

Desegregation at North Carolina State University—The Early Years
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Abstract

This paper is the result of a semester long project in which Devan Ray Donaldson¹ conducted archival research in the Special Collections Research Center of D. H. Hill Library at North Carolina State University (NCSU). Focusing on the Preliminary Inventory of the North Carolina State University Office of the Chancellor General Records, 1891 - 2005 collection, Donaldson examined materials that were part of J. W. Harrelson and Carey H. Bostian's papers while they were Chancellors at North Carolina State University in search of documentation pertaining to the beginning of desegregation as it was experienced at NCSU. Donaldson found documents concerning the early years of desegregation including: 1) documents and letters addressed to and from both former Chancellors as well as formal documents and letters from other members of the Consolidated University of the University of North Carolina,² 2) correspondence to and from various NCSU staff, alumni, and family of alumni, 3) correspondence to and from community members, and 4) newspaper clippings of articles concerning desegregation at NC State and the public's reaction. Of the documents Donaldson uncovered pertaining to desegregation, he found the sentiment of whites adamantly opposed to desegregation as a common thread among the documents. The black voice regarding desegregation is largely absent from the collection. Letters of denied admission indicate that otherwise eligible blacks were deemed ineligible based on criteria established by the Consolidated University of North Carolina Board of Trustees.³ Documents within the Chancellor's Office collection reveal a complex story concerning the beginning of desegregation as it was experienced at NC State.

The purpose of this document is to better understand desegregation as it was experienced on the campus of North Carolina State University (NCSU). This document will focus on the 1950s because desegregation occurred at NCSU during this decade. Examples within this paper will be used to prove that 1) at NCSU white education administrators made decisions based on a desire to maintain segregation, 2) some

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² During the 1950s the Consolidated University of North Carolina was a system of three public universities, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina—Women's College (now called the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Also, it is no longer a women's college), and North Carolina State College (now called North Carolina State University).

³ The Consolidated University of North Carolina Board of Trustees served as the board for all three colleges belonging to the Consolidated University—including NCSU. NCSU was responsible for enforcing guidelines approved by the Consolidated University of North Carolina Board of Trustees. This Board of Trustees played a central role in the decisions NCSU administration made concerning desegregation throughout the 1950s. Furthermore, this Board of Trustees greatly influenced the way in which desegregation was carried out at NCSU

instances in which desegregation occurred educational inequality persisted, 3) nothing short of Supreme Court rulings were necessary for desegregation to occur at both the graduate and undergraduate level at NCSU, and 4) even after desegregation of the graduate and undergraduate student body there is enough evidence to suggest that several faculty, administration, alumni, and community members were still opposed to desegregation.

Introduction

White southerners enacted a series of Jim Crow laws mandating segregation in businesses, schools, and in employment from the 1880s into the 1960s. Thus, when the second Morrill Act of 1890 required that 1) no distinction based on race be made significant in offering agricultural and technical education, and that 2) equal funds be appropriated to blacks and whites for agricultural and technical education, the state of North Carolina chose not to admit blacks into white schools, but, instead, after receiving the threat of losing educational funding appropriated from the federal government by the Morrill Act, the general assembly of North Carolina voted to provide funds for an agricultural and technical college for blacks—North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University—a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).⁴

After the establishment of North Carolina A & T University, the existence of agricultural and technical education inequality in higher education amongst blacks and whites in North Carolina persisted. North Carolina A & T had a lower budget, did not offer as many degrees and courses, and had less faculty, facilities, and opportunities for professional development than North Carolina State University.

Inequality in terms of higher education amongst blacks and whites as it existed in North Carolina was telling of a national problem. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, blacks were treated as second class citizens subject to unequal education, employment and armed forces opportunities. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that the fight for educational, employment, and armed forces equality became much more successful.

In 1942 a group of black and white students from Chicago, Illinois established the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an activist organization. A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, first planned a March on Washington in 1941 to protest against governmental hiring practices that excluded African-Americans from federal employment and federal contracts. Randolph understood that this type of racial discrimination was the reason for economic disparities between whites and blacks in the United States. Randolph proposed that African-Americans march on Washington to demand jobs and freedom. Because of this, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in the federal government and defense industries in June 1941. By the end of World War II, African-Americans war veterans insisted on their fair share of the American Dream. One great symbolic victory came in 1947, when

⁴ Frenise H. Logan, “The Movement in North Carolina to Establish a State Supported College for Negroes,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, v. 35, 1958, 170.

Jackie Robinson became the first black man to play major league baseball. One year later, President Harry S. Truman desegregated the United States Armed Forces.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and other court rulings mandated African-Americans' rights to equal public education. But Jim Crow laws were still enforced in the South, where Little Rock's Central High School was the center of a battle over desegregation. In southern states, many blacks still could not vote, could neither eat, swim, nor go to the bathroom in the same facilities as whites, and were threatened and sometimes murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Throughout the 1950s black leaders fought to break down the barrier of segregation including the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. who, with the NAACP activist Rosa Parks, successfully forced desegregation of the Montgomery, Alabama bus system; Medgar Evers, a determined NAACP organizer in Mississippi; and attorney Thurgood Marshall, who successfully argued the *Brown v. Board* case. It was against this national backdrop of the fight for desegregation that desegregation occurred at NCSU.

