

Catalyst Profile
Laura Lauffer

Over the years, Laura Lauffer, who graduated from WCU in 1988, has become something of a polyglot. Of course, she knows Spanish, French and Tshiluba, which is commonly spoken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, this former Catamount has also become fluent in the language of environmentalism, community outreach, and nonprofit management.

From 2008 to 2015, Lauffer served as Central Carolina Community College's lead instructor of sustainability studies, directing programs in sustainability technologies, green building, and renewable energy. She advocated for living roofs and solar panels to be placed atop academic buildings and lessons on hydroelectricity and architecture to be implemented in classrooms.

Her dedication even earned Central Carolina the nickname "Green Central," something that is unabashedly displayed on their website alongside photos of rain barrels and garden beds. The name "Lauffer" even works its way into the local *Sanford Herald*, often accompanied by photos of Earth Day activities or "celebrations of Mother Nature."

Still, before Lauffer developed her green thumb, she found herself surrounded by the lushness that is Appalachia. In 1986, this Fayetteville native headed off to the Wheeling campus in hopes of earning a bachelor's degree in History, with a concentration in Art History, European History, and Spanish.

During her two years at WCU, she interned at the Mountain Heritage Center, shelved books at Hunter Library, and served dinner in the chancellor's home. James Lewis, professor emeritus of the History Department, also provided Lauffer with "individualized attention" and guidance.

After graduating, she joined the Peace Corps and worked as a news coordinator for "all Africa." From there, her career took a turn toward all things sustainable. In 1996, Lauffer graduated from North Carolina State University with a master's degree in public administration with a concentration in sustainability, technology and international development.

Then stationed in Pittsboro, North Carolina, Lauffer began heading off sustainable agricultural initiatives. For four years, she acted as executive director of Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, helping North and South Carolinian farmers transition to all organic practices. The nonprofit organization even received a multiyear grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Her professional pursuits have also included organizing conferences for the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and protecting the genetic diversity of seed stocks at the Rural Advancement Foundation International. Lauffer is also a member of

the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association and is certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Though she has since learned the language of gray water catchment systems and renewable energy, Lauffer's multilingualism began in the greenness of WCU's central quad and the solitude of off-campus hiking trails.

"My time as a student allowed me to create sustainable technologies and enjoy the outdoor area," said Lauffer. "It was the best time of my life."