

History of the College

On July 4, 1851, the future Methodist Bishop William Wightman came to a beautiful site on a high ridge overlooking the tiny courthouse village of Spartanburg, S.C. As more than 4,000 people looked on, he made the keynote address while local Masons laid the cornerstone for Wofford College. A distinguished professor and journalist as well as a clergyman, Wightman stressed that the new institution would pattern itself after neither the South's then-elitist public universities nor the narrowly sectarian colleges sponsored by some denominations. Instead, he argued, "It is impossible to conceive of greater benefits — to the individual or to society — than those embraced in the gift of a liberal education, combining moral principle ... with the enlightened and cultivated understanding which is the product of thorough scholarship."

Wofford later experienced both good times and hard times, but it stands more than 160 years later as one of a handful of American colleges founded before the Civil War and operating continuously and successfully on its original campus. It has offered carefully selected students a respected academic program, tempered with concern for the individual. It has respected the virtues of continuity and heritage while responding with energy, optimism and excitement to the challenges of a changing world.

Like many of America's philanthropic institutions, Wofford came about because of the vision and generosity of an individual. Benjamin Wofford was born in rural Spartanburg County on Oct. 19, 1780. Sometime during the great frontier revivals of the early 19th century, he joined the Methodist Church and served as a circuit rider (itinerant preacher) for several years. In 1807, he married Anna Todd and settled down on her family's prosperous farm on the Tyger River. From this happy but childless marriage, which ended with Anna's death in 1835, Wofford acquired the beginnings of his fortune. At the age of 56, the widower married a much younger woman from Virginia, Maria Barron. They moved to a home on Spartanburg's courthouse square, where he could concentrate on investments in finance and manufacturing. It was there that Benjamin Wofford died on Dec. 2, 1850, leaving a bequest of \$100,000 to "establish a college of literary, classical and scientific education to be located in my native district and to be under the control and management of the Methodist Church of my native state." It proved to be one of the largest financial contributions made to American higher education prior to the Civil War. Benjamin Wofford's will was approved in solemn form on March 14, 1851, and the college charter from the South Carolina General Assembly is dated Dec. 16, 1851.

Trustees quickly acquired the necessary land and retained one of the state's leading architects, Edward C. Jones of Charleston, to lay out the campus. Although landscaping plans were never fully developed in the 19th century, sketches exist to show that the early trustees envisioned a formal network of pathways, lawns and gardens that would have left an impression quite similar to the college's present National Historic District. The original structures included a president's home (demolished early in the 20th century); four faculty homes (still in use today for various purposes); and the magnificent Main Building. Known as simply as "The College" for many years, the latter structure remains one of the nation's outstanding examples of "Italianate" or "Tuscan Villa" architecture.

Construction finally began in the summer of 1852 under the supervision of Ephraim Clayton of Asheville, N.C. Skilled African-American carpenters executed uniquely beautiful woodwork, including a pulpit and pews for the chapel. The college bell arrived from the Meneely Foundry in West Troy, N.Y., and, from the west tower of "Old Main," it continues to sing out

as the "voice of Wofford." The exterior of the building today is true to the original design, but the interior has been modernized and renovated three times — in the early 1900s, in the early 1960s, and in 2005-2007.

In the autumn of 1854, three faculty members and seven students took up their work. Admission was selective; the prospective students had been tested on their knowledge of English, arithmetic and algebra, ancient and modern geography, and Latin and Greek (Cicero, Caesar, the Aeneid, and Xenophon's Anabasis). The first Wofford degree was awarded in 1856 to Samuel Dibble, a future member of the United States Congress. The college had awarded some 48 more degrees by 1860, and 79 students were engaged in coursework in the 1859-60 school year.

After getting the new college off to a successful start, President William Wightman resigned in 1859 to launch yet another Methodist college, Birmingham-Southern in Alabama. He was succeeded by the Rev. Albert M. Shipp, a respected scholar who was immediately confronted with a devastating Civil War. Many students and young alumni, including two sons of faculty members, were killed in the war. Over the course of the war, the trustees invested their endowment funds in soon-to-be-worthless Confederate bonds, bank stocks, and other securities. (The college still has them in its archives.) The situation was quite dire, but the physical plant remained intact and the professors remained at their posts. Given the disarray of education at all levels, South Carolina Methodists saw the mission of their colleges as more important than ever if a "New South" was to be created.

