The journey begins with a sapling

Students who begin the Wesley College Experience are like saplings planted in rich soil, nourished by the unique opportunities that we offer, making our college an exciting place of transformation for students and faculty alike. We attract a diverse group of students from Delaware and the surrounding region. More often than not, our students are the first in their families to attend college. When they enter the unfamiliar world of residential or commuter college, they may feel alone and apprehensive. Historically, many students who have attended Wesley College have faced financial difficulties, but we work with those students to make it affordable so that all who desire may earn a college degree.

Often, Wesley College students are financially stressed, have a minority background, or come from single-parent households in underserved communities. Such facets of their backgrounds are often barriers to students seeking higher education and completed degree programs. However, these are not obstacles for the faculty and staff at Wesley College, for they possess the skills and knowledge to assist these students in their time of transition to a new environment.

The emotional challenges our students face are real, and understanding that is not just an intellectual exercise: it is an emotional investment by a faculty who know such hurdles from personal experience, observation, or research. To that end, we empathetically advise and mentor our students before, during, and after graduation. One example of such support is our Success in STEM (SIS) summer enrichment bridge program that was designed to help students close the gap left by a sometimes-inadequate high school experience. In addition to the programs that support our students, faculty participate in workshops that are designed to help faculty better approach student-centered learning which improves our students’ access to the resources we provide. This high level of engagement has led to increased persistence among our students.

Students with an athletics background gravitate to Wesley College because they can grow as student-athletes in a Division III school. Without feeling the pressure of Division I competition, while at the same time competing for the glory of a championship, our student-athletes combine the pursuit of academic and athletic excellence into a single mission.
After being accepted to Wesley College and assisted with financial and emotional support to begin their growth as freshmen, our students are introduced to our vibrant First-Year Seminars. These innovative and fascinating courses form the foundation of our Core Curriculum, a program unique to the region that provides students guidance in oral and written communication skills and interdisciplinary learning that serves as the underpinning of their academic programs. Our faculty deliver creative coursework in a wide array of topics in the first-year seminar, ranging from arts, history, philosophy, religion, science, and many other disciplines. These highly varied courses facilitate students’ transitions into college and lay a strong foundation for their success. Additionally, students are paired with faculty advisors in their majors: advisors work with students throughout their college careers and develop a keen understanding of their needs, strengths, weaknesses, and goals. Many students become professionally bonded with their advisors; some even form life-long friendships after graduation.

Wesley College takes great pride in its small class sizes. Here, students are well known by their professors, and the ability to bond with both fellow classmates and the faculty is a key attraction for students who seek personal attention. The Honors Program is a natural fit, then, for Wesley, for it pairs small groups of students with high academic ability and aspirations in seminars with faculty in the liberal arts programs. Like the First-Year Seminar courses, the subjects of Honors seminars are wide-ranging and interdisciplinary. They encourage advanced study and research techniques from freshman year onward and culminate in an honors thesis project in senior year for members of the program. With special student housing, merit-based scholarships, and learning activities, the program creates a unique community of the best and brightest Wesley College students across a wide variety of majors.
Wesley College also offers beginning students the opportunity to engage in mentored research. Led by the faculty in our STEM program, we successfully match many students with undergraduate research opportunities and internships. Many of those projects are funded by NSF, NIH, NASA, NOAA, etc.; therefore, most of our student researchers are paid to participate in current and cutting-edge research programs. Wesley College implemented the Cannon Scholars Program in 2014 to recruit and retain academically talented students in biological chemistry, biology, environmental science, and mathematics. The Cannon Scholars program is supported through NSF, NIH, and NASA grants that provide scholarships, academic mentoring, and career advising support to selected STEM majors. Certainly, this wide array of opportunities for all students to grow beginning in the very first semester is highly unique in the region and one of the many reasons students choose to attend Wesley College.
The sapling becomes a tree, its roots stronger, sheltered by the 148-year established community

In the second year of the students’ journey, the core curriculum takes center stage. Students taking core courses on the second level begin to form connections between academic disciplines. Our pioneering core curriculum comes alive through the way that different disciplines complement one another. For example, one student might take a course in creative writing that is grounded in a study of mindfulness and Jungian archetype examination, while another might take a course in ethical theory and contemporary public policy. Our four core areas--Arts and Culture, Literature and Languages, Philosophy and Religion, and History and Social Sciences--are designed to intrigue, to provoke, and to generate connections between disciplines. In this way, students’ roots grow stronger as they branch outside their program and see the tremendous value in interdisciplinary studies and research.

Peer tutoring and mentoring are encouraged as the students become adept at navigating their college educations. Faculty mentors recommend students who are strong in their programs to become peer tutors and mentors, and such students undergo rigorous training to become leaders among their peers. Often students needing extra help can improve their academic standing because they seek assistance from trained tutors. Moreover, professors are informed of tutoring sessions since they are logged online. Many tutors go on to work in a teaching capacity in careers, and faculty are able to write letters of recommendation detailing the skills exhibited in such tutoring experiences.

Additionally, students begin to form stronger connections with their faculty advisors. Faculty in departments with fewer majors advise undeclared students, which assists those students in choosing a major down the line. The number of advisees per faculty member is relatively low, which means that faculty can get to know their advisees better and give them personalized attention. Faculty workshops often focus on best practices in advising, and early intervention in cases of students undergoing difficulty is often fruitful.
After students become more acclimated to their college experience, many go on to join our plethora of student organizations or to become involved in student government. We make it quite easy to begin a new student organization. A few students with a similar interest can readily begin a new organization and obtain a budget to assist their startup. Students engage in student government, hold various offices, complete tasks relevant to their organizations, and engage in both fun activities as well as informational and educational endeavors as part of campus organizations. Some groups also raise money for important charitable organizations or engage in service to the community. Thus, the connections formed inside the classroom extend to outside the classroom, allowing students to work together academically and socially, reinforcing the concept of family that we so often promote at Wesley College.
Directed, mentored research at Wesley College began as a teaching experiment some twenty years ago. Since then, it has morphed into a college-wide program with a high number of stakeholders across all academic programs. In 2007, Wesley College began to showcase our students’ undergraduate research on a dedicated day in spring: Scholars Day was born. This is an annual college-wide event during which students present their own work, which may have started as a topic in a course or a problem in an internship. Scholars Day has slowly transformed the culture of research at Wesley College. Research was no more the distant art of graduate students and research professors at large universities, but it has become an integral part of every student’s education here at Wesley. In fact, course-embedded research gained such a hold within Wesley’s liberal arts mission that by 2014, the forward-thinking core curriculum designed by the faculty was created, helping us to make a significant step into the future with our focus on integrated inquiry, critical thinking, and undergraduate research. Students with junior standing take courses in Level Three; here they examine problems in depth. Students choose three courses according to their interests in either Identifying with Diversity, or Personal, Social, and Ethical Responsibility. The courses they take might revolve around particular aspects of history, or they might analyze medical and environmental data in their data science courses. It is not uncommon for some of these projects to lead to publications and the recruitment of students for competitive graduate and medical school programs.

The list of colleges and universities to which our students have been accepted is long, but for those who wish to present research at our Scholars Day, the amount of time they have been students at Wesley is no barrier. In fact, some students are asked by their professors to present their work as early as the end of freshmen year. It is not uncommon for our students to present their research more than one year; often, this early exposure to the type of work required in graduate school or in their chosen career field does wonders for their self-confidence and growth. Thus, our students learn through mentored and directed research the importance of working with others in academic and professional settings.
The orchards share resources, expanding their reach to outside our community

The culmination of the Wesley Experience involves practical real-world applications within the community during our Level 4 capstone courses. These can vary from internships, clinical experiences, conference attendance and presentations, and senior projects.

Whether strongly encouraged or required by the academic program, internships provide a very valuable way for students to begin to connect their skills and knowledge to members of the community. For example, the STEM department offers summer internships, many of which are funded by grant support. Kinesiology requires significant hours of internship experience through a healthcare facility. Departments such as history, law and justice, English, and music all have internship components integrated into their programs, and students may work in a variety of community settings, such as law offices, political offices, Wesley College offices, art museums, and local businesses.

Clinical experiences create opportunities for our students in nursing and occupational therapy to become caregivers in a variety of settings. In the nursing program, hands-on clinical experiences begin in the freshmen year and culminate with a Senior Practicum area selected by the student. In contrast, clinical fieldwork is a requirement for our students in the Masters of Occupational Therapy program. Such opportunities allow our students in these professional fields to extend their reach to those in need of compassionate care.

Our education majors also branch out into local schools where they develop and implement curriculum and learn real-world classroom management skills. Since they are paired with teachers in the community, our students make professional contacts that are necessary in their quest to obtain full-time teaching careers upon graduation.