The purpose of this document is to better understand desegregation as it was experienced on the campus of NCSU. This document will focus on the 1950s because desegregation occurred at NCSU during this decade. Examples within this paper will be used to prove that 1) at NCSU white education administrators made decisions based on a desire to maintain segregation, 2) some instances in which desegregation occurred educational inequality persisted, 3) nothing short of Supreme Court rulings were necessary for desegregation to occur at both the graduate and undergraduate level at NCSU, and 4) even after desegregation of the graduate and undergraduate student body there is enough evidence to suggest that several faculty, administration, alumni, and community members were still opposed to desegregation.

Issues concerning desegregation were brought before the Consolidated University of North Carolina System Board of Trustees and NCSU administration. Examining documents, including memorandi written by the administration of the Consolidated University of North Carolina for all institutional members; correspondence between the President of the Consolidated University, then William C. Friday, and the Chancellor of NCSU, then Carey H. Bostian; correspondence from community members and NCSU alumni to Chancellor Bostian as well as other letters written by NCSU administrators, other college administrators, and community members are helpful not only for better understanding the ways in which desegregation was experienced in North Carolina, but specifically how desegregation was experienced at NCSU.

During the early 1950s, white administrators admitted a few black students into graduate and cooperative extension programs at NCSU. Admitting these students, however, was not an effort on the part of white education administrators to desegregate NCSU. Indeed, these education administrators denied support of integration (as proven in their written responses to people who sought explanation for their so-called behavior in favor of desegregation). Instead, admitting a few black students into graduate programs was not only a way of complying with the *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) Supreme Court case which stated that black graduate students be admitted to programs of study not available

in schools for blacks, *it was the most economically advantageous way for white education administrators to address education inequality*. Since separate and unequal education was being provided in North Carolina, white education administrators had to respond, or else they were going to be sued and lose federal funding for education. They could either provide more funds for education to HBCUs to establish programs that white schools had and HBCUs did not have, or admit black students seeking to earn degrees in programs not offered at HBCUs to white colleges or universities. White education administrators chose the latter so that they would be able to maintain federal funding for education and also not have to provide a larger portion of federal and state funds to HBCUs. Essentially, this choice would not affect programs and offerings available to white students, and, at the same time, offer educational opportunities for blacks which heretofore were non-existent in North Carolina. A by-product which came along with this way of solving education inequality in higher education for blacks in North Carolina was desegregation—whether white education administrators were trying to desegregate white colleges and universities in North Carolina or not.

Instances occurred in which education administrators within the Consolidated University as well as NCSU administrators were faced with issues concerning desegregation directly or indirectly. Because NCSU was a part of the Consolidated University of North Carolina, it is necessary to examine documents written by that administration. NCSU had to abide by the Consolidated University's rules. Although other members of the Consolidated University also experienced their own specific experiences with desegregation on their respective campuses, their experiences will be highlighted only if they relate to desegregation at NCSU.

The first document examined in this paper was written by an administrative member of the Consolidated University of North Carolina in which the author acknowledges the disparity in educational offerings of graduate programs for whites and blacks. The second series of documents are letters of denied admission to qualified black applicants to graduate and professional programs at NCSU. The existence of this documentation suggests that admitting blacks into graduate programs was not an effort on the part of white education administrators to desegregate institutions of higher education in North Carolina. This is why, although a few black graduate and professional students were admitted to NCSU, several qualified black applicants were denied admission to NCSU on the basis of race during the same time period. The third series of documents, concerning the cooperative extension program at North Carolina State University, reveals the state of desegregation as it was discussed among college administrators and members of the community during the early 1950s. The fourth set of documents shifts from emphasis on the admission, or lack thereof, of blacks into graduate and extension programs to undergraduate admission of blacks to NCSU. As late as 1955 otherwise qualified black applicants were denied admission on the basis of race. Examination of proposed documents that were sent to members of the first four black undergraduates to attend NCSU regarding their application status highlight the Attorney General of North Carolina as well as the Board of Trustees' desire to maintain segregation at the undergraduate level—until the Supreme Court case of *Frasier v. the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina* (1956) in which the Supreme Court Justices ruled

against denying admission of qualified students to undergraduate programs based on race. With the admission of the first four black undergraduates to attend NCSU came formal desegregation of the undergraduate student body. Their involvement in student activities, music groups, and athletics, however, meant desegregation, however limited, for colleges throughout the South East. The fifth set of documents includes newspaper articles which focus on the reaction politicians, administrators, and community members who lived near other colleges and universities in the South had regarding desegregation at NCSU. Also included in this series of documents are reactions of alumni and staff to the first four's involvement in activities which suggest disdain of desegregation rather than appreciation for it.

By the end of the 1950s the blacks that were a part of either the undergraduate or graduate student body experienced varying degrees of racial discrimination in situations with faculty and students, and were very few in number—just as NCSU's Chancellor Carey H. Bostian predicted.

1951--The Beginning of Discussion Concerning Desegregation at NCSU

During 1951 administrators who were part of the Consolidated University of North Carolina came to the conclusion that education inequality in public institutions of higher education amongst blacks and whites existed, and furthermore, these administrators knew they were responsible for finding a solution to the existence of this problem. Based on documents uncovered at NCSU's Special Collection Research Center it seems as though one individual in particular was the first to articulate the existence of this educational inequality among the races. Just after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Sweatt v. Painter* that black graduate students must be admitted to programs of study not available at HBCUs,⁵ W. D. Carmichael Jr., Consolidated University of North Carolina Vice-President and Finance Officer, wrote a memorandum entitled "A Review of the Development of Graduate and Professional Education for Negroes"⁶ to William Gray, President of the Consolidated University of North Carolina, which was carbon-copied to administrators at all colleges within the Consolidated University—including Chancellor J. W. Harrelson of NCSU. In this document Carmichael compared the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with North Carolina College, now North Carolina Central University, an HBCU, and found that these schools were unequal in terms of degree offerings as well as faculty training programs. UNC offered thirty-six master's degree programs while NCCU offered thirteen. UNC offered twenty-five PhD programs while NCCU offered zero. Based on disparity such as this, according to Carmichael, the state of North Carolina stood the possibility of being sued and losing federal funding for education if white education administrators of the Consolidated University did not devise a way to address this problem of educational inequality. Carmichael ended his study stating that white education administrators had to do something to offset the vast educational inequality that existed for blacks in North Carolina and proposed admitting