Shipp remained at the college through the Reconstruction period, departing for a position in Vanderbilt University's theology school in 1875. Shipp's emancipated slave Tobias Hartwell played a key role in Spartanburg's emerging African-American community. Nevertheless, Wofford's history from the end of the Civil War until 1900 was dominated by one man — James H. Carlisle. A member of the original faculty and then the 3rd president of the college from 1875 through 1902, he initially taught mathematics and astronomy, but his real strength was his ability to develop alumni of character, one student at a time. Three generations of graduates remembered individual visits with Carlisle in his campus home, now occupied by the dean of students. To them, he was "The Doctor," "Wofford's spiritual endowment," and "the most distinguished South Carolinian of his day."

The curriculum gradually evolved during Carlisle's administration; for example, he shocked everyone by delivering his first presidential commencement address in English rather than in Latin. Nevertheless, many lasting traditions of Wofford life date from his administration. Four surviving chapters of national social fraternities (Kappa Alpha, 1869; Sigma Alpha Epsilon, 1885; Pi Kappa Alpha, 1891; and Kappa Sigma, 1894) were chartered on the campus. Such organizations owned or rented houses in the Spartanburg village, because in those days, professors lived in college housing while students were expected to make their own arrangements for room and board. To meet some of their needs, two students from the North Carolina mountains, Zach and Zeb Whiteside, opened and operated Wofford's first dining hall in Main Building. Although music was not part of the curriculum, there was an active glee club. Union soldiers in Spartanburg during Reconstruction apparently introduced college students to baseball, and Wofford and Furman University played South Carolina's first intercollegiate football game in December 1889. That same year, a group of students organized one of the South's earliest literary magazines, *The Journal*. At commencements throughout the period, graduates sang the hymn "From All That Dwell Below the Skies" and each received a Bible signed by faculty members.

In 1895, delegates from 10 of the leading higher education institutions across the Southeast met in Atlanta to form the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The organization was conceived by Vanderbilt's Chancellor James H. Kirkland (Wofford Class of 1877), who hoped to challenge peer campuses to attain national standards of academic excellence. Delegates also came from Trinity College in Durham, N.C., which later emerged as Duke University under the presidential leadership of Wofford alumni John C. Kilgo and William Preston Few. Wofford was represented by two of its outstanding young faculty members, A.G. "Knotty" Rembert (Class of 1884) and Henry Nelson Snyder. Perhaps it was the Wofford community's determination to meet the standards for accreditation that later inspired Snyder to turn down an appointment to the faculty at Stanford University to become Carlisle's successor as president. It was also true that Spartanburg was no longer a sleepy courthouse village — it had become a major railroad "hub city" and was surrounded by booming textile mills. Local civic leaders launched nearby Converse College, which combined liberal arts education for women with a nationally respected school of music. At Wofford, it no doubt seemed possible to dream bigger dreams.

The first decades of Snyder's long administration (1902-1942) were a time of tremendous progress. Main Building finally got electric lights and steam heat. Four attractive red-brick buildings were added to the campus — Whitefoord Smith Library (now the Daniel Building), John B. Cleveland Science Hall, Andrews Field House, and Carlisle Hall, a large dormitory. Driveways for automobiles were laid out on campus, and rows of water oaks and elms were planted. Enrollment grew beyond 200 students, and by the midpoint of Snyder's administration, the student body consisted of more than 400 students annually. Wofford began to attract faculty members who were publishing scholarly books in their academic specialties. For example, David Duncan Wallace was the pre-eminent South Carolina historian of the day. James A. "Graveyard" Chiles published a widely used textbook, and he and his Wofford students founded the national honorary society for German studies, Delta Phi Alpha. The "Wofford Lyceum" brought William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, and other guest speakers to the campus.

Although eight women graduated from Wofford in the classes of 1901-1904, the trustees abandoned the first attempt at coeducation. The cornerstone of residential campus life was an unwritten honor code, for decades administered with stern-but-fair paternalism by the college's dean, A. Mason DuPré. A yearbook was first published in 1904, modern student government began in 1909, and the first issue of a campus newspaper, the *Old Gold & Black*, appeared in 1915. World War I introduced Army officer training to the campus, and at the end of 1919, the Army established an ROTC unit, one of the first such units to be approved at an independent college. Snobbery, drinking, dancing and other alleged excesses contributed to an anti-fraternity "Philanthropean" movement among the students, and the Greek-letter organizations were forced underground for several years. A unique society called the "Senior Order of Gnomes" apparently owed its beginnings to a desire to emphasize and protect certain "old-fashioned" values and traditions associated with the college. Both intramural and intercollegiate sports were popular, with the baseball teams achieving the most prestige. The 1909 team adopted a pit bull terrier ("Jack"), and he proved to be the inspiration for a permanent mascot.

