

WEST VIRGINIA WESLEYAN COLLEGE
LEGACY MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Rockefeller
FROM: Meagan Shelton
DATE: October 2014
RE: Legacy from West Virginia Wesleyan College

Senator Rockefeller, this memo provides a comprehensive overview of your work at West Virginia Wesleyan College (WVWC). As you well know, you served as President of West Virginia Wesleyan College from 1973 to 1975. Some of your biggest accomplishments at Wesleyan include increasing enrollment, creating an active recruitment campaign, and streamlining operations.

According to Bill Watson, Wesleyan first interviewed Cecil Underwood to be their new president. Underwood turned down the job because Bethany College had offered him to be their president and Bethany was paying more. This spurred Wesleyan to think about another political figure for the position and they sought to find someone who could outdo Underwood.

Bill's wife, Mara, is the daughter of a Methodist minister and had a family friend, Carlton Mccitta, on the Board of Trustees at Wesleyan. Mr. Mccitta called Mara to see if you would be interested in the presidency. Mara had Bill speak with Mr. Mccitta about the job before Bill called you. While you and Sharon were on vacation at Jackson Hole, Bill called you to tell you about this offer. Bill says you and Sharon talked about it and called him

back that evening saying you would be interested, but you and Sharon needed to tour the campus and town before you made any real decisions.

Bill then arranged a tour for you and Sharon on the Saturday after you returned from Wyoming. You and Sharon toured the campus early in the day on Saturday and then returned to Charleston for a party at Don and Sally Richardson's home. Bill says that when you got to the party you pulled him aside and said you and Sharon liked the campus and you would be interested in the position.

On December 28, 1972 the West Virginia Wesleyan College Board of Trustees held a special meeting of the board. You met with the board and answered their questions. The board then went into an executive session and M. Homer Cummings Jr. called for a vote to confirm you as president. As a note, Cummings is the grandfather of your former staffer, Talley Sergent. Lillian, his daughter and Talley's mother, attended Wesleyan at the time of your presidency.

Nine Points for the Future of West Virginia Wesleyan

As president, you created a nine point plan for West Virginia Wesleyan College. This plan was printed in a nice book and widely distributed to make sure students, faculty, and the community knew of your goals for the school and your dedication to seeing them achieved. The nine points are:

1. To refine the basic educational mission, keep it attuned to the times, and maintain the College's ability to deliver solid programs to its students;
2. To increase enrollment and maintain student population at a higher level;
3. To establish financial solvency;
4. To increase gifts and grants;
5. To strengthen the church relationship;
6. To establish a streamlined policy framework for more refined management systems;
7. To expand the student-centered emphasis of college life and services;
8. To complete physical facility needs; and,
9. To pursue aggressively the college Consortium concept.

This was an aggressive plan for such a short time at Wesleyan, but as you will see throughout this memo, you and your administration were able to make great strides at achieving every single point.

College Operations

On March 1, 1973, you made your installation address at Wesleyan Chapel and officially took the position as President of West Virginia Wesleyan College. You immediately made changes to the administration in order to bring about efficiency, starting with hiring Don Moyer and Don Richardson. Don Richardson recalls that when you all arrived at Wesleyan the college was in serious financial trouble, student enrollment had declined, costs had been cut to the bone and any further decline in enrollment would result in big budget deficits.



In your first board of trustees meeting, you and your administration came prepared with graphs, visual aids, and project reports. You professionalized the board of trustees meetings and showed them how involved you were prepared to be to make West Virginia Wesleyan College financially solvent and increase enrollment.

You also sought to provide better accessibility to students, parents, and the community. Previously, college offices were closed during lunch but you changed this to have them remain open in order to better serve students. As you will see throughout this memo, accessibility is a common theme and goes beyond changing office hours.

Don Richardson recalls that he “developed financial models for Wesleyan based on historical data and alternative actions to solve the financial problems, including reducing faculty and staff, increasing tuition and fees, increasing enrollment and some combinations of these. Jay studied and refined them to his liking and presented them to the faculty at a retreat prior to beginning the next academic year. At the end of Jay’s presentation, essentially everyone in the room agreed that the right alternative strategy was to what was necessary to increase the enrollment and everyone offered to help get it done.”

