Wofford's Desegregation Decade, 1961-1972

Phillip Stone

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President Charles F. Marsh, who led the college from 1958 to 1968, was a Wisconsin native who spent nearly thirty years on the faculty at the College of William and Mary. He prepared a memo for the Board of Trustees in October 1963 that analyzed the possible outcomes of a decision to desegregate and of a decision to remain segregated.

1. Sadness and bitterness concerning the College on the part of some of its alumni, supporters, and friends.

2. Loss of financial support from some South Carolina Methodist churches.

3. With Clemson, University of South Carolina and eventually other state institutions accepting Negro students, we could well find ourselves in the intolerable position of being financially disadvantaged not only through lack of state tax support but also because the state colleges will become eligible for federal and private foundation support for which we should be ineligible.

4. The irrepressible and arrogant attitude of many Negro spokesmen in recent months is demanding “more here and now and right now.” It has made the liberal and progressive Negroes of the South look like moderates, both in the North and the South, to theRON to the Board of Trustees: The decision of the Board of Trustees to admit Negro students will be realized if they apply and carry out all of the required admission procedures.

5. Shall a vote be taken at this October meeting, the February meeting, or the May meeting on whether or not a policy should be adopted and announced that qualified Negro students will be admitted if they apply and carry out all of the required admission procedures?
On May 12, 1964, Wofford's Board of Trustees, pictured below, voted to admit all qualified students regardless of race. The board minutes document the policy change. A week later, President Charles Marsh released a statement explaining the board’s action.

Wofford College
Founded 1834
SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA
May 19, 1964

To Members of the Wofford Faculty, Administrative Staff and Student Body:

The Board of Trustees of Wofford College has authorized me to inform each of you concerning the basic admissions policy of the College.

This policy was originally stated by William H. Wrightman, first Chairman of the Board and first President, in laying the cornerstone of the Main Building. It reads:

"Wofford College...will be known throughout the United States as a Methodistic institution of learning. It will thus stand under no doubt the flag, and will doubtless be ready to show that flag in the smoke of battle, as well as in the setup of prosperity. I make this frank and distinct statement on the present occasion...that we may sway ourselves to the opportunity of saying, in behalf of that religious organization, that its leading principles are abhorrent to sectarian bigotry, and breathe the true spirit of a Catholic Liberty, of universal good will...in the spirit of these broad and liberal views, we shall open the doors of this institution to any of the youth of this country who may apply for admission, not only without demanding any acts of organic opinion, but also without any attempt to alienate them from the religious views in which they have been brought up..."

(As printed in Spartan, July 17, 1931, and quoted by David Duncan Wallace, History of Wofford College, 1944-45.)

For some years, students have been admitted to Wofford in accord with the following statement of admissions policy which is found in the current Catalogue (Wofford College Bulletin, Vol. XLII, No. 4, April, 1964) on pages 10, 11:

"Applicants may qualify for admission to the College as members of the Froshman class or as students with advanced standing. Since the enrollment of students is limited, the Committee on Admissions will restrict its selection of students to those who, in its opinion, are best qualified to benefit from the educational advantages which the College offers. Admission to Wofford College is dependent upon the ability, attainments, and character of the applicant..."

At its meeting on May 12, 1964, after months of study and careful and prayerful consideration, the Board of Trustees adopted the following resolution:

"That the Wofford College Board of Trustees go on record as endowing the present statement of admissions policy in the College Catalogue, with the assurance of the Board of Trustees that said statement of admissions policy is applicable to all students who may apply, regardless of race or creed."

It is my hope that this letter will be helpful to you in understanding the admissions policy of our College. With best wishes, I am

Cordially yours,

Charles F. Marsh
President

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF WOFFORD COLLEGE
May 14, 1964

The Board of Trustees of Wofford College met on May 12, 1964, at 5:15 p.m. in the Board Room, with Chairman Samuel F. Harvey presiding. Mr. J. C. Condon was elected temporary secretary and served in this capacity until the arrival of the regular secretary.

Present were all members of the Board except Mr. E. H. Hefter, Mr. W. D. Gilliam, Mr. C. Thomas and J. F. Tappan.

Dr. R. I. Cunningham led the opening prayer.

