

THE DECREE

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Wesleyan Profile: Robert Simpson — Professor, Minister and Head Coach

Robert Simpson, a Methodist minister, religious studies professor and former college athlete, is the new head coach of Wesleyan's lacrosse team.

A Maryland native, Dr. Simpson, 57, attended Frostburg State University before he finished his undergraduate education at the University of Baltimore. He earned a Master of Divinity from Duke University. He was ordained a deacon in 1995 and an elder in 1998.

Simpson has served at a number of Methodist churches around the state, and while at Front Street UMC in Burlington, he completed a Doctor of Divinity degree from University of the South (Tennessee), with a focus, Dr. Simpson said, on eucharist and spiritual formation in the tradition of the church's table-centered liturgy. He is the author of “Who Moved the Table,” a book that explores the eucharist's role in shaping Christian spirituality.

Before accepting an adjunct teaching position at NC Wesleyan, Simpson had taught courses in spiritual formation and assisted in courses on Methodist history, polity, and practical discipleship at Duke Divinity School.

Simpson is now pastor of Red Oak United Methodist Church.

Having played lacrosse from a young age, Simpson was a two-sport athlete in high school and college. At Woodland Senior High, Simpson, a placekicker, won the scholar-athlete award for football and the team MVP for his performance on the lacrosse team, where he played attack. He continued to play sports at Frostburg State, as a kicker on the football team and a midfielder on the lacrosse team where the coach switched him from attack.

Simpson was interviewed by the Decree early in the semester.

Q. Tell us about your hometown and family.

A. I was born in Western Maryland in the Cumberland/Frostburg area. My father was a pastor in the United Methodist Church, so we moved around every six or seven years. So, I really grew up all over Maryland. In my younger childhood years, we lived in northern Baltimore County. We moved to Leonardtown in southern Maryland and then to the southwest side Baltimore for high school.

My father and mother are now retired and live in Fairfield, Pennsylvania, near Ski Liberty. My older sister lives in Hampstead, Maryland. We're a close family. We continue to be very connected through social media and phone calls.

Q. Describe a favorite childhood memory.

A. I would say it's playing in the backyard late into the evening with friends, using our imagination to play any sport, everything from football and soccer to kickball and “Kick the Can.” In our backyard, we were able to create the entire experience of any sporting event we desired to play.

Q. What's the most adversity you've experienced in your life? How did you deal with it?

A. There have been several challenging moments in my life. When I was five, I had a stroke due to an aneurysm in the left side of my brain. I remember I was at a friend's birth-

day party, and I suddenly lost my ability to speak. We were playing charades and a little girl was leading the game. I knew the answer—a panda bear—but I couldn't get it out of my mouth. I started to cry.

Not only did I lose the ability to speak; I lost motor skills and my right arms and leg were paralyzed. I spent two weeks in Greater Baltimore Medical Center. It all healed without surgery, but it took quite a bit of therapy. I recalled that a woman from our church, an artist, volunteered to help me and she had me work with Play-Doh as part of the therapy. I soon got feeling back in my arms and legs and after a month I uttered my first words, “Dirty doggy,” while at McDonald's with my family.



Dr. Robert Simpson has taken the helm of the Wesleyan lacrosse team. Photo courtesy of R. Simpson.

Q. Can you talk about adversity you may have faced in college?

A. Two things come to mind. One incident occurred when I was 21 and a student at the University of Baltimore. It was also a time that I served as a pastor of a church in the town of Paw Paw, West Virginia. I remember I was driving down a windy mountain road and lost control of my car. I was ejected from the car (a Plymouth Colt). I ended up in a Cumberland, Maryland hospital with a concussion, two broken collar bones and lots of cuts. I missed a couple weeks of school.

But I would say the most adversity had been learning who I was in the midst of transferring from Frostburg State to the University of Baltimore. I struggled to find what was important in life. But when I started to put Christ first in my life, I was able to focus more on my studies and a purpose for the future.

Q. Describe your experience in playing lacrosse as a youth.

A. They always say once a lacrosse player, always a lacrosse player. When you live in Baltimore, it's what you do; you play lacrosse. You eat, sleep, and live lacrosse. I began playing organized lacrosse in junior high and continued to play through college. I wish I could still be playing now. I miss it so much. I'm grateful for this position at Wesleyan to continue my love of the game.

There are many moments that I remember fondly: from around-the-back goals and playing in front of a sizable crowd, to a special coach in high school who taught me more than lacrosse. I think what I remember most was the feeling of confidence that playing lacrosse gave me, the sense of working together as a team and having people believe in you.

Q. Describe your previous coaching experiences.

A. I volunteered to coach my son's

little league soccer team. For three years I coached lacrosse at Durham's Githens Middle School, which won the championship in their third year. It was the first time a Durham middle school beat the Chapel Hill middle schools. It was an exciting three years for those young boys.

Q. What attracted you to teach and coach at Wesleyan?

A. I've always wanted to be involved in an academic setting at the university level. I had taught Spiritual Formation at Duke for years. When the Bishop appointed me to the Red Oak-Bethlehem United Methodist Charge, I sent my resume to the religious studies department at NCWU. When Andrew Stern called and invited me to teach religion, I was never more excited. It was a blessing as I feel God has called me here.

The school's size encourages a family atmosphere where diversity is a gift and shared in every aspect of university life. At this institution, there are students from all over the world who are pursuing their future. I've seen the positive characteristics of this special diversity.

Q. Tell us about your current lacrosse roster at Wesleyan.

A. This is a unique team of young ladies. The roster has only two players who were recruited. The rest were walk-ons and many had never even played the game before they joined the Wesleyan team a year ago.