⁵ *Sweatt v. Painter*, No. 44, SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES, 339 U.S. 629; 70 S. Ct. 848; 94 L. Ed. 1114; 1950 U.S. LEXIS 1809, April 4, 1950, Argued, June 5, 1950, Decided

⁶ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 12, Folder 15, 29, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

blacks into white graduate programs, however unpopular whites found this idea, as a way of doing so. Despite the fact that NCSU was not featured in Carmichael's comparative study specifically, this memorandum had important implications for NCSU because NCSU offered degrees and programs not offered at any HBCU in the state.

Based on research within the Special Collection Research Center at NCSU, there is no evidence of any education administrator from the Consolidated University neither articulating the state of education inequality amongst whites and blacks in higher education nor is there any evidence of an education administrator suggesting that public institutions of higher education be desegregated in any capacity before J. W. Carmichael. Assuming that this is true, it could be strongly argued that Carmichael's report directly affected the Consolidated University of North Carolina Board of Trustees' decision to develop an admission policy for Negroes—the first of its kind at NCSU.

Just a few months after Carmichael sent his memorandum to members of the Consolidated University, the Board of Trustees of the Consolidated University of North Carolina created a new admission policy for Negroes which stated that:

- A. *“At this time the Trustees’ ruling is that Negroes will be admitted only to the graduate school at State College.”*
- B. *“No Negro will be enrolled for any curriculum offered in any college for Negroes in North Carolina.”*
- C. *“No Negro will be enrolled for any course in residence or by extension if said course is offered in any state-operated college for Negroes in North Carolina.”*
- D. *“No out-of-state Negro will be considered for enrollment.”⁷*

All institutional members of the Consolidated University of North Carolina were responsible for enforcing these policies regarding the admission of Negroes from 1951 onward. Even after the Brown v. Board decision of 1954, the Trustees still implemented their policies from 1951 and charged state funded institutions with continuing to uphold these statutes despite segregation in the classroom and work place having been deemed unconstitutional. Although the policy outlined by the Board of Trustees did establish desegregation on the campus of North Carolina State University—it should be noted that this was only a “crack of the door.” A few blacks were eligible for admission based on the new policy, but several applicants were deemed ineligible. The policy of 1951 made way for extremely limited integration.

Graduate Students--Admission Denied

During the fall of 1953 Robert Lee Clemons and Hardy Liston entered graduate school at NCSU to study electrical engineering. Liston withdrew because the stress of teaching as a full-time faculty member at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University in Greensboro, NC while commuting to Raleigh for full-time study in

⁷ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 12, Folder 15, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

electrical engineering was overwhelming.⁸ Robert Lee Clemons remained at NCSU and graduated in May of 1957. While there is one success story in Clemons, several blacks were denied the opportunity to attend NCSU based on criteria the Board of Trustees created to make otherwise qualified black students ineligible for admission. As indicated in the “admission for Negroes” policy adopted by the Board of Trustees, only blacks who were in-state students applying to programs not available at any of the HBCUs in North Carolina had a chance of attending a white school. The following are two examples of black applicants who were denied admission to NCSU based on the criteria set forward by the Board:

Example One:

Mr. Samuel Lee Hamlin applied for admission to begin a master’s program at NCSU in occupational information and guidance during the summer of 1955. He attended Winston-Salem State University for undergraduate studies and had a distinguished academic record. On May 10, 1955, Donald B. Anderson, then associate dean of the graduate school, wrote Mr. Hamlin:

I am sorry that we cannot accept members of your race in a program of graduate work which is available in the State-supported institutions established for Negroes. Inquiry indicates that work leading to the master’s degree in guidance is available at North Carolina College. I suggest, therefore, that you write to Dr. Roy Thompson of the faculty of North Carolina College in Durham, North Carolina for information relative to the work in which you are interested.⁹

Example Two:

On June 2, 1955 Anderson denied admission to yet another qualified black applicant. He wrote to Miss Mattie Louella Hodge:

I am sorry to say that we are not permitted to accept Negro students in the Graduate School unless they are citizens of this State. I am sure that the work in which you express an interest is offered at North Carolina College in Durham, and it is quite possible that you might be accepted for graduate study at that institution.¹⁰

The preceding excerpts were selected from a folder of letters of denied admission found within the Special Collections Research Center. The existence of these documents are helpful for understanding that, even though a few black graduate students entered North Carolina State University as early as 1953, far more otherwise qualified black applicants

⁸ Interview with Hardy Liston, October 3, 2006.

⁹ Chancellor’s Office, UA 002.001 Box 17, Folder 14, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

¹⁰ Ibid.

were denied the opportunity to attend NCSU based on criteria the Board of Trustees established in their admission policy for Negroes.