The minutes of meetings of the Executive Committee held on February 23 and April 3 were approved.

Dr. Cunningham reported for the Special Study Committee on Administration Policies. After much discussion, the following resolution was passed by a majority of those present without seconded members' dissenting:

"That the Wofford College Board of Trustees go on record as endowing the present statement of admissions policy in the College Catalogue, with the assurance of the Board of Trustees that said statement of admissions policy is applicable to all students who may apply, regardless of race or creed."

The Board approved a motion that authorized President Marsh to use his own discretion in releasing information to the Faculty and student body about Board action in regard to admissions policy.

Dr. Bruce H. Brown asked for the floor and expressed with due feeling his appreciation for Mrs. Patricia Cunningham, recently deceased, and added that the Board extend to Dr. Cunningham its deepest sympathy in her untimely passing. Dr. Brown was permitted to express the appreciation of the Board. Cunningham was present by the entire Board, and the members of the entire board expressed their sympathy to Jean Cunningham.
The public reaction to the decision came quickly. Many alumni and friends of the college reacted positively, putting their thoughts into letters to President Marsh. These letters are part of the Marsh Presidential Papers archive.

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**Methodist Center**
AV DREXEL UNIVERSITY
300 North 33rd Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

May 30, 1961

Dr. Charles F. Marsh,
President
Wofford College
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Dear Dr. Marsh,

Let me express my joy on better things, excellent qualities, the announcement of Wofford's new educational policies. I hope that this will not be an easy decision for you and the Board of Trustees, however, it exemplifies the importance of maintaining educational quality and moral standards. In this light, I look forward to hearing your response to this proposal.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

May 30, 1961

Dr. Charles F. Marsh,
President
Wofford College
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Dear Dr. Marsh,

I am honored to be a part of your 1960 Alumni Roll. My hope is that we can work together to improve Wofford at the inaugural meeting of the Board of Managers. It is my belief that we should continue to foster the growth of the college and improve its academic standards.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

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**J. Stokes Gillespie**
316 SRAVENHAM GROVE
ROCKWOOD, NEW JERSEY

June 8, 1961

Dr. Charles F. Marsh,
President
Wofford College
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Dear Dr. Marsh:

Last week I was talking with my sister, Mrs. Harris Chewning, and she told me that Wofford has officially opened its doors to all people regardless of race, color or creed.

May I please let you know how delighted I am, as an alumna, that this has happened. I have been away from South Carolina for many years but I can imagine that there are still those, particularly in the lower part of the State, who oppose this bitterly. You certainly have my moral support and anything else I can do for you to help in the months ahead.

I am sure that my father, Dr. Leo D. Gillespie, would have been pleased, too.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

J. Stokes Gillespie

JSG/m
Others connected to the college protested the move. Alumni and some Methodist congregations wrote that they would withhold contributions. These letters from individuals and churches are critical of the decision to desegregate. These letters are part of the Marsh Presidential Papers.
The college’s committee on admissions approved the application of Albert W. Gray, a student from Spartanburg and a graduate of Carver High School. President Marsh released this memo announcing his enrollment. The South Carolina Methodist Advocate reported Gray’s enrollment as well as reaction from Methodist churches around the state. Several clippings from newspapers around the state noted the college’s action.

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**Wofford College**

**SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA**

*September 5, 1934*

**President’s Office**

*Wofford College*

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**Wofford Integrates**

Albert Gray, Sr. of Spartanburg Monday became Wofford College’s first Negro student. Gray enrolled at the Methodist school as a freshman. He will major in accounting.

Gray finished third in his class at Carver High School in Spartanburg. He called the school “a wonderful college” and said he was not influenced to register by any group. (AP Wiresphoto)
Albert Gray, pictured here in the 1965 Bohemian, was the only African-American student during his freshman year. The Old Gold and Black published an interview with him in March 1965. Drafted into the Army, Gray served in Vietnam, but returned to graduate from Wofford in 1971 with a degree in sociology.

Gray Notes Cordial, Academic Atmosphere

by Dave Haigler, Feature Editor

"Wofford College is a good school. The academic atmosphere is something different from high school. I found that if you don't study, you'll just have to leave; it's as simple as that. I like the cordial atmosphere. Because of the advantage of being able to commute, Wofford is the only place I could get the type of education I want now."

