

# STUDENT LIFE

## Local Student Finds Home after Tumultuous ECU Term

By Gracie Wade

(Editor's Note: The following story was submitted early in spring semester).

It was the 17th of August 2022. It was a warm, windy morning when I woke up with the exhilarating feeling of finally moving out of my parents' house. At the young age of 18, I had graduated from high school and at the same time earned my associate's degree from Nash Community College.

I had always dreamed of attending East Carolina University, so that's where I was headed. I had long wanted to go to ECU because that's the college attended by many of my family members, including my older brother, Jacob. And ECU has been a common theme throughout my life.

That morning I was hit with the realization of loans, bills, and other life responsibilities that were soon to come my way. Although I had so much fear in the back of my head, I was still excited to start growing up and depending on myself without my parents right there beside me. I remember the green of the trees in my yard and the sight of my dog (a German Shepherd named Sarah) running around with her favorite red Frisbee and sniffing around the many bags and boxes in the driveway.

The time came for us to pack my belongings into our cars and take the hour-long journey to my new school. When we arrived at ECU, I felt so welcomed and I couldn't imagine myself anywhere else. There were hundreds of staff members on hand, helping the new students; they were all super nice. We went to the large brick gymnasium, where I was given my student ID and dorm key. I got a lot of free items as well—an ECU can koozie, pens, bags, etc.

After check-in, we drove to the dorm where I would be living for the next year of my life. I took a moment for myself in the parking lot because, even though I was keen to move away, I knew I would be saying bye to my parents and that that would be the hardest part. I remember that my parents and my younger sister, Anna Beth, helped me organize my entire dorm room and they were purposely going slow because they knew they would be leaving soon. When we finished, we walked out to the parking lot, and my mom

hugged me and cried. My dad didn't show he was upset, but no father is happy about leaving his daughter at college (In the weeks ahead, I could always tell they missed me when I would come to visit on the weekends).

There are three dorm neighborhoods at ECU: West End, Central, and College Hill. West end is typically for honors college students, Central is for gender specific-dorms, and College Hill is for the kids who like to party. This is because the tailgate lot for football games is located in the College Hill neighborhood, with the stadium right behind it. Most students choose this place because it's convenient for game days and parties. Ballard, my dorm, is the newest building in College Hill. The older dorms have smaller rooms, with ugly pipes all over the ceilings and individual AC units in the windows. In Ballard it felt like a room at home; there were high ceilings and plenty of space. My walls were painted an olive-green and the air conditioning was modern and central.

Fast forward to the first day of classes. Right away I recognized that I was in a much different learning environment. I remember walking into my chemistry class for the first time and seeing 250 college students in a lecture hall set up with retractable chairs. I knew it would be a big challenge for me because I was so used to sitting in classrooms with fewer than 20 people. I was also used to enjoying one-on-one relationships with my teachers (at Faith Christian School) and professors (Nash Early College). This intimidated me at first, and throughout the semester it made me more aware of my learning style.

Despite the challenges, I convinced myself that I could succeed. Then there came a point that I needed extra study time for my biology class due to an upcoming exam in genetics. There were about 150 in my class and only one tutoring session available. A friend and I helped each other with studying, but I still struggled with the material and decided to attend the tutoring session, which was held in the purple-walled Pirate Academic Success Center. When I arrived that day, I found I was one of 75 students looking for help. The professor, a short, thin woman in her 40s, tried to do her best, but there were so many students, and many were unable to get assistance during the two-hour session. The professor was overwhelmed; it was a disaster. Needless to say, many students did not do well on the test.

The situation was even worse in my chemistry class. Once again struggling with the material, I went to my professor's office hours to get extra help and ask some questions. The professor was a man in his 30s with a dark stubble beard and big brown eyes. As I walked into his office, I hoped he would care enough to help me. After realizing he didn't recognize my face (out of class of 250), I felt overlooked, but I wasn't too upset about it. I just wanted him to be understanding. I asked him for help with the homework, and his response was, "We learned this in class and the notes are posted on Canvas; you should know how to do it on your own." Then he asked me to leave.

About three months later, I felt doubtful about passing my classes and I had a lot of personal issues going on back at home that affected me as well. My boyfriend, Brian, and I struggled a bit with the long-distance relationship at first (We soon agreed to trade weekends, with me coming home and him coming to Greenville). My grandad was in and out of the hospital for a few months and



First-year student Gracie Wade at her graduation last year from Nash Early College.

G. Wade photo.

that took a toll. My parents didn't agree with some of my decisions, and that was the hardest part. I tend to seek their approval, so when they get upset with me, it will affect me in significant ways. (At one point my mom wouldn't speak a word to me for almost three weeks). Add in some financial strains and my inability to find a job in Greenville (My boyfriend had to pay for my gas

all the time; my friends would be upset because I couldn't go out with them) and that just raised the stress even more.

I also concluded that I didn't fit into the ECU culture. Walking around campus, a friend and I would constantly get weird stares. It happened mostly in the dining hall or in the library. College students tend to be very judgy because many think that they're better than everyone else based on appearance or the clothes they're wearing. This made me really uncomfortable. I admit I usually was a lazy dresser. Most days I'd wear my Hey Dude shoes, Nike sweatpants and a hoodie (It seemed that most days it was very cold and windy, and my dorm was a mile walk from all my classes as well as the library). My philosophy is that I have no one to impress and I would rather be comfortable anyway. Girls were definitely the judgmental ones there. They would wear Lululemon shorts/leggings with tops that made their upper chest hang out. This is a typical Greenville female outfit, and I'm sure you can imagine why they dress that way.

