

Scholar in Residence

To close out my Fall 2023 sabbatical, I spent a week in residence at Cloverlea Farmhouse. During my previous two sabbaticals (the opportunity comes around every seven years), I was enrolled in academic programs and away from Lynchburg for the entire year. This time around, my sabbatical proposal requested the half-year, full-salary option (rather than the full-year, partial-pay option.) I lined up academic projects that would contribute to my scholarship and teaching, some time for reflection, and re-imagining my classes. Reinvigorating my love of reading was also part of the plan.

As the semester's end drew ever closer, I longed for a sense of completion for any one of the goals I had put forward. Some dedicated time away was surely the answer!

The brainstorm that Jennifer Wills and I had imagined and revisited off and on since she stepped into the role as Director of Claytor Nature Center began to take shape. We settled on the dates, and I made my plans. I said to Jennifer that I was boldly billing myself as Claytor's inaugural scholar in residence. Jennifer responded that I WAS the inaugural resident scholar!

Our idea was and is still new and still in process, but my January week in residence at Cloverlea gave shape to an idea, answered a need, and offers a promising opportunity.

The Claytor Nature Center, Ecolodge, Belk Observatory, Cloverlea Farmhouse and the encompassing 491 acres of woodland, grasslands and trails are without question a rich resource. One of the challenges, however, is the distance between the Lynchburg campus and the Bedford campus. The distance becomes an asset when the goal is to get away!

The drive from my house in Lynchburg to Cloverlea is about 20 miles by way of Route 221 or about the same distance and length of time by way of Bedford County's back roads. I took the back way, winding my way through Virginia's beautiful winter woods. Mountains to my right, then my left, next looming large up ahead drew my gaze upward time and again, if only for a moment. Those twisty turns warranted close attention to the road!

The backroads drive provided a much-needed sense of departure. I was going away. I could focus fully and wholly on the work ahead.

In the spirit of collaboration, I invited faculty colleagues to join me throughout the week. (Being a big chicken, company also assured that I would not be scared at night!) English faculty were invited to share the workspace and engage ideas in a relaxed way that our usual semester crunch department meetings just couldn't manage.

Drs. Nichole Sanders and Ghislaine Lewis, colleagues and co-collaborators on a grant that is collecting oral histories from the Pierce Street neighborhood, spent part of the week with me. The extended time to meet, plan, make decisions, and actually accomplish some of our work

together gave us the jump start that we needed. Now that we are into the work of the semester—a semester filled to the brim with our students, classes, committee and department work, and other obligations, we are following the momentum we generated during our focused time in January.

Friend and colleague Dr. Amy Merrill Willis stayed at Cloverlea for half of the week. I teach one of the generation education capstone classes that falls under Amy's leadership in her role as Director of Integrative Studies and General Education. Notably, during our January week, I was rounding out my sabbatical semester just as Amy was entering hers. We brainstormed ideas for future scholar residencies and imagined a community component where scholars will visit nearby schools or offer a community program during a residency.

Throughout the week, we took in the beautiful views, relaxed in the spacious and gracious farmhouse, cooked good food, enjoyed wine and cheese while watching the sunset, and slept soundly and well in our choice of comfortably furnished bedrooms.

I still didn't complete all the things, and I have a sense of my sabbatical semester as swift and fleeting, but the time at Cloverlea was generative. It was a place where I could feel both firmly anchored in work that needed doing and able to lift my gaze to the mountains.