Q. What do you consider the biggest challenge you will face as coach this season?

A. Besides the limited number of athletes who are new to the sport, I would say it's the size of the roster overall. Lacrosse involves a significant amount of running. We only have 13 players, just enough to put 12 players on the field with only one substitute to give a teammate a rest during a match.

Another challenging aspect is that North Carolina is not a very big lacrosse area. It has just been recently that some areas of the state have started to see lacrosse. It's difficult to recruit young women with a lacrosse background to Wesleyan. But I feel we're taking small steps toward making lacrosse visible in the area.

Q. In what specific ways will your experience as a teacher and minister help you in your new position? Think in terms of both coaching and recruiting to build a sustainable program?

A. It's a delicate balance between supporting players now on the roster, while continuing to recruit more developed players who will build a strong team for the future. I feel that my experience as a pastor helps in encouraging the women to keep going through adversity and giving hope so that they will grow together as a team. I've always said that a pastor's main job is to be a cheerleader. As a coach, I'm their main cheerleader.

Teaching here has given me a unique understanding of the athletes' different interests in life other than lacrosse. As a pastor and a teacher, I am able to listen to my players in ways that can help guide them in beneficial ways toward their future.

Q. Turning to your life outside of work, tell us more about your family.

A. They both got the math brains. My son, Alex, is 24 and lives in Durham.

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Junior guard Omari Bolden in early season action. The Bishops beat Pfeiffer on the road to take the conference championship February 28. See story on page 4. SI photo.

Wesleyan Profile: Abby Todd — From the Field to the Front Office

By **Fisayo Adebimpe**
Decree Staff Writer

Abby Todd's journey was not a straight line, but every step from growing up in a military family to competing as a collegiate student-athlete ultimately led her back to the campus she now serves. Sitting in her brand-new office, a space that feels warm and welcoming, much like Todd herself, Wesleyan's Director of Sports Communications works behind the scenes in the athletic department, supporting student-athletes in ways she once experienced firsthand.

A military “brat,” Todd moved frequently during her early childhood. She was born at the Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point (Naval Hospital), located in Havelock. At age 2, her family moved to the Florida panhandle and spent three years in the Sunshine State.

“I remember the move from Florida only in bits and pieces,” Todd said. “But I was lucky I didn't have to move during middle school like a lot of military kids.”

At age 5, around the time she began kindergarten, Todd's family returned to North Carolina and eventually settled in Hertford, a small town about an hour away from the Outer Banks and not too far from Virginia Beach. Hertford is where she ended up living until college.

Adjusting to life in a small town brought mixed emotions. Todd described Hertford as close-knit, a place where privacy was limited but relationships were strong. “It was a love-hate relationship,” she said. “Everybody knew everything about you—there were no secrets. But I loved it too. I could probably name every person in my graduating class.”

Family was a major influence throughout Todd's upbringing. She is the middle child between her older sister, Robin, and younger sister, Taylor. Growing up surrounded by her sisters helped shape her sense of responsibility and companionship.

“I had someone to look up to and someone to look out for,” Todd said. “There wasn't much to do in a small town, so we spent a lot of time just watching movies and hanging out together.”

From an early age, Todd gravitated toward athletics. She played both softball and volleyball throughout her childhood and teenage years, finding enjoyment in competing. “I loved being active,” Todd said. “I loved anything and everything about sports.”

Todd attended Perquimans Central School for her elementary education, Hertford Grammar School

for intermediate grades, followed by Perquimans Middle School and Perquimans High School. She grew up alongside many of the same classmates throughout her academic career.

“I had a lot of the same friends from elementary through high school,” Todd said. “I still talk to my best friend from high school.”

While she maintained strong friendships, Todd acknowledged that middle school was a difficult period, as it is for many students.

“Middle school is tough,” she said. “You're trying to figure out who you are. But I had my friends, and that made it easier.”

As high school graduation approached, Todd faced a difficult decision: whether to pursue volleyball or softball at the collegiate level. Although stepping away from volleyball was not easy, she ultimately followed her passion for softball.

NC Wesleyan quickly became the obvious choice. Her older sister had attended the university, met her husband there, and remained in the area after graduation. Having her sister nearby made Wesleyan feel like a natural and comfortable fit.



Abby Todd has returned to Wesleyan to serve as Director of Sports Communications. Photo courtesy of A. Todd.

Todd arrived on campus in 2019 as a criminal justice major and member of the softball team. But her freshman year brought unexpected challenges. During her first semester, she became critically ill and was diagnosed with menstrual toxic shock syndrome, a life-threatening condition. “I almost died in my dorm room,” Todd said. “That experience changed me. It made me grow up fast.”

After recovering, she returned to the classroom and first base on the softball field, learning how to manage the demanding schedule of collegiate athletics. “Freshman year was all about learning time management,” she said. “Workouts, practices, games, classes—it was a lot.”

By her sophomore and junior years, Todd felt more settled. She found a rhythm academically

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CAMPUS LIFE

Hobbies Provide Faculty with Respite, Connection to Family

Wesleyan faculty come from all over the world and teach in a wide range of disciplines. Outside of work many engage in hobbies just as diverse and interesting. Many look to the outdoors, while others enjoy more artistic endeavors. Many find connection through their hobbies to friends and family.

What follows is the first in an occasional series about faculty hobbies and why they're so passionate about them.

Andrew Stern: Stamp Collecting

For Andrew Stern, stamp collecting began as a way to explore different world cultures.

It was his grandmother who started him on his collection as a boy. Employed at a research library in Washington, D.C., she received correspondence from scholars all over the world. She set aside envelopes from foreign countries to show him on his visits. "We'd find the countries on a world map and imagine what life would be like there," he recalled. "Then, we'd soak the envelopes in water until the stamps came off, dry them, and place them in a book. That was the genesis of my collection."