The Cooperative Extension Program for Farm and Home Agents

As it was earlier stated, the Morrill Act of 1890 required annual funds for agricultural and technical education to be split equally among black and white races. This requirement was unfulfilled in North Carolina from 1890 up until the 1950s. Throughout most of the aforementioned time period, North Carolina State University (for whites) and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University (for blacks) existed. However, funding was not split equally among the universities for education. This is why the institutions were unequal in terms of the number of faculty, quality of facilities, training for faculty as well as program and degree offerings. In addition, North Carolina State University had funds for the establishment of a cooperative extension program for farm and home agents while North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University did not.

Instead of providing funds for NC A&T University to develop a cooperative extension program, white education administrators chose to admit blacks into NCSU's program. Even this measure against education inequality, however, was problematic. Chancellor Bostian points out that blacks would not receive credit for their coursework in the cooperative extension program, and furthermore, blacks would not be allowed to take courses that would make their having to use campus facilities necessary. Admitting blacks to the cooperative extension program was no more than a means of seeming to provide equal education while in reality continuing to withhold such opportunities from blacks. On January 21, 1955 Chancellor Bostian wrote Mr. E. W. Ruggles, College Extension Director:

Dear Mr. Ruggles:

Our present policy for admission of Negroes to classes conducted by the Extension Division limits their enrollment to non-credit courses. It is also requested that no advertising be made of this arrangement.

It is also understood that Negroes cannot be admitted to any non-credit courses where rooming and eating facilities are involved, such as the Driver Training School.

It is my opinion that the only classes to which Negroes can be admitted will be a few evening non-credit courses.

Very Truly Yours,

Carey H. Bostian

Chancellor¹¹

If providing equal agricultural and technical education was the reasoning behind admitting blacks into the cooperative extension program at NCSU, then Chancellor Bostian's instructions to Mr. E. W. Ruggles, the College Extension Director, were rather flawed. By no means were blacks and whites going to be afforded the same educational opportunities. After all, whites were able to receive credit for their coursework and training, while, as Chancellor Bostian pointed out in his letter to Ruggles, blacks were only allowed to take non-credit courses. Furthermore, because education administrators at NCSU were committed to segregation, blacks were not allowed to take courses that would involve staying on campus to use food and lodging facilities of any kind. Whites were. Thus, providing admission for blacks into NCSU's cooperative extension program provided a small, largely-ineffective, measure against educational inequality in North Carolina's public higher education system, and, at best, black home and farm agents had the possibility of receiving a slightly less unequal educational experience than ever before. Within this laid the possibility of desegregation on NCSU's campus in perhaps the narrowest way possible.

The small chance of desegregation based on the agreement to admit blacks into the cooperative extension program stirred uproar in the white community—causing some white community members with ties to NCSU to write Chancellor Bostian directly—one by the name of Mrs. Lucas. On February 22, 1955 Mrs. Lucas wrote Chancellor Bostian a letter expressing her disapproval of proposing to allow blacks admission to the cooperative extension program. She wrote:

Sir:--

I understand you have asked permission to take Negroes carrying on extension work in the summer school at State college, you being the first head of the institution to have ever made a request of this kind. Instead of waiting for the Supreme Court¹² to force their admission, it would seem that you have gone out of your way to seek their admission. Why did you do this? Don't you think you should have left well-enough alone? We do not wish to take them in our schools and colleges in any number or at any time. Taking them in gradually will be as harmful to our white race as is creeping paralysis to the human body- the end of which is destruction.¹³

After explaining to Chancellor Bostian the unpopularity of his decision among whites, Mrs. Lucas discussed the Brown v. Board decision further by explaining to Chancellor Bostian that, given the “character” of the nine men on the Supreme Court, “you couldn't

¹¹ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

¹² Here Mrs. Lucas is referencing the Supreme Court decision of 1954 entitled Brown v. Board which declared segregation unconstitutional.

¹³ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

expect a correct interpretation of a court made up of such men.”¹⁴ In capital letters she wrote to Chancellor Bostian: “*THE NAACP WAS SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE DECISION IT WANTED, BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER OUR WHITE PEOPLE WILL BE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO LET IT BE CARRIED OUT....*”¹⁵ Mrs. Lucas even creates religious and moral grounds for her belief in segregation by stating: “if God had wanted the races mixed, he would have mixed them at the beginning. Since he did not, I think we had better not attempt the mixing.”¹⁶ She concludes with a threat to remove her family legacy from North Carolina State University if integration was in fact what Chancellor Bostian was truly seeking:

I have one brother and one nephew who are graduates of State College, however, if this college falls for integration, I would never consent for any other member of my family to attend this institution.

Very Truly,

*Mrs. D. M. Lucas*¹⁷

In Mrs. Lucas’ statements she uses the word “we” when discussing views against desegregation which suggests she was writing on behalf of herself and others. It seemed as if she felt it necessary to explain to Chancellor Bostian that “we” (which most likely stood for many white southerners in Raleigh, or perhaps Mrs. Lucas thought of herself as writing on behalf of whites all over the nation) did not want desegregation. After explaining this to Chancellor Bostian, perhaps Mrs. Lucas believed Bostian would reverse the decision to allow blacks admission into the cooperative extension program. On March 1, 1955 Chancellor Bostian replied to Mrs. Lucas’s letter. He wrote:

Dear Mrs. Lucas:

Last week you wrote to me about your objections to having the Negro Farm and Home Agents come to State College next summer for a Conference with the white Agents.

You have probably read in the Raleigh NEWS AND OBSERVER or your local papers that the Board of Trustees upheld the decision of the Executive Committee with a four to one vote. I would like for you to understand that this decision did not come from a recommendation that we at State College made to the Trustees. If you will read carefully what has been published, you will find that we explained to the Trustees that there were three ways by which these Negro Agents could receive the information they need in order to be kept up-to-date.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

I do not mind admitting that I expressed the opinion to the Trustees that the method approved is the best way to accomplish our purposes. An overwhelming majority of the Trustees agreed that this has nothing to do with mixing of the races in our public schools and churches. I do not believe a single member of the Board of Trustees would have voted for approving their action, if he thought that he was doing anything to stimulate a mixing of the two races.