Despite this progress and the wide respect he earned in national higher education circles, Snyder was able to make little headway in strengthening Wofford's endowment, which was valued at less than \$1 million. The college was painfully dependent on its annual support from the Methodist Church, which amounted to about one-fourth of the operating budget. This financial weakness became obvious

when Southern farm prices collapsed in the 1920s and hard times intensified after the stock market crash of 1929. At the height of the Great Depression, some of the faculty worked without pay for seven months. Emergency economies and a special appeal to South Carolina Methodists were necessary, but by the end of the Snyder administration, the college was debt-free and its academic reputation was untarnished.

The return of financial stability made it possible for Wofford to claim a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 1941, the first time such recognition had been extended to an independent college in South Carolina. Soon after this happy occasion, however, the nation plunged into World War II. Wofford graduates served in the military in large numbers, many as junior combat officers or aviators. At least 75 alumni and students died in the war. Wofford's enrollment was so drastically reduced that the Army took over the campus on Feb. 22, 1943, to offer accelerated academic instruction for Air Corps officers. The faculty and 96 remaining Wofford students did their work at Spartanburg Junior College or at Converse.

After the war, under the stimulus of the G.I. Bill of Rights, enrollment suddenly shot up to 720 during 1947-48. This figure was almost twice the reasonable capacity of Wofford's facilities, already taxed by two decades of postponed maintenance. Compounding the challenge was the fact that South Carolina Methodists deferred any capital projects or strategic planning into the mid-1950s while they tried to decide whether they should unify their colleges on a new, rural campus at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. While the state's Baptists approved such a plan at Furman University, the Methodist institutions ultimately retained their historic identities and campuses.

The only alumnus to serve as president of Wofford, Dr. Walter K. Greene '03, thus suffered through a very stressful administration (1942-1951) that today is remembered primarily as a golden age for Terrier athletics. Under the coaching of Phil Dickens, the 1948 football team set a national record with five straight ties. Wofford then won 15 straight games before losing a 1950 Cigar Bowl match with Florida State. Another celebrated achievement was a 19-14 upset of Auburn to open the 1950 season. Dickens' teams were known for skillful operation of a single wing offense similar to that used at the University of Tennessee as well as solid "Wofford Gold" uniforms, whose coppery color was so close to that of contemporary footballs that it created a nationwide controversy.

Born in the years immediately following World War II, the "Baby Boomers" began moving into elementary schools in the 1950s. During the presidential administrations of Francis Pendleton Gaines (1952-1957) and Charles F. Marsh (1958-1968), the Wofford community laid the foundations to serve this much larger college population. Administration and finances needed the most immediate attention, and Gaines was fortunate to persuade Spartanburg textile executive Roger Milliken to join the board of trustees. Wofford also moved ahead with a series of important building projects that included a science building, the beautiful Sandor Teszler Library, and the first campus life center. Four new residence halls built during this period gave occupants a measure of privacy and comfort. Seven fraternity lodges were built on campus to unify and improve Greek life. The new buildings and improved financial management made it possible for the college to expand its enrollment to 1,000 men.

To teach this larger student body, college officials worked hard to recruit outstanding faculty and provide better pay and benefits. Some legendary professors, such as Lewis P. Jones '38 in the history department, arrived within a few years after the war. Dr. W. Raymond Leonard effectively built a modern biology program. Philip S. Covington, who served as the college's academic dean during the 1950s and 1960s, displayed

a remarkable knack for looking beyond curriculum vitae to spot great teachers. The story goes that he met geologist John Harrington on an airplane flight. Covington talked Harrington into coming to Wofford even though the college had no major in his subject and no plans to add one. "Dr. Rock" taught his famous bus-trip laboratories into the 1970s and changed the lives of dozens of students.

Despite these efforts, Wofford still was not entirely ready for the "Boomers" when they finally began arriving on campus in the late 1960s. As the distinguished sociologist Wade Clark Roof '61 has said, they were (and are) "a generation of seekers" inclined to ask tough questions and unwilling to accept arbitrary authority and institutions. While students did not doubt that administrators cared deeply about their welfare, they still squawked about a long list of rules, room inspections, and twice-a-week mandatory chapel assemblies. Even at this late date, first-year students wore beanies and were "ratted" by upper-class students during their first weeks on campus. As one student remembered, dean of students Frank Logan '41 "couldn't keep you from going straight to hell, but he could relentlessly harass you on your way down."