His current collection numbers in the thousands, about half pasted in albums at his Raleigh home and the other half, he related, in boxes, waiting to be sorted.

He said he finds most additions to his collection while traveling. Stern travels overseas at least once a year and, over the years, has visited 30 countries, from Thailand to Israel, Colombia to Iceland. Other stamps come from family and friends during their international travels. "They stop by a post office and pick up stamps for me," he said.

Stern is not one to attend stamp collecting conventions, but did enjoy a recent trip to the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. "There was an interesting exhibit on the history of stamps and postal systems in general," he said.

He noted that some of his favorite stamps came from countries that no longer exist—Yugoslavia, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Vietnam. "They seem like relics of lost civilizations."

But his favorite stamps come from a country that's in the news at the moment. He described a series of stamps issued by the Ukrainian postal service, Ukrposhta. It honors Patron, a

bomb-sniffing Jack Russell Terrier that has become a celebrity in his home country.

"Each stamp is a little window into the culture that produced it," Stern explained. "Stamps show us what societies value, how they understand themselves, as well as their aesthetics."

Stern views stamps as small "fantastic works" of art. He pointed out that stamps serve a practical purpose, "yet societies often invest tremendous effort in making them more elaborate than they need to be."

When he considers his years of collecting, Stern's thoughts always return to his grandmother "and the care she took to instill in me a sense of the world's breadth."



Dr. Andrew Stern with stamps from Ukraine. Photo by Charlie Stern.

Aaron Allen: Fishing

Aaron Allen, associate professor of mathematics, likes to fish. And he keeps it simple. He fishes in ponds and lakes, most often from shore rather than a boat. For bait he uses worms and, on occasion, minnows. "I'm a very simple fisherman," he said.

Allen noted that as a child in Iowa, he often fished local rivers for catfish with his father. "I'd like to get back into more river fishing again."

He first went fishing 40 years ago with both his mother and father. The setting was a small pond, Bays Branch, in central Iowa. He recalls catching five bullhead catfish while his dad caught four and his mother, three. "Since I've always been competitive, I'll always remember being the one who caught the most fish," he said, adding that after that day he was "hooked on fishing" for life.

Allen lamented that his current fishing is limited to three times a year, due to work, family obligations and other demands on his time. This is despite the fact that Lake Wilson is just blocks from his house. Whenever he's back in Iowa visiting family and friends, Allen sets aside a day to fish for channel catfish at his favorite body of water, Lake Greenfield. "I definitely would like to fish more often," he said.

Allen said fishing is more than just relaxation. He said he enjoys the stillness and loves to soak in "the beauty of God's creation." He called it therapy and a necessary break from his work life. "And it gives me space to contemplate what's important in life," he explained. "It's even given me space to ponder and process challenging situations."

Asked to describe his dream fishing vacation, Allen said it would be in northern Minnesota or Canada, at a secluded lake surrounded by forest. "It would just be me and my wife, Alison, with a camping tent and a campfire on the shore of the lake," he said.

Allen said his most memorable fishing experience was his battle with a 10-pound carp he caught with his dad at Iowa's Racoon River

30 years ago. Carp are known as powerful swimmers, Allen noted, and this one took him 45 minutes to land. "It was the most exciting catch I ever had," Allen said. "It even had me snagged in a brush pile at one point during the battle, but somehow I was able to get that fish out of it without breaking my fragile fishing line."

Allen said he's grateful for every chance he gets to throw a line in a body of water. For him catching a fish is a bonus. "My dad said it best: The worst day I ever had fishing was always better than my best day at work."

Young Kim: Cycling

Political science professor Young Kim was once so passionate about badminton that he played five days a week at club in Wake County. One day a badminton partner told him about a going-out-of-business sale at Performance Bicycle's Cary store. His friend recommended a particular bike, a Fuji Roubaix road bike, which was available at a low price.

"At that time, I knew nothing about bikes, but he said it was a steal," Kim recalls. "I didn't ride much at first because I was so into badminton."

Then Covid hit, and Kim's badminton club, like many businesses around the country, shut down. "I needed something else to do, and I ended up getting into cycling," he said.

Cycling soon became his new passion. He's enhanced his blue road bike by swapping in carbon wheels and installing a Bryton cycling computer, a front camera and lights. And he's added a second bike, a Viathon hard-tail bike (a type of mountain bike). When he rides, Kim said he wears bib shorts and cleats.

The South Korea native said he tries to ride three or four days a week for a total of 70 miles. He'll often ride around his neighborhood with his daughter. When he rides alone, he heads to Raleigh's Umstead Park where he takes his mountain bike. "Many cyclists would agree Umstead is a real gem," he said. "It's close to home and quiet. When I just want a relaxed ride, there are easy gravel roads. And there are single-track trails for more fun. The hills make the rides a little more challenging. And another perk is seeing wild animals such as coyotes and snakes."

When Kim wants a longer ride, he heads to the Neuse River Trail, which begins at Falls Lake, follows the river through East Raleigh and stretches south to Clayton. It's 60 miles round trip.

Asked to describe his cycling goals, Kim shared two long-term ones: Riding from the East Coast to the West Coast and, closer to home, traversing the East Coast Greenway, which stretches from Maine to Florida. A shorter-term goal is to complete a "century," a 100-mile ride in under six hours, he said.

Like many fanatics, Kim still manages to get in his rides on rainy or snowy days. He affixes his road bike to a trainer in a spare room at home and connects to indoor cycling apps like Zwift, Rouvy and MyWhoosh. He called the investment in the trainer worthwhile. "The experience is great. It feels like I'm playing a cycling video game, while getting a real workout," he said, adding that apps enable him to keep his statistics and race cyclists from all over the world.

Besides the health benefits, Kim said he enjoys the flexibility of cycling. "Since I like riding alone," he said, "I can head out whenever I want—morning or afternoon—and ride for as long as I feel like."

