wesleyan community last summer as the university's new provost.

The Tennessee native, a political scientist by training, succeeded Dr. Molly Wyatt, who returned to her position as associate provost.

Dr. Lane, 54, graduated from Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia with a degree in classics and political science, and he earned a Ph.D. in political science from Boston College, writing a dissertation titled “The Political Life and Virtue,” which he described as an argument about the structure and purpose in Plutarch’s “Parallel Lives.”

He’s the author of many scholarly works, including three co-authored books: “The Deconstitutionalization of America” (with Roger Barrus, John Eastby, David Marion, and Jim Pontuso, 2004), “Engaging Nature: Environmental Theory and the Political Theory Canon” (with Peter Cannávo, 2014), and “A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson” (with Shannon Mariotti, 2016).

After graduate school he taught for many years at Emory & Henry College (Virginia). Prior to coming to Wesleyan he served as provost at Bethany College (West Virginia).

He was interviewed earlier in the semester for the following profile:

### Early Life

**Q:** Describe the neighborhood where you were raised.

**A:** grew up in eastern Tennessee near the border with North Carolina. Nearby cities included Kingsport and Johnson City. From age 12 till my high school graduation, we were in a subdivision, but out the back door was forest and farmland. I spent a great deal of time exploring the woods with friends. At some point my mother got a coach’s whistle that she would blow when she wanted us to come home. As I remember it, the rule was that we had 10 minutes to get home once the whistle was blown. I remember hearing it faintly sometimes and having to run to make it on time.

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

**A:** My father was a pulp and paper engineer who rose to head of maintenance and production for a paper mill in Kingsport. After I was at college, he moved to a plant in Wisconsin and retired there. My mother taught elementary school for 30 years in Georgia, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. My younger sister, Lee, serves as program director for a Big Brothers Big Sisters program in West Virginia and Kentucky, and my younger brother, John, is a creative marketing executive at Red Hat in Raleigh.

I taught at Lee’s alma mater, Emory & Henry College, for 17 years. When I first got there, many people noted “so you’re Lee’s brother?” But I think at some point she got tired of coming to her “homecoming” only to have people ask, “so you’re Joe’s sister?”

**Q:** Describe a favorite place from your youth.

**A:** We traveled many places in my childhood. When I was 15, we made a trip across the country to the national parks of the Southwest and West; that made a strong impression on me. A family ritual was spending at least one week each summer at Holston Camp in the North Carolina mountains between Banner Elk and Newland. My siblings and I were summer camp regulars from age 8 until we were old enough to work at the camp. We all were on the staff there at least four summers. Our children have gone to camp there as well, but the next generation was less



Dr. Joe Lane

impressed with two weeks of living in the backcountry without showers or dry clothes. So much for tradition!

**Q:** What’s one lasting memory of childhood?

**A:** When we visited the national parks out West, it really shifted my perspective in many ways. For years I had been active in rock climbing, backpacking, and canoeing in Western North Carolina and the areas around the Blue Ridge and Smokies. The West transformed my thinking. Since that trip, I’ve traveled out West when possible to scale higher mountains and reach wilder spaces than we have in the East.

**Q:** What did you enjoy doing through your high school years?

**A:** I was active in soccer and played brass instruments in band and orchestra. I also hiked and skied a lot.

### College Years

**Q:** Describe Hampden-Sydney. What kind of student were you in college?

**A:** Hampden-Sydney is a small, private liberal arts college for men. I didn’t choose it because it was all-male, but I liked its classical focus, small classes, and emphasis on citizenship and civic engagement. Hampden-Sydney offered me its highest scholarship and I thought it was too good a deal to pass up. I majored in classical languages and added political science as a second major in my junior year as I prepared for graduate school. I had expected to attend law school or go into writing/journalism. Then I resolved to apply to Ph.D. programs and when I was accepted into several, an academic career came into focus.

I think the best way to describe me as a student was “always busy.” That was positive insofar as I pushed myself to take challenging classes and make good grades. But I tended to over-commit myself and always delayed assignments till the last minute. I was active in a fraternity, the school newspaper, and task forces on many projects, and I led tours for the admissions office. It was wonderful to be at a small institution where I got such wide experiences. But sometimes I got into trouble because of my penchant for committing myself to projects (and my procrastination), though I did complete my work.

**Q:** Talk about a time you struggled in college.

**A:** A low point occurred at the end of the first semester in my sophomore year. I had pledged a fraternity that semester and didn’t keep up with my work the way I should have done. I capped off the semester with a bout of food poisoning that made taking my Greek final a terrible experience. It did not end well, and I made my lowest grade of my college career. I’ll always remember the drive home after that final exam as torture.

I handled it by writing my professors a letter from home (no email!), explaining what I thought I had done wrong as well as what my last week was like in terms of my physical illness. Two instructors gave me more

time over the break to make corrections and improve my standing; two told me to accept the consequences of my actions. Because of my frank acknowledgment that my choices were to blame as much as the illness, I retained the scholarship and showed improvement in the spring semester. Looking back, I learned that if I owned my behavior and demonstrated concrete plans for change, many mistakes were correctable. I try to remind students of this.

**Q:** How did you decide on your major?

**A:** I’ve always been fascinated with the classical world. I was assigned my first-year Latin professor for a first-year advisor; he persuaded me to learn Greek. He then pulled the “If you have three years’ credit of classical languages, you’re well on your way to a major” argument on me. I fell for it. He didn’t mention that the hard parts—upper-level literature courses in the original languages—were still to come.

I added the political science major in my junior year because I liked politics and thought I might go to law school or become a journalist. When I decided to pursue a doctorate, my classics advisor was the one who insisted that it would be easier to find a job in political science, so I applied to poli sci programs.

