New Leaders Welcome Parents

As the cochairs of your parents organization, we extend a hearty welcome to the parents of the class of 2006 and new transfer students. We look forward to meeting you on arrival day on August 26. We, along with other parent volunteers, will be at the Parents Council Table at the Student Resources Pavilion/Family Lounge. Please drop by to say hello.

We invite you to participate fully in the Wesleyan community. We believe that you will find Wesleyan to be a very exciting and rewarding experience for both your student and yourself. Importantly, your involvement can make a significant difference. For example, the issues discussed in this issue of ParentLine are in direct response to parent questions and discussions.

Help us continue the dialogue between parents and the university. Join us for both Volunteer Weekend (Sept. 13–14) and Homecoming/Family Weekend (Oct. 18–20). We invite you to join other parents, students, alumni, faculty and staff, as actively engaged members of this exciting community!

Carol and Jim Blann, P’04
Executive Committee Cochairs

Surprises: A Mom and Daughter Compare Notes

Mom: How excitingly diverse a student body could be.
Daughter: Definitely. I feel that relative to other universities Wesleyan makes great efforts to create a student body that is rich in socio-economic diversity. And, surprisingly to me, I became an actress and a dancer at Wesleyan.

Mom: No required gym.
Daughter: Thank you. Although I beefed up my 110-lb. body. (And 8:30 is way too early for a class.)

Mom: Where are the elderly Dorm Mothers who kept my classmates’ gentleman callers in the lobby? And where is Wednesday afternoon tea with a silver service and white gloves in the sitting room?
Daughter: The times have definitely changed.

Mom: Where are the weekly clean-up-your-room inspections we used to have at college?
Daughter: That’s my mom’s way of saying my room was disgustingly messy.

Mom: How can her room at home still be so full and in a shambles, given that she took four tons of stuff with her to her dorm room?
Daughter: Ditto my above reply. (N.B. You do not have to take home all of your stuff over winter break.)

Mom: How expensive the slimmest of textbooks can be.
Daughter: Yeah, $90 for a paperback textbook.

Mom: No first-day-of-freshman year posture photos (in underwear) or elocution-and-voice-projection placement tests.
Daughter: What were they training you for at that school?

Mom: How much an entering freshman class has already accomplished and attained in the outside world of art, science, athletics.
Daughter: It’s true, but you sound like an advertisement.

Mom: How glad I am to be on this side of that often-tumultuous developmental phase but also how I wish I could do it again.

Mother: How mature and self-sufficient and poised she was when she came home at the end of the year.
Daughter: Thanks, Mom.

Ellen P’05 and Laura ’05

ParentLine

Parent to Parent Note: As I researched the articles in this issue, I was impressed by Wesleyan’s caring, openness, and accessibility to students’ problems and parents’ concerns. Thus, I urge you, if you have concerns or questions relating to your son or daughter, do not hesitate to call or send an e-mail. Chris Ridout

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The Parents Council
The Parents Council was instituted in 1994 to help parents communicate with the University and among themselves, and to assist Wesleyan in providing the best education and experiences for its students. All parents are automatically members of the Parents Council. The council receives administrative support from the director of parent programs, Office of University Relations.

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Meg Zocco, Director, Parent Programs
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Special Events Committee
Ellen and Arthur Sinkman (Parents ’05)
New Rochelle, NY

Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>19 Mon.</td>
<td>International undergraduate students arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 Mon.</td>
<td>Class of 2006, new transfer, visiting and exchange students arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 Tues.</td>
<td>Students returning from leaves and study abroad and readmitted students arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28 Wed.</td>
<td>Course registration for students returning from leaves, study abroad, new transfer and exchange students and readmitted students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29 Thurs.</td>
<td>Course registration for Class of 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 Fri.</td>
<td>On-campus enrollment period for undergraduates begins, 8:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 Sat.</td>
<td>University housing opens for all undergraduates, 9 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3 Tues.</td>
<td>Classes begin</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drop/add period begins</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On-campus enrollment period for undergraduates ends, 5 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 Thurs.</td>
<td>Drop/add period ends, 5 p.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13–14 Fri–Sat</td>
<td>Volunteer Weekend</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>12–15 Sat–Tues</td>
<td>Fall break</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18–20 Fri–Sun</td>
<td>Homecoming/Family Weekend</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>24–25 Sun–Mon</td>
<td>Sons &amp; Daughters Program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 Tues.</td>
<td>Thanksgiving recess begins at the end of class day</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>2 Mon.</td>
<td>Thanksgiving recess ends, 8 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Mon.</td>
<td>Undergraduate classes end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10–15 Tues–Sun</td>
<td>Reading period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16–20 Mon–Fri</td>
<td>Undergraduate final examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21 Sat.</td>
<td>University housing closes, Noon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complaints over course selection are like a drumbeat on the Wesleyan campus. Students frequently express dissatisfaction over not getting the courses they want. Naturally, complaints filter to parents who become concerned if they receive too many “I can’t get the courses I want” phone calls. Similarly, course access is part of student culture and students have devised various techniques to beat the system.