Ayra Sundbom: Cheesemaking

Ayra Sundbom has been interested in farming and food production since she was a little girl.

She grew up next to Saanen farm a mile outside of the Washington D.C. beltway. When she was 10, she got an after-school job milking and caring for the goat herd for \$3 an hour. "It seemed like a pretty decent paycheck for a kid back in 1987," said Dr. Sundbom, a visiting assistant professor in the education department. "I loved the goats and really enjoyed the process of farming."

Flash forward 40 years. Sundbom now runs a family farm, Bearadise Farm, in Eastern North Carolina with her mother and two daughters. They raise cows, goats and chickens and make honey and cheese, among other products.

"I've always loved to cook," Sundbom said, "so naturally when I started milking goats again as an adult, I looked into making goat cheese."

The Sundboms make both cow and goats cheese, including mozzarella, farmer's cheese, Chevre, Fromage Frais, Queso Fresco, Cheddar, Feta, and Halloumi. "If I have time, my go-to is mozzarella but if I just need to get it done, it's farmer's cheese," Sundbom said.

Located in Edgecombe County, Bearadise Farm is already approved by the U.S. and state departments of agriculture to sell eggs, meat, produce and honey at area farmer's markets. When it comes to cheese, Sundbom is restricted to "trading, sharing and eating" her creations. She is in the process of securing a license to sell cheese and other dairy products. "It's pretty complicated because you have to go through governmental agencies, inspectors, and the like," she explained. "But the process is important because the regulations keep us healthy by ensuring that food is properly manufactured and stored in a safe manner."

Sundbom noted that a significant part of her Wesleyan job involves supporting other faculty in their use of educational technology. And though challenging, cheesemaking and other farm tasks provide a nice respite from her duties at the university. "My work is very much 'in my head,'" she explained. "I spend a lot of time looking at a computer screens, battling bizarre Jenzabar e-learning gremlins, and teaching many different concepts to a wide variety of learners. Farming lets me get outside every day (rain, snow, sun), stay active, work with my hands, create delicious food, and hang with the animals."

She added that cheesemaking, in particular, has a specific process—a beginning, middle, and end—that appeals to her. "It's a very mindful and focused activity," she said. "I can feel very anxious or stressed and making a batch of cheese will help me to be calmer and feel better. It settles my soul. And at the end



Mozzarella cheese knots made by Dr. Ayra Sundbom. Photo courtesy of A. Sundbom.

there's a delicious treat to share!"

Directions for Mozzarella:

Sundbom noted that the time it takes to make mozzarella depends on the amount milk used in the process. A small batch requires about a gallon, but Sundbom tends to use four gallons. The process takes 30-60 minutes.

- Add citric acid to raw cold milk.
- Heat slowly to 88 degrees.
- Stir in rennet and calcium chloride.
- Heat slowly to 104 degrees and make sure that the curds have separated from the whey.
- Remove the curds from the whey and put them in a glass bowl. You can reuse the whey or discard.
- Do the following three times: sprinkle with salt and heat for one minute in the microwave and then drain the whey.
- At this point, use gloves or a long spoon to fold and stretch the cheese until it has a shiny and smooth texture.
- Form the cheese into desired shapes (rounds, knots, etc.) and set it in an iced brine solution for 10 minutes.
- Take out of the brine and eat or refrigerate.

Carl Lewis: Skiing

Dr. Carl Lewis used to like surfing along the Atlantic shore. Then circumstances changed. North Carolina's sandbars began to disappear due to the beach renourishment process, and around the same time, surfing became too physically demanding for the former Rocky Mount police officer to tolerate. "Surfing puts a lot of stress on your shoulder while you're paddling," Lewis said, noting that he still has surfboards but that he had not surfed in years.

In part to fill the void, he turned to a winter activity. The criminal justice professor said he became interested in skiing during the last decade after watching the Winter Olympics. He began skiing five years ago, taking lessons at slopes in Western North Carolina.

Each winter Lewis purchases a season-long ski lift ticket and heads to the slopes "as much as possible." He's tried other resorts in the area but favors Appalachian Ski Mountain in Blowing Rock, a four-hour drive from Rocky Mount. He noted that the slopes there are not as steep or long (the longest slope is a half mile) as they are in many locations around the region. During the week, he added, there are seldom lift lines. "The area has a really laid-back vibe," he said, adding that the operators stress customer service. "Everyone is like family there."

He is such a fan of App Ski Mountain that, when asked to describe a dream ski destination, Lewis said he would stick with his go-to slopes.

Discussing his passion for his new hobby, Lewis said that not only is it fun and easier than surfing, it's a chance to commune with nature, and he loves the view at the top of the mountain. "When going down the slope, it's just you, the snow and the skis," he said. "It's an opportunity to lose yourself in the moment and enjoy the cool wind in your face."

Jackie Lewis: Japanese Embroidery

Jackie Lewis, associate professor of computer information systems, has been passionate about the art of embroidery since she was 10. She began with cross stitch. "I've loved it ever since," she said.

Like other faculty interviewed for this story, Lewis likes that her hobby connects her to family, in particular her late grandmothers and aunts. "I remember them sewing

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CAMPUS LIFE

Wesleyan Students React to Importance of Black History Month

In early March students were asked to discuss their engagement with Black History Month as well as their general feelings about the occasion. Here are some of their responses:

Fisayo Adebimpe

When I think about Black History Month, I always question why it's just one month and the shortest month at that. To me, celebrating Black history is an everyday occurrence. I see it as uplifting the Black community, celebrating the small successes with your friends, and educating others on our past.

