

# WPCC president's statement

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Here is the complete text of the letter from Dr. Wilmon Droze to Robert Carr, chairman of the trustees of Western Piedmont Community College, asking that his contract not be renewed.

Dear Mr. Carr:

Please be advised that for personal and professional reasons, I respectfully request that my contractual relationship with the board of trustees of Western Piedmont Community College cease at its terminal date of June 30, 1981.

I am especially proud of the progress that has been made at Western Piedmont since I came in July, 1979. While the years of my presidency have not been uneventful, it should be observed that change inevitably produces both stress and productive results. In meetings of the board, I have endeavored to keep the members informed of the forward steps we have taken together. I deem it appropriate to review some of those achievements herein.

First, and absolutely essential to institutional stability, is the progress that has been made in reversing the trend in enrollment decline. Between the fall of 1977 and fall of 1980, head count in curriculum programs increased from 1,469 to 1,726. In December, 1980, the Department of Community Colleges informed me that Western Piedmont was one of 39 colleges which was entitled to a share of the DCC funds which are reserved for enrollment increases of three percent or more. Increased enrollment translates as more FTE dollars which enables Western Piedmont to afford more instructors who in turn can be assigned to teach a larger array of courses. It goes without saying that more courses mean more educational opportunities for the people of Burke County.

A second major change for the better has been the new emphasis placed on the expansion of the college curriculum in order to accomplish a balanced educational mission and to provide opportunities for those people who seek training for entering the job market. In 1979-80 we developed and implemented two-year curriculum programs in Fine Arts and General Education, and a one-year curriculum program in Machinist Training. In 1980-81, a one-year curriculum in Secretarial Science, a one-quarter program for Health Care Technician, and a two-year program for Security and Loss Prevention have been implemented. Still other programs are being developed as resources permit.

## Flexibility

While new programs are being initiated each quarter, old programs which may have lost their viability are being reassessed to determine whether they should be continued. When it becomes necessary to phase out a program much discussion and travail should be expected. It must be realized that abandoning old programs in favor of new ones, designed to fit the needs of an ever changing service area, is a necessity for a community college. Therefore, a college's administration must have operational flexibility which is not circumscribed by static policies or self interest which impede innovation and stifle the mission of the college.

My third area of progress is that of intercollegiate athletics. With board approval and support and student concurrence in 1979, we began athletic programs in basketball, golf, tennis and cross-country track. We are now members of the Western Tarheel Athletic Conference and did reasonably well in competition against our area's sister institutions. A 40-passenger bus was acquired, rebuilt, and is now in use by both athletic personnel and classroom instructors. The athletic program has produced greater student interest in Western Piedmont as a place to go to school, and provided opportunities for many students who probably would never have enrolled in college to compete in athletics after high school. Some of our athletes have earned a chance to go to four-year institutions — a chance which was not available to many young Burke County athletes prior to 1979.

I am especially pleased with the success we have had in redeveloping more efficiently operated food and bookstore services. Commissions from both of those auxiliary enterprises have increased dramatically and the quality of the services offered have practically eliminated a constant and continuing source of complaints from both students and faculty. In accord with college policies, these ventures are self-supporting and funds derived from these are spent for college activities.

Still another index of successful growth is how other professional groups regard our programs. During these past 12 months, our programs in Dental Assisting, Medical Office Assistance and Nursing have maintained or achieved accredited status. Many of us are still a bit heady about being the fifth two-year nursing program in North Carolina to be accredited. Some 28 programs currently exist. We are expected to initiate the self-study for re-accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the fall of 1981. It will be spring, 1983 before we can expect a Visiting Committee. I know of no reason why we cannot expect re-accreditation in 1983. I would urge each Trustee to re-study SACS' 1972 report on Western Piedmont as one means of better anticipating the potential concerns of the 1983 visitors. Copies of that report are available from my office.