Although the complaints are real, the issue is less serious than it first appears. It is helpful for parents and students to step back and view the situation within the context of Wesleyan’s curriculum and educational philosophy. Seen from this perspective, the problem is manageable.

A LIBERAL EDUCATION WITHOUT A CORE CURRICULUM

Wesleyan does not have a core curriculum but is committed to providing a broad liberal arts education. Wesleyan embraces the goals of exposing students to a variety of disciplines while mastering the knowledge and modes of inquiry of a specific discipline. It expects—but does not require—students to become capable in writing, reasoning, quantitative and scientific inquiry, literature, the arts, and cross-cultural understanding. For example, Wesleyan does not encourage a student to take only math and science courses, although it is possible because of the lack of core requirements.

Wesleyan’s expectations are for a student to take three courses in Arts and Humanities, three in Natural Science and Math, and three in Social and Behavioral Sciences. Within each division, at least two courses must be from different departments. Most students (75 percent) fulfill all the expectations and 90 percent of students take at least two courses in each division.

Wesleyan’s commitment to a liberal education without rigid requirements has led to a curriculum frequently described as “broad but not deep”—and this is the juncture where students’ expectations and course access become challenging. Wesleyan’s course offerings are extraordinarily diverse, giving students an opportunity for exposure to subjects they would not otherwise encounter. This is one of Wesleyan’s greatest strengths. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Judith Brown says Wesleyan encourages “tasting,” on the assumption that students may become interested in new areas once exposed to them and

continued on page 2

Who’s Watching My Child: Wesleyan Weaves a Safety Net

By Christine Ridout P’04, PARENTLINE Editor

While our children are home, we keep “an eye on them,” check their “temperature,” “read the signals that say things are going well or something is amiss. But none of this is possible when they leave for college. We’re in the dark. We wonder, “How is my child doing and how will I know if something is wrong? Will my child tell me? If not, who’s watching—or cares—if emotional or academic problems develop? Will someone advise my son or daughter on ways to cope with problems or will they fester in isolation? Will I be informed if serious issues arise?”

The answers to these questions may surprise—and reassure—you. Wesleyan has woven a safety net to attempt to catch emotional and adjustment problems early, to address them appropriately, and, when necessary, to help students cope with a crisis. According to Dr. Philippa Coughlan, Director of the Office of Behavioral Health for Students (OBHS), Wesleyan is committed to helping students learn to deal with difficulties which may compromise their lives at Wesleyan.

An integral part of the safety net entails getting students who need help to use the mental health services. The vast majority of students are self-referred, including those who seek help on the advice of a peer, staff member, dean, or professor.

The system begins in freshman residence halls where Resident Advisors (RAs) are oriented to spot problems. When an RA perceives a problem, he/she may discuss it directly with the student. Sometimes that is all that is necessary, but, when appropriate, the RA may suggest additional help. Jeff Ederer, Director of Residential Life, believes that informal peer counseling is often most effective, but “just in case,” resident advisors are also required to submit an “Address and Report” form to Residential Life. This notifies that office of a student who is having difficulties. The student is then monitored. If the problem(s) is not resolved, intervention by Residential Life professional staff may take place. This most often means getting the student to OBHS.

Dr. Coughlan sees it as a positive aspect of college life at Wesleyan that it is sometimes the advice of a professor that leads a student to seek mental health services. A faculty member may become aware of emotional difficulties because a
COURSE SELECTION, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

that exposure to many fields of inquiry is the essence of a liberal education.

In spite of all the offerings, Wesleyan does not open additional sections once a course is filled and cannot always respond immediately to the latest “hot” topic or “hot” professor—unfortunately, unlike sheep, faculty and courses cannot be cloned!