In addition to bringing accessibility and professionalism, you brought technology to West Virginia Wesleyan. As an article from the WVWC newspaper states, “For the first time, the computer was harnessed to deal with the complexities of the admissions process.” Technology was introduced all across campus, but was instrumental in helping to streamline admissions. At the time, the Office of Alumni Affairs had unorganized data but your administration began computerizing its data on alumni activities in order to keep track of alumni, as well as keep them engaged in campus activities. You and your administration significantly helped Wesleyan catch up to modern processes.

Your administration sought to make salaries fair and performance based. You also did away with the traditional tenure system for faculty. A merit pay system was introduced for professional employees and a peer evaluation system was introduced for faculty. According to the 1975 West Virginia Wesleyan College Institutional self study, “This system relies

primarily on the use of peer evaluation teams. In addition, the administrative organization conducts an annual review of each faculty member for purposes of merit pay. The Board of Trustees has adopted a leave and assistance program which is now coordinated with the faculty development review.” These changes are another example of your administration streamlining the management of Wesleyan.

Arthur Holmes, Dean of Chapel at Wesleyan during your presidency, commented on your accessibility and sincere involvement with the faculty. He said, “When Jay came he was very interested in getting to know each member of the faculty and took the time to meet with us. He had an open door policy and always invited the faculty to stop by anytime. He really cared about the faculty, their well-being, and showed genuine interest in what they were doing and how they were.”

Recruitment and Enrollment

Recruiting more students was key to making the college financially solvent, which is why your administration decided to double the budget for recruiting. According to Don Richardson, your administration immediately sought out a college communications consultant who had helped many of the nation's leading colleges recruit more students. Together, the consultant along with you and Don and Sally Richardson, changed the way Wesleyan was promoted.

In what was a controversial move at the time, your team did a complete overhaul of the recruiting materials – starting with removing the Wesleyan Chapel from the front of brochures. You all put beautiful rolling hills and scenery on the front and made recruiting materials less religion oriented and more about the beauty of the area and the opportunities Wesleyan offered. You took it upon yourself to take on speaking engagements and travel to high schools to publicize the school. The first semester of speaking engagements didn't provide an increase in admissions, but you did not let that stop you.

You moved the admissions office closer to your office on campus. You then increased your time on the road and even recruited a Baltimore public relations firm to make a movie about Wesleyan. Don Richardson says, "It had become obvious that the Admissions Office needed new leadership. During a meeting of Jay, Sharon, Sally, and I, Sharon suggested that the person who could get the job done was Sally. Jay and I immediately

agreed and Sally agreed to take on the scary challenge of Director of Admissions.”

Don and Sally started massive direct mailing to SAT and ACT contact lists. They engaged all faculty members and many students in contacting prospective new students by telephone and then again with follow up letters. Sally Richardson recalls that, “Jay loved to jump in and call the kids who requested more information about Wesleyan. The prospective students usually said, ‘Oh sure,’ when he would start the call with ‘This is Jay Rockefeller, President of West Virginia Wesleyan College.’”

Your administration hired additional recruiters to visit high schools in the market area. Don created a new statistically based system to reliably predict the new school year enrollment in advance. In January of 1974, the school fielded more applications than any single month in its history. As the WVWC newspaper reported regarding admissions, “The situation nationwide remained dismal – but at Wesleyan the situation was looking up. The Richardson projection put next year’s enrollment within the budgetary boundaries.”

According to a May 1974 press release, “for the fourth consecutive month, John D. Rockefeller IV, president of Wesleyan College, has announced an increase in applications for admission to Wesleyan. Total applications for the year are up a cumulative 27 percent over last year. In April, Wesleyan received an 80 percent increase in applications over the same month last year. It would appear that despite a downward national enrollment trend in private education, Wesleyan has something to

offer the majority of young people with planning, participation, service, concern, sharing and adjustment.”