### Professor & Provost

**Q:** Talk about your teaching career.

**A:** Between my graduate teaching fellowship (1992-1993) and the year my job description tipped more toward administration (2012-2013), I taught about 20 different courses—from introductory politics of the U.S. to the political theory sequence, as well as

upper-level courses on constitutional law, environmental politics, the presidency, and congress. I taught many different interdisciplinary seminars for the Emory & Henry College core curriculum and honors program, including seminars on “The Iliad,” “Genesis,” “International Public Health,” “Water,” “Wilderness,” and “Eden.”

I’m now teaching Politics of the United States (POL 112) at Wesleyan and hope to teach some other classes in the future. I do enjoy my time in the classroom.

**Q:** What prompted you to move from an academic to administrator?

**A:** It just happened. I became a department chair in my first tenured semester because the other members of the department didn’t want to do it. A couple of years later, while serving as chair of the faculty admissions committee, I wrote the memo recommending the creation of what would become the Emory & Henry College Honors Program, and I was assigned to serve as the first director. When that program grew, I was assigned lots of academic management, fund-raising, and student recruitment jobs, and I became more focused on ways to improve academic curricula and advising models as well as on student recruitment and retention.

There are two types of academic administrators—people who love the power, pay, and prestige of administration; and people who recognize that solid and conscientious administration is necessary to make it possible for others to deliver great teaching and transformative student learning experiences. I try to make sure I’m one of the second group of administrators by staying focused on how I can give commit-

ted professors the tools, professional development, and encouragement that they need to be their best professional selves as teachers and advisors.

I loved teaching and advising. Some of my best days were those when I helped students realize their potential. Early in my career I couldn’t have been a successful teacher without the patience of senior administrators who allowed me to experiment and work out the kinks. I relied on them to help me in so many ways. Sometimes I needed a budget for an unproven concept, while other times I just needed an encouraging word to try a project a second time and hope for better results. Now I see myself as paying forward the confidence that my administrators placed in me.

**Q:** What drew you to the job at NCWU?

**A:** There was several reasons. Wesleyan is an interesting institution. It’s younger than my past schools, but it’s always been an innovator. Having started its adult degree program 40 years ago, Wesleyan has long offered different types of education while always exhibiting a commitment to meeting the needs of different constituencies in the community.

Today you need to be innovative to thrive; if you stagnate, you’ll struggle. Wesleyan’s entrepreneurial creativity made it an intriguing next step for me. With its record of accomplishments and energetic faculty, I knew Wesleyan would be a great opportunity.

What’s more, my family and in-laws all live in the Raleigh area. My wife and I have never lived close to our extended family, but now almost everyone lives right here. Julie and I can help take care of aging parents. That was a major draw.

See LANE pg 3

## Ethics Bowl Team Claims Impressive Wins

Wesleyan’s four-member Ethics Bowl Team recorded three wins in a recent competition sponsored by the North Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities.

Coached by Drs. Jason Buel and Shane Thompson, the team is comprised of students Fabio Felli, Noah Larkin, Amanda Modlin, and Elizabeth Perry. The February 10-11 competition, taking place in the state legislative center in Raleigh, saw Wesleyan debate and defeat Barton, Catawba, and Livingstone colleges. The team lost to Johnson C. Smith in a split decision.

“The team was outstanding. I was very proud of their accomplishment,” Dr. Thompson said, noting that while students do earn one credit for participating in Ethics Bowl, they must dedicate many hours of their free time to researching and preparing for the debates.

Modlin, a sophomore criminal justice major, was pleased with the results as well. “I thought we did very well overall, considering it was our first in-person contest as a team.”

Larkin, a religious studies major, admitted that he was a little surprised by the team’s success. Like Modlin, the sophomore liked that it was held face-to-face rather than in a virtual format. “It was a lot of fun,” he said.

Excited about her team’s performance, Perry noted that Wesleyan came close to advancing to the semi-finals. “I wish we had won our fourth round. I think we would have done well in the finals,” said the psychology major, set to graduate in May, adding that she enjoyed making friends at the competition.

Team members began preparations last fall, meeting once a week for an hour and then doing research on their own. In October each school was sent 10-12 cases in areas such as biotechnology and artificial intelligence. “That gave us time to research the cases and discuss the ethical dilemmas associated with them,” explained Dr. Thompson, who stressed that the students were not presented with a specific question—or debate topic—related to each case. “We make our best guess.”



The Ethics Bowl Team (l-r): Noah Larkin, Fabio Felli, Elizabeth Perry and Amanda Modlin.

Photo courtesy of S. Thompson.

When the Wesleyan team arrived at the competition in Raleigh, it was handed a case with a question for each of the four debates. For example, in the debate titled “Artificial Intelligence and Our Changing World,” the Wesleyan team took up the question “What are the ethical issues in regulating AI algorithms?”

Teams got five minutes to discuss the case among themselves. Each team then made an opening statement, asked and answered a question from the opposing team, and gave a concluding statement. Each school took part in four matches; in one of the four, the team debated an issue that was not among the cases it received back in October.

Three judges scored each team’s performance. Among many criteria, judges considered a team’s ability to provide clear answers, support their answers with evidence, and articulate the relevant ethical framework. It was also critical, according to Dr. Thompson, that teams divided the speaking responsibilities evenly among all four team members.

For Modlin, the AI debate was the highlight of the competition. “My team argued that AI should be regulated because eventually a problem will come up,” she said. “We used examples of bias to argue our point, saying that AI is designed to mimic the intelligence of humans and the biases of humans can show up in the algorithms. With government regulation, we can ensure that biases don’t appear, making AI safe and more likely to be used in the future.”

See ETHICS pg 3