Caveat: The administration does have sufficient flexibility to add extra sections or courses in response to changing circumstances and each semester assesses course enrollment to respond appropriately. Hence, the disgruntled “I can’t get the courses I want,” a situation that often clashes with students’ perceptions that “no core curriculum” means they can choose anything and it will be available. This is a misperception. What Wesleyan does offer is an amazing smorgasbord from which to choose.

Without a core curriculum, it is often difficult for the administration to anticipate course demand. In contrast, a college with a core curriculum knows that it has 700 first-year students and should therefore plan for 700 spaces in required composition. And, because students know ahead of time what they must take, they don’t feel they’re not getting what they want.

Course availability at Wesleyan is also affected by its commitment to small classes. By definition, small classes limit the number of students who can enroll. If every course were a large lecture format, students would always get what they want but the classroom and learning environment would be very different—another example of a Wesleyan strength that inadvertently feeds the perception of lack of course access.

WHEN A STUDENT’S FIRST CHOICE DOESN’T PAN OUT

When students don’t get their first choices, Wesleyan encourages them to try something new (“Try it, you may like it!”) or to take a course similar to the one that’s closed. For example, if a course on German history is unavailable, the student could opt for German politics or literature. This is the theory behind WesMaps, an online tool that helps students identify clusters of courses by topic (online at www.wesleyan.edu/course). Hopefully, a second or third choice will work for the student. But...

Speaking as a parent, I suspect a problem arises when a student enrolls in a second, third—or even fourth—choice (sometimes under the duress of an approaching deadline or at the urging of an advisor) and ends up not liking it. A student may react with “I don’t like this course, I never wanted to take it but they made me and I’m stuck. Why can’t I get courses I want?” In the heat of the moment, there is often little a parent or advisor can do to ease the student’s angst except to urge him or her to stick with it, to evaluate the situation from a broader perspective. But, from a student’s perspective, the problem is real, and sometimes a student’s whole semester is colored by being in a course he or she dislikes. In such a situation, a student will complain vociferously about the seeming contradiction between “no core curriculum” and “I don’t get what I want.” Students have also developed a “beg and pester” culture to beat the system. This goes something like, “If I beg and pester a professor long enough, he/she will let me in.” This is tough on faculty and seldom works.

Wesleyan has, however, worked hard to ameliorate the problem. Paula Lawson, associate provost, notes that techniques are available for students to get close to their first choice. Lawson urges parents to encourage their sons or daughters to explore Wesleyan’s curriculum. Students should examine course clusters (WesMaps) or consider new disciplines. For example, students could consider a literature in translation course in addition to English.

Both Brown and Lawson also say students need to be open to taking courses at different times of the day and week. Course offerings have been spread throughout the day and week, but if students insist on courses between 10:00 and 2:00 on Monday and Wednesday, their choices will be limited. Wesleyan also has instituted an online waitlist so students can indicate, directly to faculty, their top priorities as spaces open during the drop-add period.

Somehow, the issue of course selection has become entrenched in Wesleyan’s culture. Seen from a new vantage point, however, the issue is not as serious as it first appears. Wesleyan continually reassesses its course offerings, making additions and deletions as appropriate. Lawson notes that limited course access is a reality at many similar universities. She hopes that in the near future the depth and diversity of Wesleyan’s curriculum will be more fully appreciated. Parents can help by emphasizing to their sons or daughters the opportunities available in the curriculum. As Judith Brown says, we should remind our children that not getting their first choice is not the end of the world—and may be, in fact, the beginning of something new!

THE PARENTS FUND: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Thanks to the help of our volunteer callers, and the participation of Wesleyan parents, the Parents Fund had a record-breaking year. During fiscal year 2002, the Parents Fund (annual unrestricted dollars) raised $433,600 from 866 non-alumni parent households. Dollars raised through the Parents Fund will help fund a number of university priorities, including financial aid, student services, and faculty resources.

Your generosity allows Wesleyan to continue providing an excellent education for our students, who are among the best and brightest in the land.

Thank you again for your continued support and vote of confidence.