Many Black athletes have had a significant impact on society. Athletes play a key role in highlighting Black History Month by using their platforms and fame to recognize past leaders and athletes who have paved

the way. Many current athletes participate in special events, social media posts, and interviews to speak about the positive impact of other Blacks. LeBron James is an athlete that I admire; he has been exemplary in the way he emphasizes Black History Month. He often shares messages on social media and speaks on the importance of education and equality. LeBron opened the I PROMISE School to empower and educate the younger generation. He routinely wears outfits and athletic shoes that highlight equality and other positive messages and honor legendary athletes like Jackie Robinson.

Different professional leagues host events and games catered to Black History Month. These games educate fans and can inspire others to lead the way. The HBCU Classic is a great example of how the NBA hosts a game and a Black History Month event at the same time. Taking place in February during NBA All-Star weekend, it allows two historically Black colleges to play against each other while the TV broadcast is dedicated to educating fans on Black history.

As a member of the Wesleyan basketball team, I'm always looking for ways to contribute. This past month I took part in a Black History Month social media post

hosted by the NCAA Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. I provided my opinion on what Black History Month means, stating "Always take pride in your culture and use your voice to leave your mark, not just for the month of February but every day!" And I had a chance to speak about how important it is to educate others and how Black history shapes us: "Black History Month has given me a chance to understand the struggles and achievements of Black athletes and activists." It's important to understand our history and recognize our forebearers. I also wrote, "I take that knowledge and apply it to my life, not just to motivate me but to educate and motivate others who will come after me."

Gabriel Elias

It's profoundly important that Black history be taught. African-Americans were part of the force that freed the colonies from British rule. In spite of this, African-Americans have been marginalized and their history concealed, deemphasized. Because of this, there should be an emphasis on the teaching of Black history, as it widens the learner's perspective and gives us a more holistic understanding of history as opposed to only looking at events from a singular point of view. When it comes

to Black History Month, my only grievance is that it isolates a large part of history and confines it to 28 days, when in reality you cannot consider our story without looking at the impact that African-Americans have made on nearly every aspect of it.

Joaquin Goldman Holste

As a native of Argentina, I did not experience Black History Month till I came to the United States to study. This might be the case because of the very low population of Black people in Argentina, compared to other countries. Although Argentina does not have an entire month dedicated to Black history, we do have a similar period of observation. We have one week in November that's dedicated to commemorating Afro-Argentine history and culture.

Once I got to the U.S., I experienced Black History Month in person, thanks to news sources, social media and friends who have lived in the U.S. In my case, even though I did not participate in specific events this year and I do not believe BHM has made a big impact in my life, I find it to be a good practice as it helps to commemorate a significant group of people within the U.S. But I believe our approach back home is better. This is because, by having a week instead of a full month, each day feels more meaningful and the activities and other commemorations feel more important and thoughtful.

Luke Marsigli

The occasion is important, but I believe Black history should be recognized and taught throughout the year rather than just for one month. It seems disrespectful to put it all into one month, let alone the shortest month; I believe that it would be smart to filter it into all we do throughout the year. Black history is just as important, or even more so, than what we learn in our history books, and it strikes me as demeaning to set aside a specified time each year. Black history is a part of overall history and should be studied in detail, the same as other events, and shouldn't be over-simplified or overlooked. We can get an enhanced understanding of past events, and it can allow our youth to understand social issues and become better people. Black history is our history, no matter your skin color.

Kalel Mason

I tend to engage in Black History Month with my family. Every year around the 15th of February, my father holds a cookout to celebrate the month. My father hosts the event, with his extended family and slightly more from my mother's side on hand. Each year, we play games, watch movies, and sing. This year we watched the film "Sinners," while eating prime rib, as well as burgers, hot-dogs, and macaroni-and-cheese. Instead of yard games, this year we were inside playing Monopoly, Yahtzee, and spades. The cookouts always end with a family prayer and song of the eldest

member's choosing. This year went to my great-grandmother. A big fan of Bruno Mars, she decided on "I Just Might." Even though the cookout may seem like nothing special, it's important to me. I like that it's a simple celebration with my family because it shows that we still care about the importance of the month and each other. During Black History Month, many tend to honor and sing the praises of historical figures, but I prefer to celebrate the life that we have now *because* of those historical figures that preceded us. It's an excellent way to express our appreciation.

Naeem Muhammad

When I think about Black History Month, I focus on Black excellence, the experiences we've lived and the obstacles we've overcome. I think of the many icons and leaders who have risen out of the struggle, to inspire the many generations that followed. As a result, I feel compelled to lead as well and do everything in my power to make a difference in my community. With me growing up in a Muslim household, Black history was an important part of my youth. It has helped to educate me on my history. It does suck that in America Black history is shortened to a month, especially with what all that Black people have sacrificed and accomplished for this country. I also sometimes think about the way Black history is celebrated in America, how it's limited to Blacks struggling and overcoming obstacles. And someday, I think, Black History Month will amount to more than what it is now. Black history is relevant and should be taught everywhere because it shows one of the truest forms of resilience and strength, and that makes me very proud.

Arlando Neal

I've been a minority in almost every professional or educational space of my life, so Black History Month is more than a month to me. It's important and I believe it's worth celebrating every year. Even though it's the shortest month, I always make sure I do something intentional to celebrate. Since I'm pretty far from home, this year I watched at least one movie pertaining to Black History Month each week. Those included "The Hate You Give," "12 Years a Slave," "Black Panther," and "Moonlight." I believe individuals who aren't of African-American descent may feel as if the month-long observation is unnecessary; however, our society's persistent discrimination is a testament to why Black history should be celebrated in the first place. Around the world Black people have been oppressed for generations, so having a month when we can feel empowered and celebrate with our brothers and sisters is vital. I would like to challenge everyone, no matter your race, to find a way to celebrate Black History Month and lean into Black culture instead of finding ways to fight it.