These are the words of a freshman student, in describing Wofford College, his chance for a higher education.

What does this student want from Wofford College? In his own words he "just wants to be another student at Wofford. If I could be that and be a good student, I'd be satisfied." He wants to be a sociology major, so that he can go to graduate school, get a degree in sociology, and become a social worker.

"Adjusting is my hardest job, but it helps me." His versatility is evidenced by the number of activities he enjoys. He is a member of the Baptist Student Union, and the ROTC Band; and in his spare time he participates in sports, listens to records, reads books and magazines, and helps his little brothers with their studies. About music, he says, "I like all sorts of music: classical, neo-classical, and jazz." His reading list last includes such writings as the Communist Manifesto, A Day in the Life of President Kennedy, The Group, and the essay "On Liberty." "Because of the lack of time," he says, "mostly I just read book reviews and periodicals. I want to date a lot in high school, but I don't have that much time now."

The freshman student featured here is not a typical Wofford student, nor is he a very unusual Wofford student. Like all of us, he is a distinct individual. We have doubtless in featuring him because he is Wofford's first Negro student, Albert Gray."
Douglas L. Jones entered the freshman class in 1965. The Spartanburg native was a physics and mathematics major and participated in a number of campus activities, including ROTC. In 1969, he became the first African-American to graduate from the college.

Many Leaders Exist

... Some Are Molded ...

Others Are Born

Leadership is something that should not be overlooked.
Senior cadet Doug Jones was awarded in chapel for his outstanding ability shown at summer camp.
Assistant Dean of Students Bobby E. Leach joined the Wofford administration in July 1970, becoming the college’s first African-American administrator. He was named to direct the Residence Hall Education Program. Leach left Wofford in 1973 to become dean of students at Southern Methodist University, and in 1978, became vice president for student affairs at Florida State University. He earned his PhD in higher education administration in 1976 and served as president of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in 1985-86, the first African-American to hold that position. Dr. Leach died in 1989.

Dr. Otis Turner came to Wofford in 1972 as assistant professor of religion, becoming the first African-American member of the faculty. A native of Dawson, Georgia, he graduated from Albany State College and held seminary and doctoral degrees from Emory University. One new course he brought to Wofford was “Religion and Black Culture.” This represented one of several new courses added to the course catalog during an era of curriculum change.
African-American participation in student life grew quickly, particularly as the college increased its efforts at recruiting African-American students in the late 1960s. Whether it was on Campus Union or its committees (such as the Civic Affairs Committee, pictured here), the campus radio station (also pictured here) or in forming the Association of African-American Students (pictured here in 1975), African-American students quickly made an impact on campus.
Zawaski (Zeke) Bateman was Wofford's first African-American student athlete. A member of the basketball team, he transferred from North Greenville Junior College in 1969, playing for two seasons. He graduated from Wofford in 1971.
The college began to admit women as day students in the spring of 1971, and several African-American women enrolled. The first two of these to graduate were Janice B. Means ’73, who graduated in May 1973, and Gwendolyn H. Prince ’73, who graduated in August 1973.
Mr. Douglas Jones and Mr. Albert Gray with Dr. Joab Lesesne, president of the college, at opening convocation in 1999. Mr. Gray served as a member of Wofford’s Board of Trustees from 1998-2010. Two of Mr. Jones’ children, Moneefa Jones-Taylor ’95 and Jarvis Jones ’04, graduated from Wofford.
Newspapers all around the state reacted to Wofford's announcement. One trustee also took to the editorial pages to announce his opposition.

**The Herald**

**Greenville Piedmont**

**Wofford Will Enroll All Who Meet Policy**

- Students meeting admission requirements at Wofford College and selected for enrollment will be admitted without reference to race or sex in the future.
- The college board of trustees made this decision earlier this month and the students and faculty were notified of this policy this week.
- Wofford President Dr. Charles F. Marsh said the board's action "was the result of months of study.