Richard Crockford ‘04
Parents Fund Chair

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Dollars Raised</th>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>$380,217</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$433,600</td>
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student’s class behavior changes. For example, class attendance may fluctuate or homework assignments may be irregularly submitted. A faculty member may choose to notify a dean in order to be sure that someone will reach out to the student. In another instance, a student who appears distressed and discusses personal problems with a particular professor on a regular basis may be advised by that professor to seek help through OBHS. This referral process can take different forms. It can be as specific as a professor picking up the phone and requesting that the student be given an appointment “as soon as possible,” or, in rare instances, the professor may think the situation urgent enough to accompany the student to the office of OBHS. When such urgency is clearly communicated, OBHS will see the student within an hour to an hour and a half.

The Dean of the College believes that it is helpful to her office to have the admission files of incoming students read by her staff. Dean Freddy Hill notes that if a student addressed a mental health problem or recent family crisis in his application, her office makes a point of mentioning it to other people who may have regular contact with the student. For example, a class dean, aware of prior problems, may casually say to a student, “How are things going?” This, in the best of all scenarios, gives a student an opening to discuss difficulties in a supportive environment. Sometimes it’s a simple problem the dean can help resolve, but if it’s more serious, the dean will refer the student to OBHS.

Prior to arriving on campus, students are asked to complete and mail to Wesleyan a broad-based medical questionnaire together with a shorter form dealing only with mental health issues. This latter form is completely voluntary and information thus obtained is not circulated outside of OBHS. The value of this information is analogous to making a bank deposit. The information revealed is on reserve so that the student is better served should some need occur and they wish to use OBHS’ services. It should be stressed that not all students who encounter difficulties at Wesleyan are those with a prior history. Those students have frequently faced problems and developed effective coping mechanisms. Other students, however, may develop problems in response to the stresses of university life, leaving home, etc.

A less likely scenario is that a student’s difficulties surface because he/she becomes disruptive to campus life or cannot function in class or the residence halls. Dean Hill refers to this as an “event” which is an immediate red flag that the student is in trouble. In this case, the university intervenes and OBHS may have an opportunity to evaluate the problem and an appropriate institutional decision is made as to how to proceed. Most times, with treatment, or other intervention, a student can continue functioning in the university environment.

In rare incidents, students’ difficulties are serious enough to require they leave campus. In this case, a medical leave is recommended and the university follows through to be sure the student gets the best professional help available at home (or elsewhere). Wesleyan doesn’t just wave goodbye and send best wishes—Wesleyan’s OBHS works with the student and family to help achieve the best outcome. Ongoing communication with the university is particularly important if a student plans to return to campus.

There are several caveats to the system. First, no one can force a student into therapy. Second, mental health professionals never divulge the nature of a student’s problems or information derived from psychotherapy sessions (these are privileged communications). Even in those instances when a medical leave is deemed by the Behavioral Health experts to be necessary, the recommendation is made only to the Dean of the College and without any specific details included or expected. It is the Office of the Dean of the College that enacts the leave.

The psychotherapists at OBHS are not permitted, either by law or ethics, to inform parents that a student is in treatment with OBHS without the student’s explicit permission. The law is clear that anyone over 18 in the State of Connecticut is classified as an adult for the purpose of being entitled to confidentiality unless he or she explicitly signs a release. The issue of informing parents is sensitive and not without complications. OBHS believes that when parents are aware of the student’s circumstances, that awareness becomes an added resource for the student, and so the department recommends that students talk with their parents and bring them into the problem resolution process if possible.

In the rare instances when a student is considered a serious threat to himself or others, the law allows the licensed mental health provider to break confidentiality and to inform, in this sequence, appropriate authorities and the family. The Dean of the College may then be the one best situated to notify the parents and/or take other necessary action. The Dean of the College notes that this is an extraordinarily difficult decision but that it is essential to balance a student’s right to privacy with the needs of the larger community. If the Dean of the College or other designated deans are the first ones to learn of this serious situation, they will likely say to the student, “Let’s call your parents together.” Sometimes, this is all that is needed. Dr. Coughlan emphasizes that when a student takes a medical leave, he or she does not simply arrive on the family doorstep—rather, parents need to be notified and, as stated earlier, an effective and reasonable plan for treatment worked out.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:
The Office of Behavioral Health for Students has had, undoubtedly, the greatest overall experience with students who are dealing with emotional problems. It makes three major recommendations for parents to consider and take seriously.

1. You probably know your son or daughter better than anyone else. If you have a sense that “something” is not right, trust your instincts. This may stem from a change in phone-home frequency or a change in the student’s availability to receive calls from home or just “something” you as a parent can’t quite put a name to but that has you concerned. Without an exhaustive roster of possible causes—let’s just say you are concerned, what do you do? Here are a couple of suggestions.