Wesleyan hosted an exhibit of Eric McRay's paintings earlier this term in the Mims Galley. It included "Sunny Sunday." Photo by B. Grattan.

HOBBIES

from pg 2 and embroidering," she said. "My aunts got me started with cross stitch and then I just grew from there to take classes and learn more."

In 1999, Lewis saw an advertisement for a class on Japanese embroidery at the Rocky Mount Arts Center. She noted that Japanese embroidery, known as Nuido, dates back 1600 years.

To become skilled in her art, Lewis has studied a curriculum offered by the Japanese Embroidery Center in Atlanta. The course consists of 10 phases, each requiring the student to learn a new technique as she finishes a piece that incorporates Japanese cultural motifs. Lewis explained that Japanese embroidery uses silk and metallic threads on silk fabric, while other types of embroidery rely on cotton and wool materials.

Lewis said that a group of Japanese embroidery hobbyists has moved from the arts center to regular meetings on Wesleyan's campus. When she's not working at her job, Lewis tries to squeeze in two hours of embroidering each day. "It's easy for me to get lost in a project," she said.

When a piece is finished, Lewis will display it at home or her office in the Gateway Technology Center. Depending on the complexity of the design, each piece can take months or even a year to complete. "Because I spend so much time with each one," she said, "it's very hard to part with them."

As part of practicing her art, Lewis said she enjoys learning about Japanese history, explaining that many motifs carry deep symbolic meaning in the culture. She said that embroidery requires no special talents, just a lot of patience, perseverance and a willingness to learn. Her mantra is not to "chase perfection but to enjoy the process." Her pieces often feature the natural world, flowers and birds in particular. "Embroidery allows me to be present and mindful and express my love of the natural world," she said.

Lewis's skills have progressed to the point that she's often recognized for her pieces. She's regularly won first place and "Best of Show" awards at the Wilson

County Fair. And she's won several awards at the North Carolina State Fair, bringing home a "Best of County Fair" for medium-sized fairs as well as an overall first place and "Best of Show" prize.

The CIS professor noted that embroidery provides a needed respite from her day-to-day job with its focus on technology.

"What I enjoy most is that I can find a state of flow while working on my embroidery," she said. "Stitching's repetitive nature calms my mind. It's the way I handle the stress of the modern world. So much of my academic discipline and life now requires me to be on a screen. This is my escape from technology."



Dr. Shane Thompson keeps Braves and other sports memorabilia at his home. Photo courtesy S. Thompson.

Shane Thompson: Sports Memorabilia

It should not be surprising that Dr. Shane Thompson, a scholar of ancient texts and relics, likes to collect sports memorabilia. He even maintains a small museum in a second-floor room at his Knightdale home, updating his displays on a regular basis.

The Wesleyan religious studies professor attended Wake Forest as an undergraduate and grew up a rabid fan of both NASCAR and Major League Baseball.

He was inspired to collect by his late father, Rupert, a CPA who ran a baseball card store while Thompson was in middle school.

From baseball cards, Thompson diversified his collection to include items associated with Demon Deacons athletics; his favorite pro baseball team, the Braves; and his favorite NASCAR

champion, Kevin Harvick.

Among his collection, Thompson cataloged the following items:

- Braves: 100 bobbleheads, 200 figures, 100 pins, programs for every playoff series, and innumerable Braves baseball cards.
- Wake Forest: 50 programs from Demon Deacon bowl game appearances and other games, 50 pins, as well as other unique memorabilia that catches his eye.
- NASCAR: 1,000 diecast Kevin Harivck cars as well as 100 pins related to NASCAR races.

Thompson said he finds new items from a range of sources—from eBay to yard sales, to memorabilia shows. Sometimes he finds a new piece through a network of collectors he's built over the years.

"I've done pretty well at locating the type of items that I enjoy the most," he said. "My main question is 'is this displayable?' I don't get a ton of joy out of an item that can only stay in a box in the closet."

Over the years, Thompson has sold and traded memorabilia, including baseball cards from the 1950s to 1970s that he inherited from his father. But he's now content to focus on expanding and enriching his collection. "I used to sell and trade a lot more than I do now," he said.

It was hard for Thompson to single out the most prized piece of memorabilia in his collection. He named numerous items. Two relate to favorite memories from the Braves. He described a Hank Aaron figurine signed by the Braves slugger after he hit career homerun 715. A second is the framed tickets from Game 1 of the 1995 World Series. "That might be my most prized possession," he said. "I was little, but that's one of my most cherished childhood memories."

As he ticked through other examples—2006 Orange Bowl tickets, a Harvick replica helmet—it was clear that Thompson relishes the items more for the associations they conjure of time spent with family and friends. The bowl tickets remind him of Wake's Cinderella season and his college buddies, while the Harvick helmet was one of the last gifts Thompson received from his late mother, Alfreda. "Collecting," he said, "is a way to relive memories and keep them alive."



Wesleyan's campus in winter

Photo by Dr. Carl Lewis.

SPORTS

Sports Briefs: Men's Hoops Takes Down Top Seed for USA-S Title

The men's basketball team claimed the USA South tournament title and qualified for the NCAA regionals by defeating top-seeded Pfeiffer University February 28 on the road.

Playing a time-high 36 minutes, guard Rashod Smith led the way with 24 points, six assists and three steals. Forward Justin Burden grabbed five rebounds and shot 70 percent from the field for 17 points.

Burden said the team's reaction was somewhat muted right after the game, noting that there was a sense of both pride and relief among his teammates. But the celebration really began on the bus ride back home. "The energy was high, with music playing and guys replaying big moments from the game," he said.