I hope that you and every citizen of our state will understand that North Carolina State College seeks to provide the best possible service to the people of North Carolina and in ways which they approve.

Sincerely Yours,

*Carey H. Bostian
Chancellor¹⁸*

In Mrs. Lucas's letter to Chancellor Bostian, she accused him of being in favor of integration, rebuked him based on her perception of his actions, and ended with the threat of cutting off her family from attending NCSU. In Bostian's response, he failed to fully explain why he and the board decided to admit blacks into the program, yet he clearly stated that integration was neither his nor the Board of Trustees' goal.

1955—No desegregation at the undergraduate level

The Board of Trustees conceded to let a miniscule number of black students into graduate programs: only blacks who were in-state students applying to programs not available at any of the HBCUs in North Carolina. However, the Board stood immovable in denying blacks undergraduate admission. Black students who applied for undergraduate admission received letters from the institution such as the following:

May 31, 1955

*Mr. Gordon Gray, President
The University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

Dear Mr. Gray:

*I would like to submit the following letter as a suggestion
for communicating with Negro applicants:*

“Dear Mr. _____:

¹⁸ Ibid.

Your application for admission to the curriculum in _____ has been received.

The Board of Trustees of the Consolidated University of North Carolina has decided that applications of Negroes to the undergraduate schools at the three branches of the Consolidated University not be accepted

We trust that you will be able to pursue your education at another college.”

*Sincerely Yours,
Carey H. Bostian
Chancellor¹⁹*

The preceding document is a draft of a letter Chancellor Bostian prepared as a response to black applicants applying for undergraduate admission that he sent to President Friday for approval. This letter and others like it²⁰ were mailed to any black applicant who applied for undergraduate admission at any one of the three institutions that were part of the Consolidated University. All blacks were denied undergraduate admission despite their achievements, test scores, and other merits.

As it was mentioned earlier, D. W. Carmichael Jr. was able to convince the Board of Trustees that graduate education was separate and unequal and changes needed to be made. Furthermore, Carmichael was able to explain to the trustees that the Supreme Court would not stand behind states which provided this type of education for its black citizens, especially given the Sweatt v. Painter decision of 1950 which stated that black students must be admitted to graduate programs of study not available at HBCUs. With regard to undergraduate education, however, it seemed as though nothing could convince the Board of Trustees to integrate. Consider the following statement from the Board of Trustees in May of 1955:

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY BOARD OF TRUSTEES, May 23, 1955

The State of North Carolina having spent millions of dollars in providing adequate and equal educational facilities in the undergraduate departments of its institutions of higher learning for all races, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Board of Trustees of the Consolidated University of North Carolina that applications of Negroes to the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Various members of the Consolidated University Board of Trustees and administrators wrote several drafts of letters that were to be sent to blacks who they denied admission. These university colleagues revised each other's drafts for feedback and further revision. Various versions of these documents were sent to black applicants applying to universities that were part of the Consolidated University. These drafts are available at NCSU's Special Collection Research Center. Here is the citation: Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

*undergraduate schools at the three branches of the Consolidated University not be accepted.*²¹

Given the Board of Trustees' stance, there was a small chance for a few black graduate students to attend one of the branches of the Consolidated University while there was no hope for blacks to attend any one of these schools for undergraduate study. And yet, during the next academic school year, four black undergraduates were admitted into NCSU. What could explain the occurrence of desegregation despite such adamant opposition to it by trustees and administrators?

Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina v. Frasier—1956

The Brown v. Board decision of 1954 which deemed educational segregation unconstitutional made whites aware of the fact that they would have to admit blacks into white colleges and universities. Yet, with a time frame no more clearly defined than "with all deliberate speed," white education administrators continued to deny admission of blacks to undergraduate and graduate programs based on trustee policies. Subsequent court cases brought before the federal court were useful in explaining to white education administrators just what was meant by "with all deliberate speed." As decisions regarding cases brought to the Supreme Court would prove, it almost always meant a lot sooner than whites supposed.

The Leroy Benjamin Frasier, Jr. et al., v. Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina court case, which was argued before the North Carolina State Court System on September 10, 1955 and decided on September 16, 1955, was appealed, and brought before the Supreme Court on March 5, 1956. It stated:

*This suit seeks a declaratory judgment that certain orders of the Board of Trustees of the Consolidated University of North Carolina, which deny admission to the undergraduate schools of the institution to the members of the negro race, are in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The plaintiffs also ask for an injunction restraining the University and its trustees and officers from denying admission to the undergraduate schools to Negroes solely because of their race and color. The plaintiffs pray for relief under Rule 23(a) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, 28 U.S.C.A., not only for themselves but also for all other Negro citizens of North Carolina as a class who possess the qualifications for entrance to the University.*²²

The attorneys representing Leroy Frasier, John Lewis Brandon, and Ralph Frasier argued that qualified blacks be admitted into the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the student applicants. It seemed as though since

²¹ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina

²² Board of Trustees v. Frasier, Supreme Court of the United States, 350 U. S. 979; 76 S. Ct. 467; 100 L. Ed. 848; 1956 U. S. LEXIS 1317, Mar. 5, 1956.

the court case was filed against the Consolidated University of North Carolina Board of Trustees, admitting qualified blacks would apply to all institutions that were part of the Consolidated University. Although some education administrators interpreted it this way, North Carolina's own attorney general, William B. Rodman Jr., did not.

