Dr. Jennifer Burruss is new Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Services

Dr. Jennifer Burruss began her duties as the new Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Services at Martin Community College (MCC) on March 3. Dr. Burruss, originally from Washington, NC, comes to MCC via Virginia where she was working simultaneously for Caroline County Public Schools as the School Counseling Director and VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University) in Richmond as an adjunct professor in the Counselor Education Department.

Dr. Burruss brings extensive postsecondary level teaching experience to MCC as well as first-hand knowledge of managing and updating academic programs. Her acknowledged ability to lead collaboratively and supportively through faculty engagement make her a welcome addition to the MCC community.

Burruss earned her Doctorate in Higher Education Administration from The George Washington University, her Masters of Education in Counselor Education from East Carolina University (ECU) and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from ECU. She holds K-12 Pupil Personnel Licensure in Virginia and K-12 School Counseling Licensure in North Carolina.

In addition to working as an adjunct professor at VCU, Dr. Burruss advised the Student Affairs Networking Association (SANA) and served on the university’s NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teaching) Committee, Education Assessment Committee and Cultural Diversity Committee. She is also a member of NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators). As the Director of School Counseling for the Caroline County Public Schools, Dr. Burruss oversaw a number of operations, including: master scheduling; PSAT administration; organization of Career Day; updating the program of studies; conducting grade level assemblies; managing

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Author Jennifer Thompson-Cannino met with MCC students in Marsha Rogers’ English class via Skype (a telecommunications application which allows video chatting via the Internet) on April 10. Thompson-Cannino discussed Picking Cotton, the book she co-authored with Ronald Cotton and Erin Torneo in 2009. The book, which was required reading for the class, was on the New York Times Best Sellers List and has inspired many law enforcement and judicial systems to adopt “best-practices procedures” in processing eye witness identification.

Picking Cotton tells the story of Thompson-Cannino when she was raped at knifepoint by a man who broke into her apartment while she slept. She was able to escape, and eventually positively identified Ronald Cotton as her attacker. Ronald insisted that she was mistaken - but Jennifer’s positive identification was the compelling evidence that put him behind bars. After eleven years, Ronald was allowed to take a DNA test that proved his innocence. He was released, after serving more than a decade in prison for a crime he never committed.

Two years later, Jennifer and Ronald met face to face-- and forged an unlikely friendship that changed both of their lives. In the book, Jennifer and Ronald unfold the harrowing details of their tragedy, and challenge our ideas of memory and judgment while demonstrating the profound nature of human grace and the healing power of forgiveness. Today, they travel around the country speaking about the lack of credibility of eyewitness testimony and wrongful convictions.

The online interview was serendipitously facilitated by Ashleigh Howard, MCC’s Director of Institutional Research. When Howard noticed the book, Picking Cotton, in Mrs. Roger’s classroom, she noted that she had heard the author speak while she was a student at UNCG. Howard then called her former professor, Dr. Sandra Westervelt, a leading researcher on wrongful convictions, to see if she could contact the book’s authors and ask them to record a short video or write a card for the MCC students reading their book. Shortly thereafter, Jennifer Thompson-Cannino agreed to do an online interview with the class.

The students were extremely appreciative of Ms. Thompson-Cannino taking time from her busy schedule to share her thoughts and experiences in writing the book. Those in attendance asked several good questions and noted that the book should be required reading for all students. “It really made us think,” noted one of the students.
Burruss - continued

student caseloads; program-
ing Governor’s School, over-
seeing the storage of grades
and managing records.

For three years prior,
Burruss worked in VCU’s 2,000
student, School of Education,
first as the Director of the Stu-
dent Services Center and then
as a clinical coordinator within
the Counselor Education De-
partment. In these capacities,
Burruss organized and revised
clinical placement procedures,
oversaw professional develop-
ment, assisted in accreditation
processes, supervised staff, and
worked closely with departments
and faculty to make sure stu-
dent needs were met.

Regionally, Burruss has
worked as a School Counse-
lor in Bertie County and as
an adjunct instructor for
Beaufort County Community
College. She has also
worked as a School Counsel-
ing Specialist, a Clinical Co-
ordinator, a Student Services
Center Director, and a Guid-
ance Director in Virginia.

Dr. Ann Britt, president of
Martin Community College
stated, “After conducting a
nationwide search, I am most
pleased to have Dr. Burruss
joining our staff. Her skill set
will make a great addition to
our base of talent and allow us
to better serve our students.”

Away from work, Dr.
Burruss and her family enjoy
cookouts and time at the
beach.

When asked why she chose
to work at MCC, Dr. Burruss
replied, “I was drawn to MCC
because small institutions can
have a big impact on their
communities, and Martin is a
great example of that. I am
excited to get to know the stu-
dents, faculty and staff and
look forward to working with
them and the community as a
whole.”