Facing Pfeiffer for the third time this year, Wesleyan recovered from a sluggish start. Pfeiffer jumped to a 11-2 lead, but Wesleyan sliced the margin to three points, 34-31 at half time.

The Bishops took control midway through the second half. Following

a steal by Nasir Johnson, Deejaay Cox made a layup to put Wesleyan ahead, 56-54, at the 10:43 mark and the team maintained a slight edge the rest of the way, with Smith making six clutch free throws to seal the win.

Wesleyan had entered the conference tournament as the second seed, after finishing 11-3 in the regular season (21-7 overall), one game behind Pfeiffer (17-9). In the semi-finals, the Bishops defeated Southern Virginia, 84-81, at home. Burden, shooting 75 percent from the field, exploded for a game-high 27 points and collected six rebounds. He was one of five Bishops to score in double figures.

That victory set up the title game in Misenheimer, North Carolina. During the regular season, the Bishops and the Falcons split their two games, each winning at home.

Playing at Everett Gym on January 3, Wesleyan beat Pfeiffer, 80-79, with James Jones scoring a team-high 21 points.

Four weeks later, the Falcons thumped the Bishops, 98-79, getting 16 fast-break points and 13 points off turnovers.

"When we played them at home," Burden said, "we controlled the tempo and were more disciplined on defense. When we went to Pfeiffer, they sped us up and forced us into rushed possessions. We didn't handle their pressure well, and they capitalized on our turnovers in transition."

Burden added that the Bishops learned a lesson from their previous trip to Misenheimer, where they knew they would encounter a raucous partisan crowd. "The earlier experience helped us handle that environment much better this time," Burden said. "Their home crowd was loud and intense and they fed off every run Pfeiffer made. But instead of letting that rattle us, we used it as motivation. We stayed locked in on each other and the game plan."

Burden said his team was composed and disciplined. "We valued the ball, executed our sets, and made sure we got quality shots instead of quick ones," he said. "On defense, we were more connected. We communicated better on switches, contested shots without fouling, and limited second chance opportunities."

Asked what it will take for the Bishops to advance in the NCAA regionals, Burden said consistency will be the key, on both offense and defense. "We have to defend at a high level for 40 minutes, rebound as a unit, and limit turnovers," he explained. "In tournament play, every possession matters. On offense, we need to trust our spacing, move the ball side to side, and take the best shot rather than the first shot available."

Burden believes that Wesleyan's team depth will be an asset. "Different players have stepped up in different moments this season," he noted, "and that balance makes us harder to scout."

UPDATE: In the first round of the NCAA regionals, Wesleyan faced Randolph-Macon College (27-4), the dominant team in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference. Playing in Ashland, Virginia on March 6, the Bishops fell behind 40-32 at half time before the Yellow Jackets took control in the second half, winning 76-52. Markquan Gilbert (15) and Nasir Johnson (11) were the only Bishops to score in double figures, as the team shot 28 percent from the field in the second period.

Women's Basketball Loses Heartbreaker

Southern Virginia rallied in the fourth quarter to edge Wesleyan, 74-71, in the semi-final round of the conference tournament at Buena Vista, Virginia.

Wesleyan forward Dorinda Jordan led the way with 19 points, 10 rebounds and six steals. Four other Bishops scored in double figures.

Playing on the road, Wesleyan led by four points, 55-51, at the end of the third quarter. But SVU tied the game early in the fourth quarter on two foul shots and then opened a four-point lead with just under five minutes remaining.

Showing their resilience, Wesleyan retook control of the game and led by five, 70-65, after a jump shot by Anaya Hall with 1:15 remaining. SVU trimmed the lead to 71-69 on two foul shots by Abigail Snyder with 23 seconds left. Moments later SVU's Aysia Foster stole the ball and converted a layup and the ensuing foul shot to give her team a one-point edge at the nine-second mark. Following

a missed three-pointer by Ansley Griffin, a Wesleyan foul led to two more points by the home team.

The Bishops had advanced to the semi-finals by thumping Greensboro, 91-69, at home in the first round of the tournament. Against the Pride, Wesleyan's leading scorers were Hall with 18 points and Ansley Griffin (17), while Jordan tallied 14 points and a team-high 12 rebounds.

Wesleyan finished 12-6 in the conference and 15-11 overall, the seventh consecutive winning season for Head Coach Artina Trader.

Lacrosse Wins 2 in Row

The Bishops earned rookie head coach Robert Simpson his first win, beating Randolph, 12-8, at home on February 28. Senior Maxima Iglesias was dominant on offense, leading the team with seven goals and three assists. Kelsi Oyer tallied three goals and Nicole Triassi recorded two.

A week later, the Bishops vanquished rival William Peace at home, 14-4, as the same trio led the team on offense. Iglesias paced the team with six goals and five assists. Triassi scored five times and Oyer added two goals and an assist. Goalkeeper Elizabeth Daniels made three saves in the victory.

Wesleyan's two-match win streak ended March 14 in Buena Vista, Virginia, as the short-handed Bishops lost to a powerful Southern Virginia squad, 20-0. The opposing goalkeeper, Savanna Burnett, had an easy day, facing zero shots on goal, as Wesleyan competed the entire match with just 11 athletes, one short of the full compliment.

Wesleyan began the season with losses to Montreat, Warren Wilson and conference foe Brevard.



Lacrosse midfielder/attack Maxima Iglesias.

Baseball Struggles In Early Going

The Bishops baseball team edged Greensboro, 14-13, on the road March 15 to salvage the last game of a weekend series, their first in USA South action this season. The Pride took games one and two by scores 21-14 and 3-2.

In the series finale, Maison Nance and Schumata Brown each drove in three runs for Wesleyan, which took advantage of four Greensboro errors. Second baseman Malachi Hayes said Sunday's victory was vital. "It really boosted our team's energy," he said. "We had a hard non-conference schedule so to come out and do what we did today was incredible."

