

1961- 1969



Sykes Presidency Begins

Earl Sykes starts his eight-year presidency, which sees a commitment to diversity well before the passing of the Civil Rights Act. He is committed to hiring black faculty and would refuse to sponsor rental housing that only accepts white students.



1961



Men's Soccer Team, NCAA Champions

The men's soccer team wins the NCAA Championship this fall. Only a single opponent scored more than one goal against them all season.



1961



U.S. Gymnastics Perform in Poland

On August 10th, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Men's and Women's National Teams leave campus for a tour of the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia. They trained on campus for a week beforehand. In exchange, Japanese and Soviet teams perform at WCU, thanks to an invitation by Russell Sturzebecker, at the time Dean of Health Sciences and an expert on the Olympic Games.

AAU-Poland poster on loan from Special Collections.

1964



Computer Center Created

With the establishment of the Office of Research and Data Processing, the first computer center is created. It is located in Anderson Hall and uses IBM systems with punch-cards.

1965



Darlington Herbarium is Catalogued

Botanist William Roy Overlease begins a 5-year overhaul of the catalog for the Darlington Herbarium, a compendium of flora specimens begun by U.S. Congressman, botanist and West Chester native William Darlington (1782-1863). Given to the West Chester Academy in 1850, it is the second oldest institutional herbarium in the US.

Wild grass specimen on loan from Special Collections.

1969



Black Student Union Founded

The Black Student Union is founded as a club to “motivate, inspire, and unify the multicultural campus on-and off-campus.” Activism-oriented, it quickly overshadows the more conservative NAACP chapter. One of its founders, Larry Dowdy, would dedicate much of his career to diversity and inclusion at WCU as a long-serving executive deputy to the President and founder of the Dowdy Multi-cultural Center.

Vietnam Protesters Clash

National Day of Conscience Protests on campus spark clashes between pacifists and hawks at all institutional levels. Speaker wires are cut, a bomb threat is called in, and the names of deceased servicemen are laughed at.

Michael Kay Scandal

On December 4th, the college administration decides not to reappoint Professor Michael Kay. An outspoken liberal activist, many perceive this as a violation of academic freedom, and gets the college censured by the American Association of University Professors.

Black Student Union plaque showing the organization's presidents from 1969-1991 on loan from Larry Dowdy.

1971



Cross Burning

On October 20th, 4-5 white students are observed carrying a cross across a field from Sanderson Hall at about 1:30 am before it was lit. Draped over the cross was white cloth with the letters "W.C.S.C.-KKK".

Boxing Club Begins New Era

Founded in 1955, the Golden Rams Boxing club reached its height in 1971, when Al McChesney and Dean Plemmons began co-coaching. Students fondly recall their coaches' passion for boxing and belief in the lessons the sport could teach inside and outside of the ring. Yet as popular interest in boxing waned at the turn of the millennium, the club disbanded in 2001.

Original Quad issue detailing the events leading up to and immediately following the event, on loan from Larry Dowdy.

Boxing club memorabilia on loan from WCU Athletics.

1972



Old Main Demolished

This piece of Old Main's door is taken during the building's demolition in 1972. The historic building, which was built in the majestic "Old Imperial" architectural style in native serpentine stone, is replaced in 1974 by the concrete New Main Hall, designed in the Brutalist architectural style popular on college campuses at the time.

Door and knob keepsake on loan from Special Collections.

1973



Center for International Programs Established

The Center for International Programs is established to coordinate study abroad trips, assist international students and provide language training.

Gordon Natural Area is Inaugurated

In response to proposed dorm construction in 1969, a coalition of students led by David Fluri and Bradley Gottfried begin a 2-year movement to preserve 186 acres of native Eastern woodlands on South Campus, behind Farrell Stadium. On November 10, 1973, the Board of Trustees formally establishes the Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies, named after a beloved biology professor.

Please see our exhibit on the Gordon currently on display in the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology. To visit the Gordon, see www.wcupa.edu/GordonNaturalArea.

1974



Women's Center is Established

The WCU Women's Center is established during the Second Women's Movement. Dr. Pamela Hemphill becomes the first director, and today, the now renamed Center for Women and Gender Equity continues to advocate for the safety and equitable treatment of female students and staff members.



1974



Graduation is Cancelled

The graduating class of 1974's ceremony is canceled when a hurricane causes massive flooding and closes campus. This would be the only time a graduation is cancelled outright, though others would be postponed: Graduation in 1902 had been moved earlier in the day because of a smallpox outbreak. And while the COVID-19 pandemic would end nearly all in-person classes and activities on campus for over a year, the class of 2020's graduation first would be held virtually, and then in several in-person ceremonies across campus in May 2021.

1976



Gays of West Chester Founded

The precursor to the WCU Chapter of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and Ally Alliance is founded with a mission to “promote equality for all people, and to insure [sic] the rights and privileges of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual students, staff, faculty and community members-at-large.”



Gays of West Chester

President:
Jon Geiser
Education Coordinator:
Tim Cwik
Delegate at Large:
Susan Lambert

1976



Sykes Student Union Opens

Sykes Student Union opens as a common area for students, complete with meeting rooms for clubs and dining options.



1979



Student Handbook is Published

In the Spring, the Off-Campus Student Association publishes a handbook for students who are renting. It includes housekeeping, security, social, and legal advice.

Handbook on loan from WCU Special Collections.

1980-1995



Eagles Hold Summer Training on Campus

The Philadelphia Eagles hold their preseason training camps at the South Campus athletic fields. They had previously trained at Wayne Field in 1938, 1940, 1944, and 1945. Beginning in 1980 they would stay in Schmidt Hall and would frequent popular student hangouts like the Rat. During this time, the Eagles would enjoy a renaissance under coach Buddy Ryan and QB Randall Cunningham, who would become the first black QB to be a Pro Bowl starter.

Cunningham jersey c. 1985 on loan from Nick Staats.

1981



Current First Lady Graduates from WCU

Jill Biden receives her Masters of Education from West Chester State College. She would go on to get her doctorate (Ed.D.) at the University of Delaware while teaching at Delaware Technical Community College. She continues teaching throughout her tenure as Second Lady from 2009-2017. As current First Lady, she has made affordable public education a priority.

1982-1992



Kenneth Perrin Presidency

Kenneth Perrin begins his presidency in 1982, stabilizing the school after a period of difficulty. He would also become known for his practicality, making campus changes to install night lighting, blue light buttons, and air conditioners in the dorms.

