

'Big T' Helps Make Unique Program A Real Help

Peer Counseling Assists Students At WPCCC

(Editor's Note: This is a report prepared by the N. C. Department of Community Colleges and distributed to newspapers throughout the state regarding a special program at Burke County's Western Piedmont Community College).

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When the students at Western Piedmont Community College comment about the distinguishing characteristic of their institution, their almost unanimous response is, "We are at home here."

This consensus is no happen-chance condition. It is one of the prime goals of the college's administration. President Gordon Blank identifies the dedication of the college administrators, faculty, and trustees to the development of the individual student's sense of worth as one of the most significant objectives of the institution.

Mrs. Nancy Moore, director of Student Services, who coordinates the work of the registrar and three professional counselors, attributes the effectiveness of Student Personnel Services to the commitment of both the professionals and the students who work with them.

A distinctive aspect of Western Piedmont's Student Services is a "peer counselor," a student who was initially employed 15 hours weekly as a work-study assistant. Miss Irma Dantzler, a professional counselor, explains that this year's peer counselor began what was to be a 15-hour work week that became a 40-hour work week.

Terry Whisnant, "Big T", an army veteran whose training had included psychological warfare, enrolled at Western Piedmont with plans to major in humanistic psychology. He is a graduate of Drexel High and plans to transfer to West Georgia College to complete his degree in psychology.

"Big T" (so-called because his wife, a graduate of Western Piedmont, is also named Terry

and called "Little T") expects to complete his studies at Western Piedmont this year.

Among the students who have worked with him and the college counselors are Julia Harris and Millen McNeeley. Julia, confined to a wheelchair, plans to carry on with some of the services provided her by other students during her sophomore year at Western Piedmont and later transfer to St. Andrews College to major in psychology. Students attest to the benefits of tutoring services, both those who seek help and those who tutor.

William Hooper, newly-elected president of the Jaycee chapter of the local unit of the Department of Corrections and student at Western Piedmont, has, according to the college counselors, rendered valuable service to other inmate-students and has expressed an interest in devoting more time to peer counseling under the direction of the college counselors during his second year as a student.

Cynthia Whalen, editor of the college newspaper, also has expressed interest in the college's peer counseling program.

Miss Iram Dantzler, who supervises the peer counseling program, explains that the professional counselors on the staff make no referrals to Terry, but that students voluntarily come to him to "talk out" problems that they will not discuss with anyone else. Terry insists that he is not an adviser, but an interested listener.

Counselor Dantzler says that "Big T" has worked with a fierce devotion toward creating a fraternal atmosphere at Western Piedmont, but he is

quick to explain that it really should not be classified as work.

He says his interest in the happiness of people around him prompted him to assist the counselors and that his greatest reward is the return visits from Western Piedmont graduates or the trust demonstrated by the prison inmates.

A front page article in the final issue of the college newspaper represents the thinking of the student body. Entitled "Wanted: Someone to Fill His Moccasins," it is a warm tribute to a man who stands tall among his fellow students and whose smile and eyes radiate his concern for people.

One of the areas in which Western Piedmont's outreach counseling program is making a significant contribution is the extension of the college's counseling program into the local unit of the Department of Correction. Terry always accompanies counselor Dantzler when she visits the local prison.

The prison officials have provided them with a classroom for group counseling and have encouraged the exploration of the potential for future vocational training. Miss Dantzler says that the prisoners come when they want to and that they have been receptive.

One 48-year-old man, convinced that he can help others by his personal testimony, has asked "Big T" to tape the story of his life.

Another prisoner has learned to read and write through the instruction of the Continuing Education Department so that he now can handle his own personal correspondence. Although this outreach program is officially a once-a-week counseling service, Mrs. Moore explains that the prisoners often call Miss Dantzler or Terry at their homes to talk over individual problems, and that some, after release, continue to keep in touch.

Besides this academic work and his counseling services, "Big T" has edited the college's yearbook, for which he did the bulk of the photography. His most fascinating project, according to the college administrators, has been "The Flick," a multi-media program using six movie screens with an acid-rock sound track. The

program has received widespread recognition from numerous groups in several states. After each showing of "the Flick," Miss Dantzler and Terry preside over group discussions which range from open hostility to commendation.

Basic to the peer counseling and outreach features of Student Services in a guidance program designed to serve each student at Western Piedmont. Each student is given Comparative Guidance and Placement Tests to assist students and counselors in planning programs tailored to individual needs.

Counselors Earl Duncan and Dick Fisher interview each student, explaining test results, answering questions, and exploring interests. Terry Whisnant explains that an important function of the guidance program is student orientation. Beginning freshmen are invited to the campus in small groups and are given complete tours by students. Each new student gets to know students familiar with campus routine and locations.