1956--Nearly Two Months before the Arrival of the First Four Black Undergraduates

Even after the Supreme Court ruling in favor of the student applicants in the Fraiser v. Board of Trustees case, challenges against the formalized desegregation of NCSU's undergraduate student body persisted up until two months before the arrival of the first black undergraduates on the campus of NCSU. William B. Rodman Jr., then attorney general of the state of North Carolina, was the most powerful source of challenge to desegregation. Indeed, he fought for segregation until the last moment possible. His actions can be used to explain why the otherwise simple action of sending correspondence to black applicants became somewhat of a sticky situation. As education administrators at NCSU were moving forward with the admission process for blacks, the attorney general gave William C. Friday, President of the Consolidated University of North Carolina, directions to halt the admission process for blacks to undergraduate programs at NCSU, which left NCSU admission officers at a loss in terms of how to proceed.

On April 4, 1956 Mr. K. D. Raab, Director of Admissions and Registration, wrote Chancellor Bostian concerning how best to respond to Irwin Richard Holmes Jr.'s application—especially after what had already been sent to Walter Holmes on behalf of NCSU concerning his application:

Dear Dr. Bostian,

On February 14, 1956, the Admissions Office received an application for admission from Walter Van Buren Holmes, 124 Masondale Avenue, Durham, N. C. Mr. Holmes is a Negro.

In accordance with current directives he received the following letter dated February 15, 1956.

“This will acknowledge your application for admission together with your partial high school record which indicate that we will be able to approve your admission if you maintain your present scholastic average, complete the program outlined, and are graduated. A tentative dormitory reservation will be made as of this date.

Shortly before you complete your high school work we will forward your principal a form for reporting your final grades. You should be certain this record is sent to us before the school office is closed for the summer.”

On March 2, this office received a memorandum from Mr. William C. Friday, Acting President of the University of North Carolina. This memorandum, dated March 1, 1956, concerned Negro applicants and instructed Dr. Spain to send the following letter to any additional Negro applicants.

“This letter is to acknowledge receipt of your application dates _____, which I received in my office today.”

On March 19, 1956, this office received a completed application from Mr. Irwin Holmes, Jr., 1403 Alston Avenue, Durham, N. C. Under current policy, which we have been instructed to follow, this later acknowledgement is entirely different from that sent to Walter Holmes on February 15, 1956.

Since these two applicants are in the same class and, we believe, related, the difference in the acknowledgement is quite likely to be noticed and cause considerable publicity and embarrassment.

In view of the above facts we feel that every consideration should be given to the reply from this office in the case of Irwin Richard Holmes, Jr.

*Sincerely,
K. D. Raab, Director
Admissions and Registration²³*

Thus, on February 15, 1956 NCSU administration had moved as close to integrating its undergraduate student body as it ever had in the history of the institution's existence. Yet, with William C. Friday's memorandum the admission process for blacks was put to a halt. In no way did the form President Friday proposed to be sent out from March of 1956 onward, which simply informed black applicants to NCSU that their application was received, compare with the tentative letter of admission that was sent out to Walter Van Buren Holmes in February of 1956. Essentially, President Friday was requiring NCSU to take several steps backward in the desegregation process. Why?

Attorney General Rodman wrote Chancellor Bostian a letter on February 28, 1956 explaining that the state of North Carolina had appealed the Supreme Court's decision in terms of the effect the court decision would have on admitting black undergraduates at the other institutions that were part of the Consolidated University. Because Rodman had not heard back from the Supreme Court regarding whether or not the *Frasier v. Board of Trustees* decision was applicable to NCSU, Rodman wrote Bostian:

Our appeal to the Supreme Court is still pending. While the Court refused to suspend its judgment as to the three Negro youths who went to

²³ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Chapel Hill, until the Supreme Court has passed on the question, I am not certain what we would need to say to these applicants.

A number of other questions, both legal and policy, are presented. I will try to be prepared to give the answers to the legal questions, but the questions of policy will, of course, necessarily have to be passed on by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees.

The Supreme Court may at any time pass on our appeal and, since these Negroes do not seek to enter before next [sic] Fall, I do not think you need to take any action at the moment.

If you have any further communication from [either of the black applicants], I wish you would advise me promptly.

Yours very truly,

*(signed) W. B. Rodman, Jr.
Attorney General²⁴*

Thus, as late as April of 1956 Attorney General Rodman was still proposing to neither accept nor reject black applicants to NCSU—segregation by default. With the Supreme Court ruling against the state of North Carolina’s appeal, however, Rodman and the Board of Trustees realized that they had to admit qualified black students into all undergraduate programs that were part of the Consolidated University of North Carolina—including NCSU.

The First Four Black Undergraduates, their Student Activities, and the Public’s Reaction

In 1956, the first African-American undergraduate students entered NCSU; all were engineering students. Walter Holmes enrolled in mechanical engineering with an aerospace option, and Irwin Holmes, Manuel Crockett, and Edward Carson enrolled in electrical engineering. Two of the first four, Walter Holmes and Manuel Crockett, enrolled during the summer of 1956. The other two, Irwin Holmes and Edward Carson, entered during the fall. Not only were the first four black undergraduates integrating by virtue of being students on campus, they were integrating other college campuses by their involvement in various intercollegiate student activities.