   • If time and distance make it at all feasible, pop in and see your son/daughter. Make it pleasant—that is, don’t dump your concern as the opening gambit—go for a walk or get a bite to eat—but get them by themselves and talk. It’s funny but often kids (of all ages) loosen up and talk more in a car ride. See for yourself.

   • If you think it’s serious, try taking him/her home for a couple of days—call it “R & R.” If classes and/or tests are going
to be missed, be sure his/her class dean or the faculty know he/she will be missing those obligations.

• Or, alternatively, urge a visit to OBHS—remind them you’ve paid for it (the Health Fee) and it’s only good consumerism.

• Or try calling OBHS yourself if the trip to Wesleyan is not possible—the therapists are available to discuss concerns and options (without divulging any information if indeed the student is already seeing someone in the service). In fact, you would be put through to someone definitely not your student’s therapist (this is determined when you first introduce yourself and give your student’s name).

2. Apart from a specific emotional meltdown, if your son/daughter says he/she does not want to return to school in the fall or next semester, be supportive first and explore the situation at leisure. People don’t always know why they don’t feel right about doing something—like returning to school—they just know they don’t feel right about it. It has been the experience at OBHS that when students say, “I shouldn’t go back…” but do go back, it is most often a less than positive experience. The critical aspect of time out of college is that it be determined when you first introduce yourself and give your student’s name).

3. If a medical leave is recommended by OBHS, please take the recommendation seriously—they do, and have a great deal of experience to support their recommendations. Sometimes parents become so persuaded by their son/daughter’s desire to stay at school that the parents put all their efforts as a counter weight to what the mental health experts are encouraging the student to do. Wesleyan is a demanding academic environment and it is not always wise, never mind possible, to deal effectively with two serious and time-consuming undertakings: school and wrestling to resolve emotional issues.

Wesleyan wants students to be successful in life. Sometimes that means a student must address the personal issues first in order to perform better academically. See page 5—Resources for Parents

PARENT AND ALUMNI VOLUNTEER WEEKEND
Join us at Wesleyan on September 13–14, 2002, to talk about volunteering for Wesleyan, both on and off campus. You’ll hear about admission, career resources, parents fund, special events, and PARENTLINE opportunities. For more information, please see www.wesleyan.edu/volunteerweekend or contact Camille Dolansky: 860/685-3756 or cdolansky@wesleyan.edu.

HOMECOMING/FAMILY WEEKEND IN THE FALL
Mark your calendars for October 18–20, 2002, make your overnight reservations and plan to be on campus for a weekend of enrichment and fun, as the Wesleyan community celebrates together. You’re encouraged to attend the Parents Council open meeting on Sunday morning, October 20. A preliminary schedule of events will be posted on Wesleyan’s Web site at www.wesleyan.edu/hcfw/, and mailed to all families in late August.

SONS & DAUGHTERS PROGRAM: PREPARING FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS, NOVEMBER 24–25, 2002
This unique program helps prepare high school students and their parents for the college admission process. For more information, please see www.wesleyan.edu/sonsanddaughters or contact Camille Dolansky: 860/685-3756 or cdolansky@wesleyan.edu.

DINING REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT
Read about the recent comprehensive review of Wesleyan’s dining program at www.wesleyan.edu/deans/dining.html.

NEW RESIDENTIAL SMOKING POLICY IMPLEMENTED
To review Wesleyan’s new residential smoking policy, see http://www.wesleyan.edu/reslife/SmokingPolicy4-02.htm.

AIRPORT SHUTTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE
For information on the fall 2002 airport shuttle schedule, check out www.wesleyan.edu/studserv/shuttle2003.html.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENTS ’03, ’04, AND ’05
Join us in making welcome calls to parents of incoming first-year and transfer students. No experience necessary, except for being a Wesleyan parent. For more information or to sign up, go to www.wesleyan.edu/parents/fallcall.html.

EDITOR’S NOTE:
This issue of PARENTLINE is atypical because I wrote most of it—nice for me because it is the first time an editor has not quarreled with my writing. However, this is your newsletter and I am only the editor. We urge all parents to either write or contribute article ideas to PARENTLINE and we welcome suggestions. Please feel free to contact me, Meg Zocco or Camille Dolansky. I look forward to working with you.

Chris Ridout