## Innovations

In many other ways things have been changed or re-directed at Western Piedmont. Many of those innovations are difficult to quantify. For example, I believe there is greater concern with adhering to college policies, doing one's job, being an effective teacher, etc. I have tried to insist on high standards in instructional methods, impartial grading practices and mature behavior by faculty and staff. Perhaps it has been this ever present threat to confront an offender and to react vigorously to a student's legitimate complaints that has led some of our personnel to conclude that a "climate of fear" exists. Perhaps, also, I have been too willing to fight the battle alone in the quest for responsible commitment which has left me exposed to criticism.

In many instances it has been difficult to ascertain what the rules are or were at Western Piedmont. Policy handbooks for students and faculty-staff use did not address many problem areas. I have made two efforts to remedy this situation. First, I developed the numbered administrative memorandum as a directive to convey to faculty and staff precisely what constituted existing policy or procedure on a given subject. As those were issued, a copy was provided to the Chairman of the Board for informational purposes. Secondly, last fall (1980) I appointed a task force to review, rewrite and draft a faculty handbook which would then be reviewed by the Academic Policies Council, appropriate administrators, the Board's Personnel and Executive Committees and eventually by the entire Board. This project is still being conducted by the Task Force.

For two years I have been encouraging the Division of Student Services to revise, update and draft a student handbook. It is mandatory in the case of many federal regulations that students be informed of rights, regulations, etc., and given a chance to review and, if inaccurate, to challenge specific parts of their files. The student handbook is the appropriate vehicle for informing the student of such matters plus all other college rules relative to student life. Some progress is being made in response to my request. It is hoped that the new Coordinator of Student Activities will expedite this project.

I have striven to further institutional self renewal. A significant effort has been made to overcome faculty fears of job insecurity which had been spawned by several annual reductions-in-force. Declining enrollment brought about the reductions. A crusade to secure monies for construction of a "complete" campus, in accord with the campus master plan of several years standing, was unable to gain the support of county officers. I have been an advocate that Western Piedmont's instructional programs be characterized and respected for their levels of quality. Academic excellence must be based on effective teaching, courteous and sympathetic advising, fair testing and grading. An instructor should possess unassailable academic qualifications, and I have carefully reviewed the credentials of candidates for instructional positions and interviewed each in an effort to ensure high standards of performance.

## Academic excellence

I have sought to obtain greater diversity in the educational preparation of instructional faculty. In-breeding is a problem at Western Piedmont and should be carefully attended to in future employment of instructors and especially in the granting of educational leave. Division Directors and Deans have been strongly urged to employ only persons with Master's degrees to teach courses which are subject to transfer to four-year institutions. Standing tall for academic excellence does not mean that I do not respect the authority of the faculty whose responsibility it is to ensure that high standards are maintained at Western Piedmont. When standards have been compromised I have been quick to remind persons of their responsibilities. I am confident that the quality of academic programs at Western Piedmont have not been compromised in any fashion. On the contrary, I believe that the instructional faculty are more concerned with effective instructional success than ever before.

It was my understanding that I was employed to serve as an agent of change. I have been exactly that and the changes I submit, have been beneficial to the College.

Adding to the controversy over change have been the constant reminders by the local press and the newly elected County Commissioners that I am not worthy of the salary I am paid from local funds. It appears certain that should I seek to re-contract with the board I would place the trustees in an untenable position, for funding of the salary supplement by the County Commissioners is not likely. Moreover, supplements for senior level administrators are also in jeopardy. In view of these considerations, I hereby request that the board take immediate steps to employ a successor to assume the office of the president upon the termination date of my contract.

I cannot end this lengthy review without a word of appreciation to all of the members of the board, and especially to the former members, Dr. Edward Phifer, Mr. Stanley Moore, Mr. John Carson and Mr. Ray Childers. My stay in Morganton has been indeed saddened and influenced by their untimely deaths. My success here is to a large degree the result of your wise counsel and advice. You gave me a chance to try out my ideas, to test my abilities, and to season my confidence. For both the opportunities and the challenges I will always be grateful.

Wilmon H. Droze  
President