MCC PTA Students work with Martin HS students

Allied Health students from Riverside and South
Creek High Schools visited the Martin Community
College (MCC) campus on April 1 to work with
MCC students in the Physical Therapist Assistant
program. This annual event prepares the high
school students to begin their clinical work. The
students received training in stairs, assistive de-
vices, client transfer, gates, and passive range of
motion. Pictured left is MCC student Johcel
Hughes (in the wheel chair) being lifted by high
school student Danielle Rogers. Below, are a
group of MCC students demonstrating passive
range of motion techniques on the High School
students.
Martin Community College celebrated its fifth annual graduation and recognition ceremony at the Bertie Correctional Institution on April 17. Twenty-nine of the eighty-eight GED (General Education Development) completers were present to receive their High School equivalency diplomas. Nine Commercial Cleaning, twenty-four Computer Application, and seventeen HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) certificates of completion were also distributed during the ceremony.

MCC president, Dr. Ann Britt and MCC Trustee Chairwoman, Jackie Gillam presented the diplomas and certificates of completion to the students.

The graduation speaker was Darren R. Whitehurst, Senior Pastor for the First Baptist Church of Kelford in Bertie County. Whitehurst brought a unique perspective to the graduates because he too, had been incarcerated. Pastor Whitehurst focused his comments on taking responsibility for your actions and the importance of now – “not what you did in the past or what you’re going to do when you get out, but what you are doing at this moment to make yourself a better person.”

Whitehurst told the graduates that when he entered the prison, “I was mad at my lawyer, the DA, the judicial system – everyone except the person who really put me in prison – me. It took me a couple of years for the anger to subside, but eventually, I realized that it was time for me to make a change and I asked God to help me.”

The changes came. Eventually Whitehurst had the courage and desire to enter a 30-day treatment program. Upon its successful completion, Whitehurst became one of 50 inmates in NC to be invited to enter a state sponsored counselor training program. He became a group counselor within his own prison.

Five years after serving nearly ten years, Whitehurst became the first ex-offender in the NC penal system to return to the prison, where he served most of his sentence, as a state affirmed chaplain. As Whitehurst stated, “I was humbled to be walking and talking a message of hope among the population to which I once belonged - to return to the facility where I once wore state issued clothing, now wearing a suit and tie, and carrying a state issued radio and keys to the Chaplain’s office.”

Today, Whitehurst not only pastors his flock, he also runs the Grace and Mercy House of Eastern NC, a nonprofit halfway house for ex-offenders which Whitehurst founded and is planning to expand. He also started a landscaping business which allows him to create jobs for the residents in the Grace and Mercy House.

Many in attendance of the commencement ceremony were moved by Pastor Whitehurst’s comments. Human Resources Director for MCC, Harlan Frye, stated, “Pastor Whitehurst did a great job. His message was powerful, not preachy, and one that all of the graduates could relate to.”

In regard to the graduation, AJ Tyson, Jr., Interim Executive Director of MCC’s Continuing Education Division stated, “The classes and training MCC provides at BCI are a key component in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. It provides them with vital skills they need to find employment – which along with transportation and housing – are the three legs of the metaphorical stool ex-offenders need to gain stability after their release.”

According to Jeri Griffin, MCC’s Basic Skills and GED Director, “The partnership between MCC and BCI is a significant one. We work together to return these men to their communities as productive citizens.” As Griffin sees it, “Education has the great ability to generate self-sufficiency and hope for a better future – something that is often in short supply within the prison population.”
MCC participates in Kidsfest at the Ag Center on April 11

MCC’s Early Childhood instructor Elaine Spellman and student Johanna Peele manned a booth at the Martin/Pitt Partnership for Children’s Kidfest on Saturday April 11 at the Senator Bob Martin Agricultural Center in Williamston. The event focused on wellness, recreation, community, health and fun as they pertain to young children. The Partnership for Children is a great resource for many of our students. For more information about the Partnership for Children and its many services, call 252-789-4911. Attending events like this, are fundamental in promoting MCC! The selfie on the right was taken by Elaine Spellman.

Advising workshops part of CBD goal to improve student retention

Dr. Brian Busch, MCC’s Associate Dean of Student Services, offered a series of workshops in early April to assist both advisors and students in signing up for the classes they need to complete their program of study. This training is an essential component of the Completion by Design program in which MCC is one of five colleges in NC and one of nine nationally to participate. The program is funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Pictured above from left to right are Instructors Al Dawes, Tami Thurston, Barbara Daly, Rhonda Breed, and Debra Twitchell. Student retention is an issue of concern for every college.
Wayland Mitchell is new BLET Coordinator

Wayland Mitchell has joined Martin Community College as the new full time BLET (Basic Law Enforcement Training) Coordinator and Lead Instructor of the program. He began his duties on April 13.

Mitchell brings with him a wide variety of law enforcement experience which makes him especially qualified to prepare students for the many different careers in the field – municipal police departments, sheriff’s departments, private security companies, school resource officers, and investigation.

Although born in Greensboro, Mitchell was raised in Ahoskie and graduated from Ahoskie High in 1987. He obtained his BLET certificate from College of the Albemarle and his BS degree in Criminal Justice from Elizabeth City State University.