The period from 1964 to 1976 saw four major transformations in the life of the college, and Wofford emerged from that decade of transition as a changed institution. In the early 1960s, Wofford began to confront its need to become a more inclusive community. This process has been evolutionary and remains ongoing. After observing a challenging period of racial desegregation at flagship universities across the South, the Wofford Board of Trustees in the spring of 1964 announced that applicants for admission henceforth would be considered without regard to race. Wofford thus became one of the first independent colleges in the deep South to take such a step voluntarily. Albert W. Gray of Spartanburg was the first of several African-American men admitted to Wofford after the trustees' announcement, and he enrolled without incident in the fall of 1964. After service in Vietnam delayed his graduation until 1971, Gray later served as a member of the Board of Trustees. Douglas C. Jones enrolled in 1965 and became the first African-American to earn a degree in 1969. Intentional efforts by administrators saw more African-American students begin to enroll in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1971, the college began to admit women as day students, and four women enrolled in the spring semester. A larger number enrolled in the fall of 1971. After a study on the future composition of the student body, the trustees voted to admit women as resident students beginning in the fall of 1976. By the mid-1990s, women made up more than 45 percent of the student body. From the beginning, Wofford women were high achievers, winning more than their proportional share of academic honors and exercising effective leadership in campus organizations of every kind.

The college saw more than changes in the student body during this period. The faculty approved several significant changes to the curriculum, and working jointly with the student government, the administration brought about significant changes to student life and student code of conduct policies. When President Paul Hardin III arrived on campus to begin his administration in 1968, he found few radicals and revolutionaries among the students, but he felt that major changes in residence life policies and programming were overdue. A new "Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities" guaranteed academic and political freedom for students and established a judicial process regulating campus behavior. Another committee drew up a constitution for a campus union that reorganized and sought to empower student government. Though there have been occasional embarrassments over the years, the policy of treating Wofford students as adults has proved to be healthy and wise. It has been a principle that the college steadfastly has defended, while at the same time taking steps to ensure that caring, personal

attention is available to students when they need it. An effective campus ministry and service-learning program in the United Methodist tradition undergirds this commitment.

The college implemented curricular reforms to encourage faculty creativity and give students more choices. The 4-1-4 calendar and the implementation of the Interim term permitted a student to spend the month of January working on a project of special interest. The Interim became a popular feature of the Wofford experience, particularly for career-related internships, independent research or foreign travel. Wofford's first-year humanities seminars, pioneered in the 1970s, were copied at institutions large and small. Although a broad liberal arts core curriculum remained in place, pruning departmental requirements made it easier to double or even triple major. Students also were permitted to arrange interdisciplinary majors in the humanities or intercultural studies.

In 1972, having demonstrated his ability as a faculty member and in several administrative positions, Joab M. Lesesne Jr. succeeded Hardin as Wofford's ninth president. Lesesne oversaw much success at the college. In 1972, Wofford's endowment market value was \$3.8 million; in 2000, it was approximately \$90 million, thanks in part to a \$13 million bequest from the estate of Mrs. Charles Daniel. The downtown campus doubled in size, and new structures included the Campus Life Building with its Tony White Theater and Benjamin Johnson Arena, the \$6 million Franklin W. Olin Building, the Papadopoulos Building, the Roger Milliken Science Center, and three new residence halls. The college received national recognition as a "higher education best buy" and came to be listed in most of the selective colleges guides.

Since the early 1960s, Wofford had been struggling to find an athletic identity — the college's investment exceeded the norm for "good time sports," but it was insufficient to attract the best student-athletes or improve national visibility. Aging facilities were painfully inadequate for a program that aspired to meet the recreational, intramural and intercollegiate requirements of a larger, more diverse student body. Wofford carefully moved step-by-step from the NAIA to membership in the NCAA Division I Southern Conference. The construction of the Richardson Physical Activities Building, Gibbs Stadium and the Reeves Tennis Center allowed Spartanburg and Wofford to become the summer training camp home of the NFL's Carolina Panthers, founded and owned by Jerry Richardson '59. In the 2000s, Wofford football teams made four trips to the NCAA Football Championship Series Playoffs, and Wofford claimed SoCon championships in baseball, men's soccer and men's basketball. In the five years beginning in 2006-2007, Wofford won the SoCon's D.S. McAlister Sportsmanship Award three times and ranked high in its NCAA Academic Progress Rate statistics.

After he became Wofford's 10th president in 2000, Benjamin B. Dunlap, who had taught at Wofford since 1993 as Chapman Family Professor of the Humanities, completed the long-awaited restoration and technological modernization of Main Building, with special emphasis on Leonard Auditorium. Located on the first floor were the Campus Ministry Center and Mickel Chapel, with several memorials to faculty and alumni. After careful study, Wofford trustees approved a gradual plan to increase the size of the student body to about 1,600 with a full-time faculty-to-student ratio of 1 to 11. The development of the award-winning Wofford Village, with apartment-style housing to renew personal relationships among seniors helped make this growth possible. "Fun Funds" also broadened social and recreational opportunities involving the entire student community. Dunlap went on to challenge the faculty to "make connections," combining the core curriculum with new majors in theatre, Chinese and environmental studies as well as advanced and highly innovative opportunities for research, internships and study abroad.

Additionally, the faculty created interdisciplinary programs in Latin American and Caribbean studies, African and African-American studies, gender studies, and Middle Eastern and North African studies. In 2008, Dunlap signed the Presidents Climate Commitment, signaling the beginning of a new “Gold, Black & Green” initiative. Its academic component was an interdisciplinary major in environmental studies that incorporated perspectives from the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities. Students studied both on campus and at the college’s Goodall Environmental Studies Center at Glendale, which has received LEED Platinum certification. Annual Open Doors surveys conducted by the Institute of International Education consistently ranked Wofford in the top 10 of all colleges and universities in the nation in the percentage of students who received academic credit overseas. Faculty earned national recognition in the development of multi-disciplinary learning communities.

The closing years of Dunlap’s tenure saw some exciting new institutional developments that helped bridge the gap between educational theory and action. The Space in The Mungo Center, established in 2010, focused on building upon a liberal arts foundation to help students develop an advanced set of professional skills desired by employers and valued in the marketplace. The Center for Global and Community Engagement provided new perspectives on spiritual life and mutual understanding as well as new avenues of service to a hopeful city facing many challenges. The Center for Innovation and Learning supported the faculty with fresh ideas and added resources for the improvement of teaching.

On July 1, 2013, following a national search, Dr. Nayef H. Samhat became Wofford’s 11th president. He had been provost and professor of political science and international studies at Kenyon College since 2009. Samhat quickly embraced the college’s mission, and led a strategic planning process that resulted in a new strategic vision for the college, “It’s Our Wofford.” At the same time that the college unveiled the new strategic vision, Samhat announced a gift from alumnus Jerry Richardson to begin to implement a major component of the strategic vision, a new arts center. The Rosalind Sallenger Richardson Center for the Arts, which opened in 2017, filled a significant gap in the college’s fine arts offerings. A few weeks later, Richardson announced a subsequent gift, the Jerry Richardson Indoor Stadium. Opening in the fall of 2017, the new indoor stadium replaced Benjamin Johnson Arena as the home of men’s and women’s basketball and volleyball. The men’s basketball team won Southern Conference championships in 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2015, earning a spot in each of those years in the NCAA Division I tournament and bringing national attention to the college.

The relocation of basketball and theatre to the new Richardson buildings, the college was able to renovate the Campus Life Building to improve intramural, fitness, and dining options. The construction of the Rosalind Sallenger Richardson Center also meant that fraternity row would have to move. A new Greek Village opened in 2016 on the north side of Main Building, with houses for each fraternity, and for the first time, houses for each sorority. Additionally, reflecting the college’s increased focus on diversity and inclusion, the village included a house for multicultural students.

If William Wightman could return to the Wofford campus today, he undoubtedly would look with pride at his Main Building, freshly restored and renovated to serve new generations of 21st century students. He surely could relate to the Wofford woman of the Class of 1991 who wrote, “It is through Wofford that I found myself. And it is through the memories of my time there that my joys are intensified and my miseries are lessened. The majestic white building that I know as ‘Old Main’ is the

harbor for my soul, and whenever I need strength, I call upon those twin towers to give it to me.”

Standing beneath the high towers, Wightman also would perceive roots that have grown continuously deeper since the college’s beginning. Methodist Bishop William H. Willimon ’68 is the former dean of the chapel at Duke University and the father of two Wofford graduates. He explained it this way: “Education is not buildings, libraries, or faculty with big books. It’s people, the mystery of one person leading another as Virgil led Dante, as Athena led young Telemachus, to places never yet imagined, through thoughts impossible to think without a wise guide who has patience with the ignorance, and therefore the arrogance, of the young. Wofford and its faculty have a way to helping students believe in themselves — yet never to excess. I loved it all.”

So, the words that Professor K.D. Coates wrote for the Wofford Centennial in 1954 still ring true in the third millennium: “Somehow, in spite of all the complexities, the individual student still manages to come in contact with the individual teacher. And occasionally too, as in the old days, a student goes out and by words and deeds makes a professor remembered for good intentions, and a college respected for the quality of its workmanship.”