Your recruitment activities paid off during your term and in the years directly after. Throughout Wesleyan’s 125 year history, they saw the highest number of students enrolled during your term and the two years directly after, which is believed to be a result of your aggressive recruitment campaign. In fact, from your time as president to now, the only years with more than 1,700 students enrolled were 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1980.

| Year | Number Enrolled |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1973 | 1622 students |
| 1974 | 1678 students |
| 1975 | 1793 students |
| 1976 | 1800 students |
| 1977 | 1769 students |
| 1978 | 1798 students |

Brett Miller, West Virginia Wesleyan College’s archivist and historian, said, “When President Rockefeller took over, he really changed the course of the college. The previous president was in office for about fifteen years and a change was in the air at the time, both nationally and at Wesleyan. Jay came in as president and was young, vivacious, and what Wesleyan needed.” Your recruitment numbers are a testament to this statement. At a time when Wesleyan was worried about financial solvency and student enrollment, you chartered a path to avoid the impending dire financial situation.

In October 1973, your administration instituted a \$110 tuition hike, bringing the total to \$1,595. Although the tuition increase was necessary for your goal of financial solvency, you were concerned then – as you still are today – about student aid and

making college affordable. In 1972, student aid was \$319,500 and your administration increased this in 1974 to \$467,500. While this was a significant increase, your administration sought to do more in terms of aid “to serve Appalachian students and to select individually deserving and able students who cannot cover our rising costs” (1975 institutional self-study). According to a press release from 1974, “Wesleyan still remains one of the lowest cost private colleges in our area. Fortunately, student assistance is also aware of the additional burden on the student, and is doing all it can to be responsive to the need... 70% of our student body receive some kind of help in the way of workshops, grants, loans, etc.”

Your administration also looked beyond the traditional student. The 1975 self-study says, “During the next five years we anticipate ... program developments will significantly broaden our sources of students. First, our institutional planning includes instruction on the master’s level, particularly in education. Second, it includes expansion of our summer program through intensive short sessions and provision for contract studies to permit students to learn off campus through internships, cooperative programs, and competency based instruction. These two plans will enable us to serve the older student who cannot be in residence for long periods of time. We will also be able to serve some students from lower income families because the opportunity to earn credit off campus and while employed will reduce the cost of the degree by eliminating some of the cost of residency and allow the students to earn while enrolled.”

Not only were you focused on recruitment and efficiency, but you also made academics a priority. As president, you started a two-year associate degree program in secretarial science in 1973 and a new bachelor's degree program in engineering physics in 1974. Wesleyan's first graduate degree program, a master of arts in teaching, was started in the summer of 1975. Many people cite your hiring of Dr. William H. Capitan as key to strengthening academics at Wesleyan. Before coming to Wesleyan, Dr. Capitan held positions at Oberlin College and Saginaw Valley College.

You also created a "Humanities Core" to recognize human needs as they are expressed in problems of people in rural and developing regions. A key part of the "Humanities Core" was directed at students completing service and outreach to the people of Appalachia to help those people and better educate students in a real life laboratory. Your administration sought to "attract more of the socially concerned students who seek a value oriented private college education" (1975 institutional self-study).

Rockefeller Center and Wesleyan Athletics

The John D. Rockefeller Athletic Facility, commonly referred to as “The Rock,” is home to Bobcat Athletics and the Department of Athletic Training and Exercise Science. As you know, this facility is named after you. It was officially opened in October 1974.

After you resigned as president, you and Sharon made a generous donation of \$250,000 for the gym. This gift combined with your service to Wesleyan led to the eventual naming of the gym, the John D. Rockefeller IV Athletic Facility.



The Rock is a main court, two multi-use athletic courts, an auxiliary gym, and a turf practice facility. Student-athletes, as well as students participating in intramural sports, make great use out of this facility. Many students and staff recall that you frequented the gym, too. Don Richardson said you could often be found playing basketball or racquetball, sometimes by yourself but oftentimes joining the students.