Walter Holmes joined the band during his first semester of college. Bryan Haislip of the Sioux Falls Argus-Leader newspaper interviewed Holmes about his experience as a band member. Haislip wrote that Holmes reported “a warm welcome from other band members.”²⁵ Although Holmes may have received a warm welcome from his fellow

²⁴ Chancellor’s Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

²⁵ “Integration Works at N.C. State Colleges; No Incidents Reported,” by Bryan Haislip, Sioux Falls Argus-Leader, Sunday, Oct. 28, 1956, 3-D.

band members, reaction toward his presence in the band started a bit of a media wild fire provoking other universities throughout the South to articulate their stance against integration. Many white southerners began to realize that Holmes' presence in the band at away games would cause integration in campus football stadiums as well as dining and lodging facilities. Particularly, Holmes' presence at Clemson University caused uproar in South Carolina. In the Raleigh News and Observer newspaper, Del Booth wrote about the controversy:

Athletic teams of South Carolina's state supported colleges apparently will not compete on home soil against racially mixed teams of other colleges.

Both Atty. Gen. T. C. Callison and President R. F. Poole of Clemson College made it clear today that this is the present policy.

Teams of South Carolina state supported colleges apparently will be guided by the policies and laws of the states in which they are playing when engaged out of the state.

Athletic Director Rex Enright of the University of South Carolina said the matter has not come up as far as the university is concerned, but when it does, "we will deal with it."

It came up at Clemson Oct. 5, indirectly, when the N. C. State College band, there for a football game, showed up with a Negro member who ate with the band in the Clemson College dining hall.

A result is a petition now being circulated in the Lake City area of the state, directed at Gov. Timmerman, and to be delivered to him when at least 2,000 people have signed. One thousand had signed through last week.

The petition asks the governor to see that such racial mixing doesn't occur again, especially when N. C. State visits the University of South Carolina here Nov. 23.

The petition calls the Clemson incident "a foot in the door" wedge against the state's official and adamant stand for segregation.

Callison said, without quoting any particular law, that the entire segregation structure of the state supported schools and colleges presupposes that any integration on school grounds is untenable.

Poole said he had mentioned the matter to N. C. State on the same basis—that mixing violates the spirit of laws under which state-supported institutions operate and receive state funds.

Clemson and the university are especially concerned with the prospect of meeting teams of mixed races because they both are in the same athletic conference—the Atlantic Coast Conference—of which N. C. State is a member.²⁶

²⁶ "S. C. Racial Policy Is 'Clear,'" The News and Observer, Raleigh N. C., Thursday Morning, October, 17, 1957, 18.

Irwin Holmes, another of the first four black undergraduates to attend North Carolina State University, was also involved in intercollegiate athletic activities which deeply concerned advocates of segregation:

*The Negro student in the N. C. State band was the No. 1 tennis player on State's 1957 freshman team, and is expected to be a candidate for the 1958 varsity. State has April 18 and 19 tennis dates, respectively, with Clemson at Clemson and with the university here.*²⁷

The band member and tennis player were not the same person. Walter Holmes was the band member and Irwin Holmes was the tennis player. Regardless of the mistaken identify on behalf of the reporter, what is clear is that institutions throughout the South were going to be integrated by virtue of athletic association—at least to the degree that one Negro student band member would use the same facilities as whites and that one Negro student tennis player would possibly compete against white players—and several white southerners were against it. One did not have to travel down to South Carolina to encounter whites in favor of segregation despite the first four being enrolled in courses and involved in student activities. In fact, it was not even necessary to leave N. C. State.

Mr. A. W. Boswell, a NCSU alum, wrote H. W. Taylor, Director of Alumni Affairs, a letter in which Boswell complained about Walter Holmes' membership in NCSU's band. While Boswell's letter was not present in the archives, Taylor's response to Boswell was. On October 1, 1956 Taylor replied to Boswell stating:

*I agree with you in that I am opposed to integration. I saw the boy in the band and that is all I know about it because I have not been here enough to pick up any details.*²⁸

From Taylor's reply the reader can infer that Boswell and Taylor were engaged in a dialogue in which they both agreed they were opposed to desegregation. For those who may not have deep enough of an understanding of the desegregation process as it was experienced at NCSU this document is important. The process of desegregation was much more complex and multi-layered than the arrival of the first four. Their presence within the student body, as the preceding document proves, did not mean that an appreciation for desegregation occurred in the hearts and minds of all NCSU staff and alumni. There are only a few documents like this letter within the Special Collection Research Center, so I can only pose a few suggestions. If the preceding document is representative of several letters Chancellor Bostian received, which would mean several of these letters were weeded out of the archival collection, then I could much more easily assert that NCSU staff and alumni were adamantly opposed to desegregation well into the late 1950s. If the preceding document was the only one of its kind, I would be much more inclined to say that few NCSU staff and alumni were opposed desegregation—based on the documents. What I can say with certainty is this, I did not come across any

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

NCSU staff, alumni, and/or family members who wrote any correspondence directly or indirectly to the Chancellor in which an author expressed a positive attitude toward desegregation. This is what leads me to believe that the preceding document is perhaps more representative of the correspondence Chancellor Bostian received regarding desegregation than not. If nothing else, the preceding document is evidence that, during the 1956-1957 academic years, there were administrators and staff members employed by NCSU as well as alumni who were openly against desegregation.