**Wofford Board of Trustees Acts To Lower Racial Bars**

- Methodist-affiliated Wofford College plans to lower its racial barriers on admissions.
- The school's board of trustees decided earlier this month to accept students without regard for their race or creed. The decision was announced to the students and faculty this week.
- President Charles F. Marsh said the board's action was the result of "months of study.

- There are no plans at present to change the admittance policy at Columbia College, which is operated by the South Carolina Methodist Conference.
- Dr. Marsh said the board's action "was the result of months of study.

**Wofford Dorms Hit By Thieves**

- Two thefts from dormitories of Wofford College students are being investigated. One occurred on Monday when $100 was stolen from a student's desk and a second on Tuesday when $150 was taken from a student's room.

**Vendor Against Wofford Action**

- Mr. Wofford has been in opposition to the board's action.

**The Herald**

**CHARLESTON (S.C.), NEWS AND COUSIER**

**Evening Herald**

**Wofford opens its doors to Negro students**

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The Textile Tribune, a local newspaper, used its editorials to issue some strong criticisms of the college in the spring of 1964.

Sad Day for Wofford

School integration in Spartanburg County is opposed by about 92 per cent of the white people and is of little concern to a majority of the colored people, since the colored people have fine school facilities and able instructors for their own children. And 99 per cent of the white people in Spartanburg do not feel any guilt or morally wrong-doing with the situation that exists in our county.

Yet in the face of this peaceful situation the trustees of Wofford College in Spartanburg have announced a policy of mixing the races in the college. Such action was uncalled for and unnecessary. The trustees went against the wishes of 99 per cent of the white residents of this county.

Since the trustees of the college have taken such uncalled for action they should now be prepared to prove they are sincere. Let them not be surprised by their Negro students when they arrive at college to let them feel they are among strangers or are not wanted. College life is not made up entirely of books and studies. The association with other students, the participation in college activities, the visiting of homes of other students make up the full college life.

So, Mr. Trustees, do not let your Negro students suffer any lack of attention. Do not be hypocrites—if you can help it! If any of you have a daughter of dating age, then stand true to your colors and invite the Negro college students into your home and forbid them not to date your daughters. If there should be any “demonstrations” at the college, then stand true to your colors and lie down in the street, whenop and tell the whole world you want freedom now!

Yes, we know full well that 99 per cent of the white people of Spartanburg County are opposed to Wofford College mixing the races. The entire State is opposed, too, for that matter. A great majority of the people of the State, however, are opposed to the college mixing the races. Keen will be contributed for the operation of the college. Keen will be contributed for the operation of the college. Keen will be contributed for the operation of the college. Keen will be contributed for the operation of the college. Keen will be contributed for the operation of the college.

Oh yes, we mentioned that 99 per cent of white people. That other 1 per cent is white trash.

Maybe Money Talks

It was announced on radio the past weekend that the president of Wofford College stated that he had received more favorable than unfavorable mail on the action taken by Wofford that will probably lead to Negro students being enrolled at the college this fall.

We personally know of two people who said they changed their minds because of the action taken by Wofford College. In each instance $5,000 had been persuaded to Wofford. In both instances the mills were changed, and the college will not receive the money that otherwise would have been left in the bills. And up to this time eleven churches have announced the withholding of funds from Wofford.

Now it may be that Wofford College will receive more money from some foundations than the losses we now know about amounts to. That may be true. But the college has lost something far more precious and desirable than money. It has lost friends. There may be a substitute for money but there never has been and will never be a substitute for friends.

And another thing: If the course Wofford has taken is right, then does it not follow that Wofford’s past policy has been wrong? Row else could it be? And is there a man who will rise and say that all the devoted Christian men who have steered the course of Wofford in all the years gone by were wrong? Why has it taken all these years to learn that the college should become an integrated college?

There are many fine people and fine institutions in our beloved Spartanburg, but among the very finest of the fine are our two largest colleges—Wofford and Converse. And if it is true, as has been said, that Wofford College adopted a policy of integrating the class rooms of that institution for the purpose of being the recipient of large sums of money from some of the larger foundations of the country the result will inevitably be a loss of prestige for the college. The mark of high character will not be quite so outstanding. Many people have been proud of Wofford almost to a fault.

If it should now develop that all those fine qualities were sold for the high dollar it will truly be a sad day for Wofford.