Hayes was proud of the way his team battled back. Greensboro led, 11-4, after six innings before the Bishops tallied 10 runs in the last three innings. Hayes said Wesleyan needs to maintain the same mindset as it strives to rise in the USA South. "We need to stay up when we

have a rough inning," Hayes said. "Coach Clifton always says, 'You got punched in the mouth; how are you going to respond?' Sunday's game was a perfect example. We were down by quite a bit, but we responded big time to come back and win."

Noting that the team plays its next eight games at home, Hayes said the Bishops hope to build on their win and "keep it rolling."

Wesleyan's overall record stands at 3-13 after it went 2-10 in non-conference action.

So far the pitching staff's cumulative earned run average is 6.68.

Softball 9-6-1 in Non-Conference Action

The softball team won eight of nine during spring break on the way to a 9-6-1 non-conference record. It begins the conference season March 21 when it hosts a double-header with Pfeiffer.

In the early going, the Bishops have featured a balanced offense as four players have hit over .320 and driven in at least 12 runs: Ragan Holoman, Brooke Markiewicz, Kayla Simmons and Kyiah Simmons.

Coach John Brackett is in his 35th season at the helm. He has led the Bishops to more than 800 wins.

Tennis Finds Success In Memphis

The men's and women's tennis teams turned in strong performances during a spring trip break to Rhodes College in Memphis.

The women lost their first match to the host school, 6-3, but rebounded to take their next two, 5-1 over Hendrix College, and 9-0 over DePauw University. Wesleyan's top three singles players, Andrea Elaez Miranda, Bethan Fothergill and Renata Torres, each won both matches against Hendrix and DePauw.

The Wesleyan men swept all three matches against the same teams. The number-three doubles pair, Brody Brice and Largo Koch, won all three of their matches, while the new number-one duo, Adam Singleton and Ben Russell won two of three. Singleton, Albert Sitwell and Farhaan Patrawala were all undefeated in singles action.

COACH from pg 1

He earned a degree at Wake Tech, where he focused on CAD (computer-aided design); he's now looking for a job in mechanical engineering. My wife, Christy, chairs the math department at Riverside High School in Durham.

Our family rituals revolve around our active participation in our church. We also enjoy going to the beach—Oak Island is a favorite destination—with extended family. When we get together, besides enjoying the beach, we love to play board games like Trivial Pursuit and Pit.

Q. What are your hobbies?

A. I enjoy reading, writing and weightlifting/physical fitness.

Q. List your favorites:

BOOK: I like "The Firm" by John Grisham. And I'm an avid reader of theology and philosophy.

SPORTS TEAMS: Duke and Penn State.

MOVIES: "St. Elmo's Fire," "With Honors," and "Family Man."

TV SHOWS: "Paper Chase," "Family Ties," and "Boston Legal."

MUSIC ARTIST: Phil Collins and other 80's artists.

CUISINE: Italian.

SOCIAL MEDIA: For the most part, I use Facebook to stay connected to friends and family who are scattered around the country.



2026 USA South Conference Champs.

SI photos

TODD

from pg 1

and athletically and began to appreciate her college experience.

One of Todd's favorite college memories was off the field—taking trips to Myrtle Beach tournaments during spring break. "Our bus rides were always the best," she said. "Just being with the team, that's what made it special."

After years of competition, physical wear and tear led Todd to step away from playing her final season of softball. Even so, she remained closely connected to the team, attending games and supporting her friends.

She graduated early with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice in December 2023 and chose to remain at Wesleyan to pursue her master's degree, which she completed in November 2024.

"I knew I wanted to get my master's, and since I was already here, it made sense to just finish," she said.

During graduate school, Todd explored career paths within criminal justice, including an internship with Child Protective Services in Nash County. The experience proved emotionally taxing and eventually helped her recognize that working in that environment long-term would be difficult.

"That was rough," Todd said. "I realized I was too soft-hearted to see things like that every day."

After earning her master's degree, she accepted a remote position conducting online investigative work. While she found aspects of the job interesting, she soon realized it did not align with her long-term passion.

When Todd was offered the opportunity to return to Wesleyan in a professional role, she made a career change. By 2026, she had become the university's Director of Sports Communications.

In her current position, Todd manages the athletics website,

oversees game statistics, updates schedules and rosters, coordinates team headshots, assists with social media and covers basketball and spring sports. Much of her work happens behind the scenes, ensuring information is accurate and accessible for athletes and fans.

"I do a lot on the back end," Todd said. "Now that I've got basketball stats down, it's super fun."

When it comes to her work, she said her approach has been influenced by her experience as a Wesleyan student-athlete. Having once balanced practices, games and academics herself, she understands the pressure today's athletes face.

"I love supporting our athletes because I know how hard it is," she said. "Even if I'm the only one out there, I want them to know someone is supporting them."

When she is not working, Todd enjoys a variety of hobbies. She likes cooking and trying new recipes. Her favorite sport is college baseball (she's a dedicated fan of the Tar Heels) and her preferred exercise is walking, which she does while listening to Tate McRae and Lil Wayne, as well as her favorite podcast, "The Viall Files." Todd said she just loves to get outdoors. "Having this alone time is very peaceful to me," she said.

Living in the area allows Todd to visit her sister Taylor, a freshman at UNC-Chapel Hill, and her sister Robin and her family in Raleigh. Wesleyan has also shaped Todd's personal life. Like her older sister, she met her significant other on campus. Her boyfriend, Tyson Bass, a former Wesleyan baseball player before he transferred, just finished his final season on the UNC team. The couple have been together for four years.

Looking back, Todd sees her return to Wesleyan as more than coincidence. "I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't ended up here," she said. "Everything led me back home."