One is also left to consider which is worse: open disdain for desegregation, or mere toleration of desegregation only to the point of complying with federal law. Take Chancellor Bostian for example: In his response to the same alumnus Mr. Taylor addressed in October of 1956, Bostian makes it clear that NCSU was only desegregating in order to comply with federal law. Furthermore, Bostian takes the position that desegregation certainly will not occur in any significant percentage. In other words, desegregation would occur at a rate just enough to comply with the federal government—nothing more. On October 5, 1956, Bostian replied to Boswell upon Taylor's request stating:

Mr. Taylor has asked me to send you an explanation of the membership in our band of a Negro student. We are fully aware of the attitude of the people of North Carolina about the admission of Negroes and their participation in activities. Our policy has been determined by the Attorney General, the Trustees of the university, and by the administrative officers of the Consolidated University as necessary compliance with decrees of the Federal courts.

Five Negro students were thus admitted to the freshmen class for this year. The printed program for the orientation of freshmen announced band try-outs and urged all qualified freshmen to apply for membership in the band. It would have been a violation of the decree from the Federal courts if we had inserted a statement that Negroes were not eligible for the band and if the Director of the band had told Negroes who appeared for try-outs that they could not be in the band. Two Negroes appeared for try-outs. One was rejected because of only fair performance on his instrument. The individual approved for being in the band is an excellent musician and there was no way the Director of the band could eliminate him.

We are endeavoring to carry out the law without discriminating either for or against the Negroes whom we admit. I do not believe there will be many of them at State College and doubt that we shall have as many as five freshmen during the next four or five years. After admitting three freshmen at the University last year, some thought there would be many this fall. There is not a single one.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid.

Thus, in this document Bostian simply states that by federal law NCSU had to allow their black students access to the same opportunities as white students. Furthermore, Bostian felt it necessary to comfort proponents of segregation, such as Mr. Boswell, by stating that there were not that many black students currently enrolled and most likely would only be a few in the future. What Chancellor Bostian stated, that as of October 1956 no black student had applied for admission to NCSU for the next semester or next academic year, was true. What he left out was that neither had any white student during that part of the academic school year. When Bostian wrote this reply, school had hardly been in session more than two months, which was obviously outside of the admission process cycle. As a whole, there was not a shred of altruism in Chancellor Bostian's remarks.

The 1957-1958/1958-1959 academic years

Fortunately, by the appropriate time for receiving applications for the upcoming academic year, NCSU did receive applications from black prospective students. In fact, there were a few new black faces during the academic year of 1957-1958 including George Ratcliff Bennett majoring in electrical engineering; Richard Hausber Bowling majoring in electrical engineering, who also applied for a dormitory room; Roy Cecil Dunn who majored in electrical engineering; James Summer Lee majoring in electrical engineering whose father was a biology professor at NCCU; James Edward Oxley, the first Negro student to major in chemical engineering; and Robert Lee Reid majoring in Nuclear Engineering.³⁰ In addition, 1957-1958 marked the first year black women attended the university. Jessie Mae McQueen entered as a freshman majoring in nuclear engineering while Yolanda Leine Fisher of Raleigh, NC entered as an unclassified student (UN).³¹

More black students enrolled for coursework during the 1958-1959 academic years as well. Marguerite R. Cook took courses as an unclassified student in the school of education. This academic year marked the first time in which African American women enrolled in graduate programs at NCSU. Mrs. Rebecca Christmas Weatherford³² was the first African American woman to attend graduate school at NCSU in applied mathematics. During the same year Hazel Virginia Clarke enrolled as a graduate student in Occupational Information and Guidance (OIG).³³

³⁰ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 21, Folder 23, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

³¹ Unclassified student—a student working for college credit but not enrolled in a degree-granting program. Admission as an unclassified student requires the recommendation of the dean of the college in which the student wishes to enroll. Unclassified students must meet the same entrance requirements as regular degree students and must meet the same academic requirements to continue. If, at a later date, unclassified students wish to change to regular status, their credits will be evaluated in terms of the requirements of their intended curriculum.

³² Based on Research I completed outside of the Special Collection Research Center I found out that after Mrs. Weatherford graduated from NCSU, she became a professor of mathematics at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, NC and worked there for over forty years.

³³ Chancellor's Office, UA 002.001 Box 21, Folder 23, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Conclusion

Relying on research from the Special Collections Research Center entirely, this paper was born out of a desire to better understand how desegregation should be properly regarded during the 1950s in North Carolina with focus on North Carolina State University. Based on documents featured in this paper, desegregation during the early to mid 1950s would be best characterized as a by-product of weak attempts to address a completely different issue—offsetting education inequality existing amongst blacks and whites in North Carolina in order to maintain funding for public higher education from the federal government. Desegregation was too radical for white community members—who criticized white education administrators at NCSU for any steps they took toward admitting blacks into graduate and extension programs. During this time period only two black graduate students were admitted into graduate programs and hardly more than two were admitted into the cooperative extension program. Blacks in the cooperative extension program were not allowed to earn credit for their coursework nor were they allowed to use campus facilities for food or lodging. During this time period, this was the type of desegregation to which several white community members were adamantly opposed.

After the arrival of the first four black undergraduates on campus, NCSU experienced desegregation at the undergraduate level. Desegregation of the undergraduate student body coincided with continued sentiment against desegregation among white administrators and community members as well as a group of white students in favor of desegregation willing to take a stand in favor of it—at least by befriending their black classmates.

There seemed to be no significant change in the number of black undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at NCSU by the end of the 1950s. Each year a few black male and female students attended NCSU. By and large it seems that the words Chancellor Bostian wrote to comfort alumnus Mr. A.W. Boswell, “I do not believe there will be many of them at State College and doubt that we shall have as many as five freshmen during the next four or five years”³⁴ rang true well into the early 1960s.

³⁴ Chancellor’s Office, UA 002.001 Box 18, Folder 68, University Archives, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina.