



INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

FOUR-YEAR BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

It's hard to fathom that just 20 years ago, the incoming Peace College Class of 1997 became the very first freshman class in the school's history to have the option of earning a baccalaureate degree. This fall, the William Peace University community gears up to celebrate both the 20-year anniversary of the Bachelor of Arts program and the creation of the Office of Career Services.

Through the vision of the Briggs administration, Peace College transitioned from a two-year junior college into a four-year baccalaureate institution. To support that evolution and the students enrolling in new degree programs, Barbara Efird, M.Ed., LPC, became the first director of Career Services, charged with establishing the department on campus.

"It was a leap of faith for our two-year graduates to decide to stay on and graduate as part of Peace's first four-year baccalaureate degree programs," said Efird. "But that fall, the option of enrolling in a four-year program excited so many."

Peace offered five BA degree programs, and soon after hiring Efird, launched its esteemed internship program, requiring every student to complete an internship in their field. At the time, this innovative requirement was nearly unheard of among colleges and universities.

Throughout the past 20 years, Efird and her staff have provided students and alumni resources to advance their careers while gaining national

recognition for its internship program. Today, the University offers 24 majors and is ranked "Number One" in the nation for colleges with the highest rate of internships (*US News & World Report*).

"To this day, when I talk about graduating from Peace in 1997, I always say with pride, 'We were the first B.A. class!'" said Dr. Kristen C. Wynns, founder and owner of Wynns Family Psychology and No Wimpy Parenting. "Having the opportunity to blaze new territory for women to follow meant so much to me. I remember the excitement of getting an internship at Dorothea Dix and at an Autism Group home. Both experiences cemented my desire to become a clinical psychologist. I believe the confidence and leadership that soaked into my bones during my four years at Peace are absolutely a part of my success as a psychologist owning a thriving practice."

Wynns graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies and a concentration in Psychology. She believes internships are a critical part of professional development.

"They help you figure out what you really want to do 'when you grow up,'" she added. "I love how things come full circle, and I currently have between five and eight college and graduate-level interns working at my practice every year. It's so exciting to see them have the fire lit for the field and get 'real life' experience in a private practice."

As the number of majors grew, so did the demand for internships within those fields. Career Services worked hand-in-hand with faculty to create a program and experience for Peace students, so graduates would leave with not only an education, but also real work experience in their chosen field.

"Internships allow students to apply what they have learned in the classroom through experiential education," said Kathleen Monroe, Associate Director of Career Services.

WPU students work 120 hours at their professional internship site with the goal of meeting three objectives set at the beginning of the semester. At the end of the internship, students complete an exit interview with Career Services to see if those objectives were met, and both the supervisors and interns complete an evaluation.

"One of the questions we ask supervisors is, 'If you had an opening, would you consider this student for employment?'" Our goal is to have 92 percent of them say yes, and we've exceeded that by being at 95 percent for a few years," said Efird.

This year, Career Services oversaw 150 interns, with a record-setting 70 students in the spring semester alone. WPU Seniors Daquawn Coleman '16, Melvin Gray '16, and Susan Thomas '16 were three students in that group. Coleman, a communication major with a graphic design concentration, interned with *Triangle Downtowner Magazine* and worked on *BOOM magazine*, one of their publications. He designed ads, worked on layouts, and designed the entire February 2016 issue by himself.

Gray, a theatre major, interned at North Carolina Theatre in the Development Department. He worked with donors and organized the Backer's Club VIP events.

"I'm so used to performing, I didn't know what it was like behind the scenes and what went into the actual production," Gray said.

"Now I know how theatre works backstage and onstage. It'll be super beneficial to me to have this experience in development."

Thomas, a biology major, interned with the Environmental Protection Agency and worked on a study of hyperthyroidism in the brains of pregnant rats. She plans to continue to work in research after graduation.

Internship experiences like these open doors to careers for many. In fact, 60 percent of WPU graduates state their internship was very helpful in getting their first job. Of the last three graduating classes (2013, 2014 & 2015), at least 96 percent are either working full-time in their field or have enrolled in graduate school within one year after graduation.

In addition to Efird and Monroe, the Office of Career Services recently added another staff member, Susanne Vergara, a graduate student and counseling intern from NC State University. As an innovative function of the department, Vergara provides distance career counseling overseen by Efird to alumni and students, as well as job search coaching.

"We're always looking to be at the forefront of career counseling innovation," said Efird.

Through distance career counseling, WPU offers students and alumni the unique ability to work remotely with a counselor on any number of career building services, such as career assessment reviews, resume and cover letter creation and review, job search coaching, and even assistance with LinkedIn. The services aren't provided just to first-time job seekers; they're also offered to those who may be pursuing a change in career.

"It's always really nice to know that when I'm ready to move onto a different career, I can rely on Peace to help me through the process," said Beth Ann Mills '13, who works as a special needs teacher in Mobile, AL. "It's encouraging that the one-on-one support I was able to obtain while enrolled at WPU will continue in my life as an alum, no matter how far away I go. That safety net will always be there when I need it."

According to the National Career Development Association (NCDA), over the past few years distance counseling has been growing steadily in popularity at most major institutions because of its convenience and participant anonymity.

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- BARBARA EFIRD

"Our students – especially those in the School of Professional Studies – and our alumni don't always have the opportunity to come in [to campus] to talk to a career counselor," Efird said. "We wanted to provide counseling, face-to-face, but at their convenience, so we explored and researched opportunities to do it by using technology."

WPU's Career Services counselors use Zoom, a secure video conferencing program approved by the NCDA Ethics Committee, which can be used with students and alumni not available for on-campus career counseling, or who may live outside of the Raleigh area.

Melissa Lancaster McCurry graduated in 1997 with her Bachelor's degree. Now, two decades later, she's coming back full circle to Peace as an intern with Efird and Monroe while completing a Master's degree through Wake Forest University.

"It means so much to me to participate as a career counselor intern at the place that impacted me so much as a young woman," McCurry said. "Meeting current WPU students over the past year has really shown me how much we have in common: similar experiences, mentorships, and friendships built with faculty, and a place that is our second home. I'm thrilled to be a part of this place once again and launch my career in counseling from the place I started so long ago."

For more information on Career Services and the internship program, visit www.peace.edu/academics/career-services.