

PEACE GOES “BACC”

Celebrating five years of baccalaureate success

by MIRIAM SAULS

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ith five years of Bachelor of Arts history under its belt, Peace College can look at its BA program now and make some assessments. Has the BA program been a positive change for the school? Early data indicates a definite yes!

“I think the transition to the baccalaureate program has been unexpectedly successful,” says Dr. Charles Yarbrough, Peace’s Vice President for Academic Affairs. “Benchmarks have been realized well ahead of schedule. We thought it would take years to achieve significant retention of undergraduates, but by the second year we had reached 75%,” (*of sophomores who elected to stay and earn their BA*).

And other stats look good as well. Last year, students were accepted into graduate and professional schools at an outstanding rate (over 90%), found employment in fields of their choice (over 95%), won awards at scholarly and performance competitions, and joined professional and honorary organizations.

But perhaps the best standard of measurement is the students themselves. Are they glad they stayed the entire four years? How do they assess their education and the value of their BA degrees? What are they doing now?



Jubilant members of the Class of '97 celebrate their graduation from Peace. These were among the first students to ever receive bachelor's degrees from Peace.



Class of '97 graduates listen to commencement speaker Gail Godwin '57. Godwin is a talented and acclaimed author.

Jennifer McGuire, a '97 liberal studies major and a recent graduate of Campbell Law School, was in the first class faced with the decision of whether or not to stay at Peace for a BA. "After two years, I considered transferring to Carolina or Guilford College, but neither seemed to offer what Peace did — a small community, caring and interested professors, and a comfortable environment," she says. "I wasn't sure what the Peace BA program would be like since it was brand new, but I am definitely glad I did stay."

Jennifer credits the special opportunities she found at Peace with setting her on her post-graduate path. "During my freshman year, I obtained a job from the counseling office job board for a law firm in downtown Raleigh, and I worked there for two years. Then, my junior year, I located another job at a law firm the same way. Also, through Peace, I had the opportunity to intern in the Governor's Office of Citizen Affairs," she adds. "Dr. Valerie Hall was my advisor for my internships and provided me guidance in locating and completing them. As for 'service after the sale,' two years after I graduated from Peace, I applied to law school and received guidance,

support, and a glowing recommendation letter from Dr. Hall."

Internships played a valuable role for biology major Mandy Cutler Edwards '01 as well. Mandy did one of her two internships at GlaxoSmithKline, where she is now a genotyping scientist. "I fell in love with lab work during my internship and I use a lot of



By 1999, baccalaureate graduates were distinguished by green robes and mortar boards. Each robe is embroidered with the name of the graduate, along with graduates who have worn the gown in previous years.

the techniques daily that I learned in my labs at Peace," says Mandy. While she is at a company that has seen some layoffs, she feels being in genetics gives her job security, and she credits the faculty in the biology department with giving her not only a great foundation in science, but going above and beyond and encouraging her as a person.

Human resources major Amber Sauer '00 did six internships at three different companies. "I learned what I liked in HR, and more importantly, what I didn't like," says Amber.

Now an Advanced HR Specialist with ESB Metals, a division of Owens Corning, Amber spends 85% of her time doing leadership and diversity training, and she confides, "I never said two words in high school — now you can't shut me up. Peace gave me the confidence to know that it's okay to speak up. Without being coddling, Peace really gives a student the support and guidance and confidence she needs."

Other graduates commented on the unique opportunities afforded them at Peace. Music majors Hunter Davis '99, Vivian Adams '00, and Amanda York '01 all named their travel abroad experiences through Peace and the ability to record and produce their own individual CDs in Peace's state-of-the-art facilities as significant in the pursuit of their music endeavors after graduation.

Spanish student Jessica Coscia '01, who now works in Congressman Bob Etheridge's office on immigration and naturalization issues, says, "Without the experiences I had in Mexico, the practice I had writing and conversing, and the history and background of Latin America that I learned at Peace, I wouldn't be able to do my job to my full potential. And with North



In 1997, Main provided the backdrop for a portrait of a college in transition. The AA graduates are in their long white gowns and carrying red roses, and, on the second floor balcony, the college's first BA graduates pose.



From left, Congressman Bob Etheridge (D-NC), Faye Etheridge, Jessica Coscia '01, Dick Gephardt, Jeanna Gladney. Jessica works on immigration and naturalization issues in Congressman Etheridge's office.

Carolina having the second fastest growing Latino population of any state in the country and Congressman Etheridge having a district with a lot of Latinos, it is important I do my job well."

Opportunities for leadership on campus meant a lot to biology major Heidi Plemmons Hill '97, who currently teaches 8th grade science at Durant Middle School in Raleigh and is working on her master's degree in secondary science education at N.C. State. "Peace provided me with experiences I doubt I would ever have had at a larger university," she says. "I was able to participate in PSGA as well as the Leadership Scholars Program. I was an RA and later, as I student taught — even after graduating — I was an RD. I was the speaker for the first ever BA graduation and received the Frazier Award my senior year." And Heidi is still receiving awards. She was recently presented a Kenan Fellowship for Excellence and Leadership in the Classroom by the First Lady of North Carolina, Ms. Mary Easley.