Additionally, our students become skilled in the areas of research and conference attendance, presentations, and even publications. Because many of our students begin mentored research in their freshmen year, they have sufficiently developed the skills of inquiry and research to engage in conference attendance and presentations by their final year at Wesley. Many of our students have gone on to present papers locally or at national or international conferences. Our STEM department has assisted many students with undergraduate research that culminates in conference presentations; also, many other
departments, such as psychology, English, mathematics, and multimedia communications, have worked with individual students to prepare their papers for presentations at highly reputable conferences.

Lastly, senior projects also provide a method by which our students may engage with the broader community. Students choose faculty members with expertise in a particular academic discipline who can guide them in forming research questions and identifying research to create their projects. These students may choose to present their work at Scholars Day.

A valuable component of these experiences is networking and exposure to individuals within students’ professional areas. Students learn about the field, make professional contacts, and demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Students prepare to branch out to other communities through additional professional development, resume building, letters of recommendation from professionals in the field, as well as employment. Additionally, the community benefits because our students support internship/clinical experience locations, disseminate research results, and study important questions about the community.
The orchards branch, networking locally

Wesley College provides its students with focused and personalized guidance as they progress toward graduation and, in many instances, enter graduate school programs. An excellent example of the success of this guidance is seen in the recent placement of graduates from Wesley STEM programs as well as programs in the humanities. Our students have been accepted to a variety of Masters and Ph.D. level programs at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, University of Toledo, Thomas Jefferson University, SUNY, Winston-Salem State University, Salisbury University, Old Dominion University, University of North Carolina, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Medical University of South Carolina, Delaware State University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and many other esteemed colleges and universities. Of course, graduate school accomplishments often take place in our own vicinity when Wesley College students continue their education in our own graduate programs in Education, Business, Occupational Therapy, Nursing, and Criminal Justice.

Wesley students are also actively engaged in numerous community initiatives, such as Habitat for Humanity, The Delaware Food Bank, and The Shepherd Place. It is not surprising that in several instances Wesley undergraduate volunteer service has translated into sustained public service, as exhibited in the careers of Wayne Gilchrest and Colin Bonini. A Wesley education opens both eyes and hearts to the opportunities and challenges of today’s world, inspiring its students to excel beyond expectations.
What was once a sapling becomes a member of the Wesley family

Wesley College’s reputation for educational excellence stems from the vision that students will graduate achieving their full potential. For many alumni, the positive experiences and knowledge gained as students at Wesley College continue to be cultivated for many years after graduation. Wesley College recognizes the value, unique talent, and expertise of its graduates as demonstrated by the many faculty and staff who were once students themselves and yet today serve the student population. These alumni exemplify the quality of education received at Wesley College, and their passion for the College is demonstrated in how they uphold the traditions and spirit of the institution. They can be found throughout several departments and majors on campus including Admissions, Student Success & Retention, Academic Affairs, Informational Technology, Alumni Relations, Office Services, Athletics, Kinesiology, and Nursing.

Wesley College is often referred to as a family. Some alumni have returned as employees because of the positive environment, engagement, and community experienced as a student. They felt a sense of belonging and an awareness of being part of something special and unique. Many alumni encouraged the continuation of the College legacy by having their own children join others in the excellence of instruction, unity, and traditions offered within the Wesley College Community.

*Great Things Await* at Wesley College. Whether students are part of our honors program, STEM research and publication, Scholars Day, service learning, our high-performing athletic teams, our teacher education program, our nursing and occupational therapy programs, or our clubs and organizations, there is something for everyone at Wesley College. And it is through all of these varied opportunities that students begin to make connections, to their fellow students, to faculty, to support staff members, and to the larger community.

Wesley College has reach. Our graduates complete reputable graduate programs. We produce future teachers, researchers, and professionals. The liberal arts tradition of the small college, at whose heart lies close attention given to each student, has a role in the community beyond our campus. We educate the hearts, minds, and souls of our students so that they may become ambassadors of Wesley: their intelligence, creativity, and passion drives them to become a force for good in the world.
We do this by offering our students a unique experience, focused on the individual. Through our small class sizes and personal attention, Wesley College makes every individual student feel special. The student is connected. The student is supported. The student is family, and so are we.

Wesley College: the home we love; the home we seek; the home away from home.