During that semester, perhaps the most serious issue—a recurring one—involved the boys that lived on my floor in the dorm. Nearly every night, there was a group who would bang on our door to get me and my roommate to come out and talk to them. After a couple of months of persistently telling them no, to leave us alone, they crossed the line. I lived on the fourth floor, and one night I took the elevator to my room after coming back from dinner. Two tall, skinny guys

walked up to me and cornered me against the wall next to my door, bombarding me with questions. They repeatedly asked, "Where is your boyfriend?" or "Are you gonna be alone in your room tonight?" Luckily, I had a friend who lived a few doors down; she came in time to get them away from me. The next day I filed a harassment report to the cops and the school took action. My roommate and I had a no-contact order against the boys, and that took care of the situation.

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## WINNER from pg 1

**Q:** Will you continue to be active in volleyball after graduation?

**A:** I do plan to continue to play through adult leagues and tournaments either in Raleigh or Greenville. I've played since I was 9 years old and it's not something I could give up without feeling empty.

**Q:** What's one aspect of Wesleyan that you would change?

**A:** I would try to build a tighter-knit community in the Villas (16 housing units, located across the road from the athletic fields, that Wesleyan leases and then rents to students). The community leaders (similar to RAs in the dorms) occasionally hold events, such as a block party, but considering most staff and residents are athletes it can be difficult to come together. I would add a fire pit to build community; I'd also invite student groups (e.g., Fellowship of Christian Athletes) to hold events in the grassy areas. Asked the same question, I'm sure most students would respond that they would change from a dry campus, but since, realistically, that will never change, we need to find other ways to have fun.

**Q:** Talk about your internship as well as your immediate post-graduate plans.

**A:** I'm finishing the hiring process to be a probation/parole officer for Nash County. I'll be supervising offenders within the community and monitoring their rehabilitative processes as well as ensuring the safety of neighboring citizens. While at Wesleyan, I completed an internship that indirectly led me to this job. I was a behavioral specialist intern for a non-profit, the Mephobsheth Project, in Goldsboro. I helped facilitate group therapy for juveniles on probation or released from youth detention centers. I enjoyed my time with the non-profit and felt I could apply the same skills I learned there to the adult population. With the help of Dr. (Gail) Marsal, I submitted an application to the state and was later offered an interview for the position.

**Q:** What are your long-term goals? What do you want your life to be like at 40?

**A:** I want to grow in my career, whether this means staying a parole officer or moving into a different position. If I choose to change positions, I will likely apply to the FBI and would love to work at the BAU (Behavioral Analysis Unit) in Quantico, Virginia. Having grown up on a farm, I would like to own horses again and would like to help support a feral cat colony in my community.

**Q:** Who will be at graduation with you?

**A:** Both my parents; my boyfriend, Sean; and my sister, Sara. We don't have set plans for celebrating. I just want to enjoy the time with my family before they go back home, and I want to hang out with friends before they leave.

## Superstitions and Rituals Abound On Wesleyan's Baseball Team

By Hunter Hopkins  
Decree Staff Writer

Baseball players have always been known as a superstitious bunch. The North Carolina Wesleyan baseball team is no different, as many Bishops follow a particular ritual because they feel it helps them to be successful on the field.

One such player is Bishops first baseman Jackson Hobbs, who has just been named Player of the Year in the USA South Conference. Last year, his teammates gave him the walk-up song "I Need a Dollar" by Aloe Blacc after they discovered he always kept a dollar bill in a hat that his father gave him in high school. Hobbs considers it his "lucky dollar," as he is from Florida and feels like his father is right there with his dollar bill tucked inside his ball cap.

Similar to Hobbs, pitcher Clayton Gilmore is well known on the team for keeping his "lucky penny" in his left cleat every time he toes the rubber. He started his superstition during his sophomore year of high school, when, like Hobbs, his father gave him a lucky penny to keep on him as he prayed for good luck. Gilmore said he has forgotten the penny twice since starting the tradition, and each time it has resulted in a bad outing for him. To Gilmore, the penny gives him extra fuel to succeed on the mound.

Next on this list is infielder Javier Quintana, who received a golden necklace from his grandmother on his 8th birthday. This necklace has a gold baseball pendant on it, and he has worn it ever

since he received it. The necklace is superstitious to Quintana, as he feels as if his grandmother is always there to support him.

During his senior year of high school, the necklace broke as Quintana dove head-first into second base in attempting to steal. After his necklace broke, Quintana had "the worst slump since his high school career started." After getting his necklace fixed, Quintana exploded in the playoffs, batting .380 throughout his team's playoff run.

Among Wesleyan players, a well-known ritual is pitcher Hunter Hill's pregame breakfast every time he is slated to start. Since Hill arrived at Wesleyan, his routine has always been to hit Red's restaurant for breakfast, always getting the same meal: Biscuits and gravy with two eggs and bacon.

Last year Hill received the USA South Rookie Pitcher of the Year award and he's been well known on his team for going to Red's before games, a fact that earned him the nickname "Big Red." Despite eating the same meal every time, he claims he will never change that superstition since he received the prestigious award last year and the food is always "excellent."

Like Big Red, Damon Hardy also eats the same meal before every game. Unlike Hill, though, Hardy started this superstition when he was just a little boy playing recreation ball at the Harrison Family YMCA in Rocky Mount.

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