Visual communications major Audrey Warrenfeltz '01 will soon be sharing what was given to her at Peace with her very own students. "We came out of Peace with knowledge, experience and skills that others in our field don't have. This was made very clear to me when I returned to Maryland and

began my job search. I was thrilled that my first interview led to my present position as a graphic designer at Frederick Community College.

"My supervisor later told me that my portfolio was the strongest and most impressive of all of the applicants," she says. "This was largely due to the wonderful teaching of Mr. [Woody] Holliman, who pushed us to do our best, and Ms. [Carolyn] Parker, whose perfectionism rubbed off on us as an eye for detail...In the fall I will be enjoying my first teaching position here at FCC as an adjunct faculty member. As I prepare for the Graphic Design II class, I hope to pass on my love and knowledge of art and design to my students."

Individual attention from professors came up over and over as the secret to success for many Peace graduates. "I was an average student in high school," says English major

Mohana Rajakumar '00, "but Dr. [Jean] Arrington and Dr. [Valerie] Hall saw something in me that I didn't see. They said, 'you're smart,' and I realized they're right. I'd never thought of grad school until I heard that from them. I've just received my MA in English from N.C. State and I'm headed for my PhD from the University of Florida."

Human resources and psychology major Stephanie Browning '01 says Dr. Heather Lee especially made an impact on her. "Dr. Lee not only helped me to make education and career decisions, but also touched my life personally with her advice, her concern for me, and her ability to just sit back and listen when I needed someone to talk to. She knew me so well she could tell just by looking at me when something was wrong. To me, that is

someone who cares, not someone just trying to make a living." Stephanie is now a Human Resources Assistant for Rex Healthcare in Raleigh.

Liberal studies major Virginia Smith '97



Mandy Cutler Edwards '01 with husband, Chip. Mandy is now a genotyping scientist at GlaxoSmithKline.

has just received her MA in public history from N.C. State and remembers being inspired to do her best. "In my Senior Seminar, Dr. Hall instilled determination and made me work harder than I ever had on my senior paper (although by the 6th draft,

Adventures

GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN A FIRST YEAR STUDENT IS DROPPED OFF AT THE DORM with a trunk and a hair-dryer and a book of stamps and expected to jump into college life and sink or swim. At least those days are gone at Peace. The Adventures program at Peace helps first year students develop the skills to thrive in college, both personally and academically.

Making its debut in fall of 2001, Adventures requires students to take a first year seminar, Adventures for Women, which covers issues of a scholarly nature, but also addresses issues such as careers and relationships and personal wellness. Each seminar is paired with an English course, so students are surrounded by peers with whom they begin to form a community and around whom they feel comfortable voicing ideas.

First year advisors who are specifically trained to support the students teach the seminar. And outstanding upper level students called peer educators co-teach the seminars and live on the halls with the girls. The symbiosis is unmistakable. "I feel like the girls in the class saw me as a role model and that was a positive thing," says peer educator Jenn Lindberg '03. "I was able to take what I knew and apply it to our class."

All of these factors add up to a secure and supportive environment aimed at fostering the success of each and every student. And the support doesn't stop after the first year. Because of its initial success, the program is being expanded to include service projects in the community for second year students and a global perspective for third year students. The fourth year program will pull all three years together in practical experience with internships and a senior ethics course.

"We have taken a really comprehensive approach in designing the Adventures program," says Dr. Whitney Cain, director of the program. "Our hope is that students find a place for themselves on our campus and over four years figure out what they want to do in their careers and their lives and at the end of the day how they can contribute."

While Adventures has only been in place since last fall and one year's data can't be considered conclusive, a decrease in both student probations and suspensions has been noted, and academic performance and retention of first year students is up. Beyond Peace, the Adventures program is getting its share of attention too. Dr. Cain was awarded the Innovation Award for her leadership of the program by the North Carolina College Personnel Association.

And the benefits go on as new leaders emerge. "My peer educator was not only a fabulous teacher, but a friend to everyone in the class," says Sam Collins '05. "We all enjoyed getting to know her. In fact, she made such an impact on me, that I am going to follow in her footsteps and be a peer educator next year!"



After graduation from Peace, Mohana Rajakumar '00 earned a MA in English from N.C. State and is pursuing her Ph.D. at the University of Florida.

I was ready to toss my roommate's computer out of our third-story dorm room in Davidson). And taking physical anthropology with Dr. [Laura] Vick was an inspiring experience. One could see her love and passion for the subject."

Another theme that came up time and again was the wonderful friendships made at Peace and the bonding that occurred in the small classes. And some students even waxed nostalgic about the old days. Brett Morgan, who graduated in 2000 with a double major in business administration and psychology and is now a Commercial Underwriter with Chicago Title Insurance Agency in Raleigh, says, "I miss Peace very much and if I could attend for another four years I would."

"I received a top-notch education that more than prepared me for the 'real' world," she adds. "I miss the days when I could get up five minutes before my class, put on a ball-cap, grab a glass of O.J. and a bagel from Belk Dining Hall, and head off to class...I am very proud (on the verge of boastful) to tell people that I graduated from Peace College...I am envious of the upcoming freshmen because I know that the most memorable four years in their lives thus far is about to begin. I'd love to go back." ❁