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TOP STORY

Spaces created to help Wake Forest students, faculty relax

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Anna Keller/Special Correspondent



David Rolfe/Journal

Students helped to unpack bistro-style tables and chairs on Tribble Plaza on the Wake Forest University campus, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013.

Intentionally creating places for college students to relax and hang out may seem a bit counterintuitive.

But, as Provost Rogan Kersh of Wake Forest University points out, the current generation of college students is more schedule- and routine-driven than ever before, so unstructured downtime is actually a rare occasion.

“Generation Y tends to be very over-programmed,” Kersh said. “This is the first generation of young people who actually schedule time in their calendars to talk to their friends. We wanted to find ways to interrupt these routines,

and to add a touch of spontaneity and play to the mix.”



Wake Forest University landscape worker Thomas Wilborn helped wheel a new upright piano onto Hearn Plaza outside of the Subway sandwich shop Tues., Mar. 19, 2013, and was the first person to sit down and play. The university is putting out bistro tables stocked with games, athletic gear, and the piano in an effort to create spaces for the students to linger and relax. While Wilborn was playing, a passing student scribbled a sticky note and pasted it above the keyboard which read, "Thank You. That's beautiful!"

Toward that end, Wake Forest reached out to Biederman Redevelopment Ventures Corp., a group with significant experience turning underused open spaces into areas for passers-by to unwind. Wake Forest wanted to use BRV's experience to transform the quad area into a place where students would be encouraged to interact with one another, play games and break their routines, if just for a bit.

"We found that there weren't a lot of places for people to sit comfortably outside, and so people were going from place to place more often," said George Roberts of BRV, the project manager on the Wake Forest endeavor. "We added moveable seating to the quad as well as game equipment. All these things were designed for people to take a 30-second break or a 30-minute break, and to create moments of surprise and discovery."



Alex Hill, (l-r), Kimberly Struglinski, and Teddy Landsman helping unpack bistro tables and chairs in Tribble Plaza at Wake Forest University, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013. The university is upgrading outdoor gathering spots for students to relax and unwind.

Since the project rolled out last fall, Wake's once-empty quad now contains several bistro tables and chairs, ping pong tables, game carts, and footballs to entice people to sit for a while, or challenge a fellow student to a game of Connect Four between classes.



A variety of board games are set out in new outdoor lounge areas on campus at Wake Forest University, seen Tues., Mar. 19, 2013.

"There wasn't a major announcement about these changes — they just sort of cropped up," said Wake Forest senior Kory Riemensperger, an English and communications double major. "Now they find themselves with 10 minutes between classes, and they might spend their time there. It's a way to get out of your daily routine, because we tend to live very structured lives here."



The shadows from bistro tables and chairs resemble musical notation at Tribble Plaza at Wake Forest University, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013. The university has set up outdoor lounge areas for students to relax and gather, supplying board games, athletic equipment, and an electric piano painted in the school colors.

The lack of advance notice was intentional, and it was part of the push to make the project feel organic and unstructured, Kersh said.

There are plans to continue evolving the quad space by adding such things as regularly scheduled fitness classes, dance practices and musical performances. In the short months that the project has been in place, Roberts said he has already noticed a shift in the way people seem to view the quad.



Wake Forest University sophomore Chris Ford, left, sat down for a turn on the electric piano wheeled out on Hearn Plaza, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013.

“We’re already seeing people walk on the quad more and getting a sense that these are spaces to be used, not to be kept off limits,” he said. “They’re no longer just spaces waiting for commencement. They are meant to be used all-year round by everybody.”

In addition to the project on the quad, Wake Forest plans major renovations to Reynolds Gymnasium, which hasn’t been updated since it was built in 1956. The school has surveyed its students to determine what new amenities they’d like to see in the gym, and overwhelmingly respondents requested living room-like hangout areas in the gym, as well as some of the suggestions the school expected, such as a spinning room and a weight room.

“In the last year, Wake has been especially focused on the overall well-being of our students,” Kersh said. “‘Wellness’ often means physical fitness for students, but we wanted to define it in a much broader sense, expanding to include intellectual well-being, social and emotional well-being, professional and academic well-being, spiritual well-being and environmental well-being.”



To gauge how successful these campus wide efforts have been, Wake Forest is working with Gallup to develop a survey for measuring and understanding what well-being means on a college campus. The aim is to find a baseline so the university can measure students’ well-being as they add programs to have a sense of what is effective.

As for Riemensperger, he says he definitely gets the sense that Wake Forest truly cares about all students’ well-being and looks forward to seeing even more expressions of that commitment emerge in the coming months.

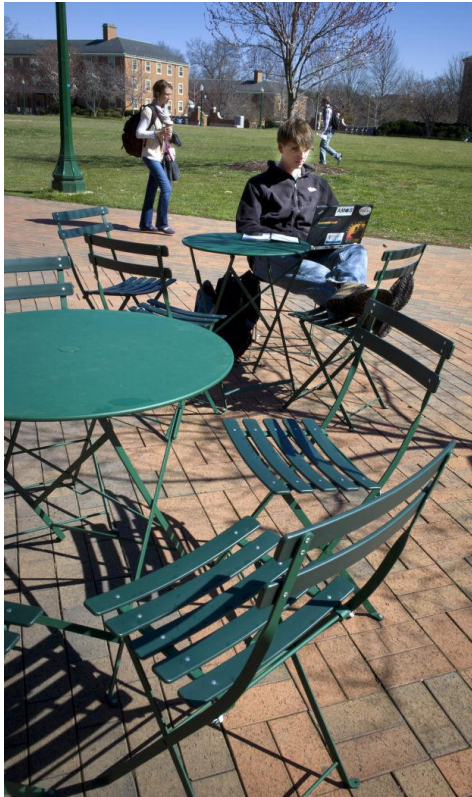
New bistro tables were uncrated on Tribble Plaza at Wake Forest University, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013 to provide students with additional places to gather and relax

“They’re definitely paying attention to us and focusing on how they can keep things as balanced as possible,”



Riemensperger said. “The school is always looking out for students and giving them opportunities to slow down and take in the world around them.”

Wake Forest University has set up a pair of ping-pong tables on Hearn Plaza for students to relax, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013.



Wake Forest student Daniel McCall, rt, made use of new bistro tables and chairs set up on Hearn Plaza as he worked with his laptop, Tues., Mar. 19, 2013. The university is upgrading spaces on campus for students to relax with tables and chairs, board games, athletic gear, ping pong tables, and an electric piano