Bill Thomas, who was a basketball player at Wesleyan while you were president, recalls playing racquetball with you. He said, “Jay was two inches taller than me and quite athletic. He beat me regularly, like a drum. And after each game we would chat about the cafeteria food, the needs of students, how students felt about certain policies, or what students might think about certain policies. He was always concerned about the students. So, we

played many, many times. And one time I beat him. We go to leave and he stands in front of the door and won't let me out. He said to me, 'You beat me, but can't tell anyone because how's it going to look if you beat the president?' I agreed not to tell anyone. We walk out of the gym and I told the first person I saw. We kept playing after that and he kept beating me, but I did beat him once." Bill also shared that it meant a lot to him and the rest of the Wesleyan basketball team that you brought all of them to the governor's mansion after they won the championship basketball game.

In 1972, Title XI was passed. This landmark piece of legislation changed women's sports forever. As president of Wesleyan, you did your part to implement Title XI. A women's swimming team was added in 1973. In 1974, women's basketball and tennis were added. One of the first members of the tennis team includes West Virginia Supreme Court Justice Robin Davis. Later in 1975, a women's track team was added. Adding more women's sports was part of following the law, but it also speaks to your vision of a student-centered campus. Women had been involved in intramural sports for many years, but this was their first chance at Wesleyan to be a part of intercollegiate sports.

It is rumored that some members of the faculty were concerned about your focus on athletics and the amount of money being spent on athletics. Bob Skinner, Vice President for Advancement at West Virginia Wesleyan College, recalls, "When approached about athletic spending, Jay did what he always does – backed up his decision with facts. President Rockefeller opened up the books to the faculty to show just how little was

being spent on athletics.” Looking at the 1974 operating expenses for the college, the line item budget for athletics was less than one percent of total expenses.

Wesleyan memories from friends, faculty, staff, and students

When describing your time at Wesleyan, Bob Skinner said, “President Rockefeller took a hands on approach to his job. You would always see him on the sidewalks talking to students. He made this a student-centered campus. And, he was always at athletic events, sitting in the student section and cheering on the team. One football game I remember fondly was against Bluefield State and a fight broke out on the field. You saw referees and players all over the field in a scuffle and then on the 50-yard line was President Rockefeller. He had a Wesleyan player in one arm and a Bluefield State player in the other and was helping to break up the fight. Like I said, President Rockefeller really took a hands on approach to Wesleyan and that was exactly what the students, school, and community needed.”

Chemistry professor Allan Hamner talked about your openness and willingness to hear anyone’s concerns, whether it was the faculty, students, or community members. Allan also shared one of his favorite memories from your time as president; he said, “I was walking across campus at lunchtime and encountered Jay leaving his office. When he asked where I was having lunch I replied, ‘at my mother’s house,’ and he asked to come along. So we walked over to her home and mother made him a cheese sandwich, too.” He went on to say, “Jay was just one of us. He ate with us, visited with us, invited us to his farm. He made sure we all felt included as members of the faculty.”

Mark Washburn, who was editor of the student newspaper at Wesleyan and now a Pulitzer Prize winner, said before you

became president the student newspaper wrote editorials and covered how angry students were about the price of coffee increasing. Mark recalls that one of the first things you did as president was change the price of coffee from 15 cents back to a dime. This made all of the students happy and they felt like you were really listening to them, even though this was an issue that happened before you even took office. Mark also recalls a story about the poor quality of the food service at the cafeteria, so you called him in to eat together at the cafeteria. According to Mark, the ladies that guarded the cafeteria and took meal tickets or cash were very serious. He said they didn't care that you were the president and he was your guest because neither of you had a meal ticket and you can't enter without a meal ticket or cash. Mark says he ended up having to use the cash he was holding on to for weekend beer money to buy lunch for you two at a Christian college.

Don Richardson shared the following story, "When Bill Capitan, the new Academic Dean, came aboard we all became good friends. One weekend the Capitans decided to wallpaper one of their kid's rooms. Sally and I had some experience hanging wallpaper, so we volunteered to help. In the afternoon, Jay and Sharon came over and Jay was fascinated with how wallpaper was hung. So, we showed him how to prepare and hang it, and he did his first 'hang' with great success. He was so enthusiastic he helped us all complete the job. He really got into slathering the paste on the paper, folding it just right, hanging it to the top of the wall, squeezing the bubbles out with great sweeping brush strokes, rolling the seams to make them tight, and removing

the excess paper with a razor blade. We all agreed that he had developed a new skill to help insure his comfortable retirement.”