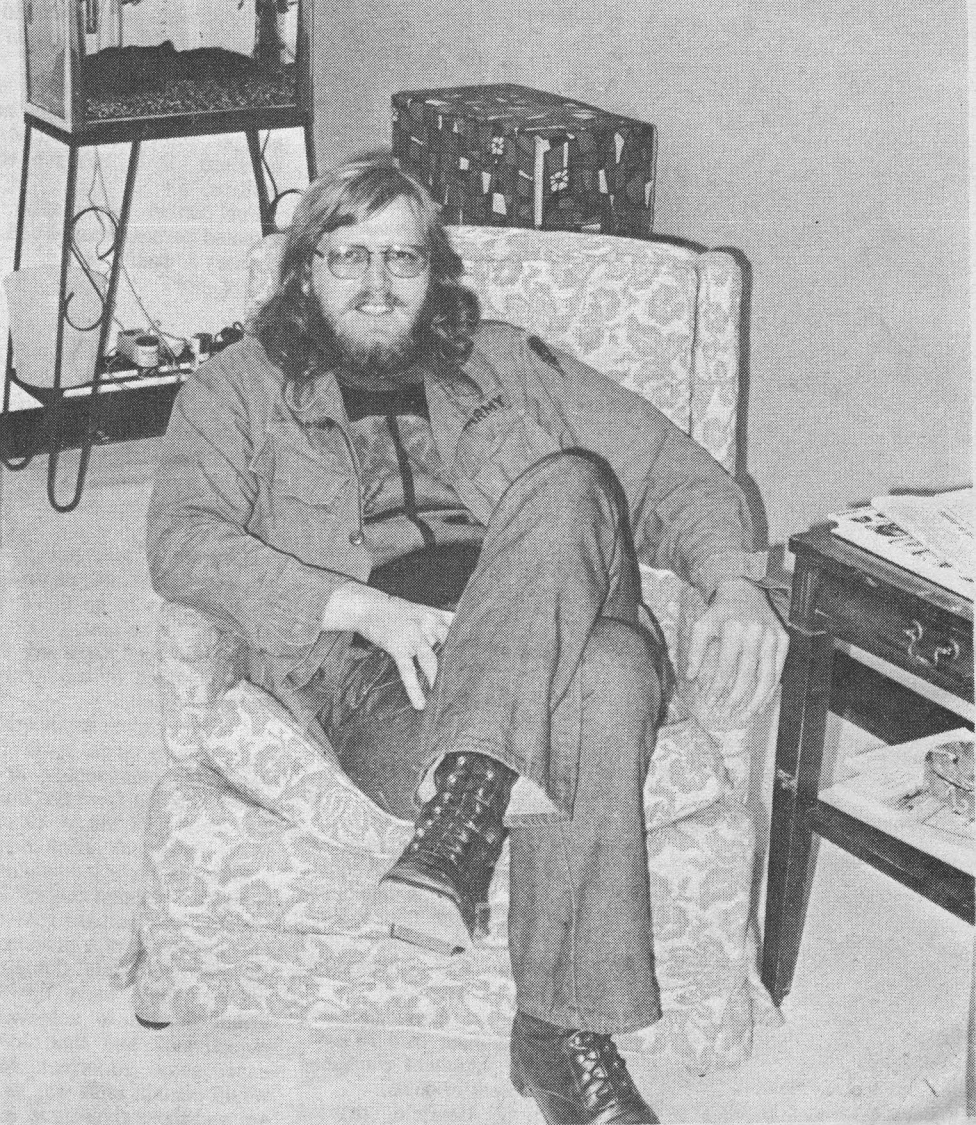
"Big T" says that on registration day, student "helpers" are stationed appropriately and trained to detect students who show indications of confusion. Often, he says, students will accompany newcomers through the registration process and introduce them to other students with similar schedules so that they are more readily "at home."

Any student who is registered in two courses of guided studies, courses for students needing additional preparation in some academic areas, is automatically assigned to a course in applied psychology, taught by Miss Dantzler. She does not use a textbook, but aspires for an in-depth analysis of the particular problems of each student in the class and a sharing of the common problems.

An out-of-town visitor to Western Piedmont Community College is immediately struck by the beauty of the campus and the friendly warmth of faculty and

students. A brief visit provides many clues to its success as a community college, one of those being the attribute that it

D. Moretz calls "caring."



Terry Whisnant, "Big T," Western Piedmont's peer counselor.



William Hooper, Department of Correction Jaycee president, chats with Cynthia Whalen, editor of

Western Piedmont's student newspaper.