Mitchell began his law enforcement career in the Williamston Police Department, from which, he moved to the Elizabeth City police force. Within two years he accepted a position as a school resource officer at Northeastern High School in the Pasquotank County School system. Eventually, Mitchell returned to the Elizabeth City Police Department as an investigator and obtained the rank of Sergeant. During this time, he began teaching for the BLET program at College of the Albemarle (COA) and has continuously taught part time for COA to present.

Most recently, Mitchell worked for the City of Greenville Police Department. However, after remarrying, he moved back to the Elizabeth City area to take a job with Harvey Point Defense Testing Activity in Hertford, NC. While there, he became a part-time Qualified Assistant in the state’s BLET program which, eventually lead him back to Williamston and Martin Community College.

Mitchell has six children, five girls and one boy. He enjoys outdoor activities, especially bicycling, kayaking, camping and spending time with his two dogs.

PTA students retake the Obama Adult Fitness Test and improve

Pictured left are Beth McCombs, Jessica Winstead, Seth Boyd, and Corey Everette working on their endurance component of the Obama Adult Fitness Test (OAFT). In January of this year, the students in MCC’s PTA (Physical Therapist Assistant) program, had their fitness levels assessed using the OAFT. The test categories included: endurance, strength, flexibility, and body composition. The students’ data was collected and kept on file. On April 23, the students retook the test to see if their fitness levels improved over the semester. Lead Instructor, Dawn Parker was pleased to report that all of the students improved their scores. Parker felt that all of the PTA students took the test seriously because exercise and fitness are such key components of physical therapy.
PTA instructor Dawn Parker and three MCC (Martin Community College) students in the PTA (Physical Therapist Assistant) program participated in the first annual Trot for Trykes 5K race that was held on April 25th in Greenville, NC. The event was sponsored by the NC Physical Therapy Association and its proceeds will be used to purchase bikes and tricycles for children with disabilities. The MCC participants from left to right were Kendall Street (third place in her age group), Brigette Dickson, Dawn Parker (Instructor), and Kaylyn Eastwood (first place in her age group).

Cell phone discounts available for MCC Employees

Great News! Do you have a Verizon, Sprint, or US Cellular phone? Many of cell phone companies offer as much as a 20% discount off your cell phone bill if you are an state employee. Call or visit your provider and inquire about a NC State Employee discount! If you do not have an Martin Community College identification card, please contact Crystal Pugh and she can schedule you an appointment to have one made!

MCC PTA Students run for Trykes

Pictured from left to right are Alex Delgadillo, Kaylee Jackson, Stephanie Kimball, Samantha Matamoros-Komar, Tammy Roberson, and Alex Joyner - six of the newest members to join the MCC chapter of Phi Theta Kappa.

13 MCC students join Phi Theta Kappa

Maureen Green, Director of the Academic Skills Lab and advisor to Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) at MCC, led the annual PTK Chapter Ritual in the MCC auditorium on April 16. Thirteen MCC students joined the membership of this prestigious group.

Green welcomed all attendees and noted that, “We come together tonight to honor these special students who are the cream of the crop. The students whose hard work deserves to be recognized.”

Phi Theta Kappa is an international honor society for two year colleges. Inductees must have completed at least 12 semester hours with a GPA (grade point average) of at least a 3.5.

Dr. Jennifer Burruss, congratulated the students on their accomplishments and praised them for their commitment to excellence.

The inductees then came to the stage and read the oath of office after which they filed past a ceremonial candle from which they lit a candle of their own, symbolizing the passing of the light of education and then received a white rose and certificate from Green.

The inductees included Alex Delgadillo, Kaylee Jackson, Stephanie Kimball, Samantha Matamoros-Komar, Tammy Roberson, Alex Joyner, Summer Corden, Kristi Godley, Brooke Newman, Fabiola Hernandez, Donna Mizelle, Lauren Rumer, and Megan LaGant.

A reception for the inductees and their family members followed the ceremony.
MCC Participates in Job Fair

MCC staff, Brenda Moore, Murray Elliott and Catina Blake, pictured above, manned two booths during the local Job Fair on April 16 at the NC Telecenter in Williamston. An estimated crowd of 300 jobseekers attended.

Three new members of the MCC staff

Walter Wheeler, the director of the MCC maintenance department, is happy to announce that there are three new employees in his area. Pictured from left to right above are Jerry Wilson, Kevin Raynor and Robert West. Wilson has joined MCC as a groundskeeper. Raynor and West are both maintenance workers. They can be seen all over campus performing a variety of tasks and keeping things in good order!

Martin Memos

May 4-6 - Exam dates
May 7 - Grades due by 10 am
May 7 - Graduation practice at 10 am
May 7 - Faculty meeting at 2 pm
May 11 - GED Graduation
May 12 - MCC Graduation at 7 pm in the Martin County Auditorium (Riverside High School)
May 15 - Summer schedule for MCC employees begins
May 18 - Summer Semester begins
May 4, 11, 18, 25 - Monday registration for new students continues
May 21 - MCC Foundation Golf Tournament at Roanoke Country Club
May 22 - Deadline for submitting news for the Martin Messenger
May 25 - Memorial Day