Sally Richardson said, “He was never boastful about who he was – about being a Rockefeller. That was just not part of his personality. He is such a nice guy who enjoys exchanging with people and helping people. He always does what he thinks is good and right for the circumstance.”

Jolanda Holmes, the wife of Arthur Holmes, shared very fond memories of how kind you and Sharon were to them. Mrs. Holmes told me, “Jay was just so kind and very concerned about the faculty. When he found out I was pregnant, he sent Arthur a personal note congratulating us. He didn’t have to do that, but that sort of kindness was his nature. ”

Bill Thomas also shared some nice words about you. He said, “He’s just a fine gentleman. There’s no other way to say it. He made sure the campus was closely knit and made it feel like a big family. His door was always open – to anyone. I really looked up to him – and still do. There aren’t many people that you say, ‘I want to be like that person when I grow up.’ And I still do. He is just a great human being.”



Your inauguration ceremony, along with Charles’s baptism, is a weekend that countless students, faculty, and community members

remember fondly. Many of your family and friends from out of state came to Buckhannon for these special events. Some of the special guests included your parents, Senator Charles Percy, United Mine Workers President Arnold Miller, and Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Eaton. Mark Washburn recalls, "One of my 'royalty' moments under Rockefeller was the installation ceremony and being able to interview Senator Percy."

Along with the baptism and inauguration ceremony, you held a special evening of music. Daniel Moe, conductor at the Conservatory of Music at Oberlin College, was commissioned to write a special music score for your inauguration. In addition to the special score, the evening of music included Johann Sebastian Bach's "We All Believe in One God, Creator," "O Christ, the Consolation of All the World," "Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now," "Lobe den Herrn, Meine Seele" Cantata No. 69, and "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht" Cantata No. 105.

WVWC Today

Today, West Virginia Wesleyan College is preparing to celebrate their 125th anniversary in 2015. WVWC has seen a steady increase in enrollment over the past ten years and continues to receive state and national recognition. They are ranked number one among small colleges in science research funding, which includes EPSCoR money. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Wesleyan as a first-tier school in the South in “America’s Best Colleges 2013.” *The Princeton Review* has also ranked them as “Best Southeastern School” for 12 consecutive years.

According to the WVWC website, more than 95% of students receive some sort of financial assistance from grants, scholarship, loans, and student work opportunities. Wesleyan is the top private school for West Virginia PROMISE Scholars each year since PROMISE began in 2002. Wesleyan has had eleven Fulbright Scholar winners, including three finalists in 2013.

Community service and volunteerism is still a big component of student life at Wesleyan. More than 84 percent of students participate in some form of service. In 2012-2013, students served more than 21,650 hours in community organizations and advancing societal needs for social justice and sustainability. They also donated nearly 3,000 items to local food pantries, planted 2,000 red spruce trees, and helped raise money for local nonprofit organizations. Wesleyan is also home to LEAP (Leadership Exploration through Applied Practice), the first co-curricular leadership certificate program in West Virginia offered

through the school's Center for Community Engagement and Leadership Development.

Conclusion

Your years as West Virginia Wesleyan College President were quite successful. Your administration turned the school around and put it on a path towards success and sustainability. You, Sharon, and your children left the Wesleyan campus and town of Buckhannon with wonderful memories.

Some people thought you would leave West Virginia for good after the 1972 election. Your choice to stay in the state showed the people of West Virginia your dedication and commitment to the state, as well as your decision to truly make West Virginia your home. As you know, you resigned from Wesleyan in July 1975 and went on to successfully win your campaign for governor.

Notes

Photos are courtesy of the West Virginia Wesleyan College Archives. Brett Miller, the archivist at Wesleyan, provided me access to the Wesleyan archives, including enrollment numbers, past press releases, past newspaper articles, and other materials that were used to gather facts and figures for this memo. Other information was gathered from West Virginia Wesleyan College's website.