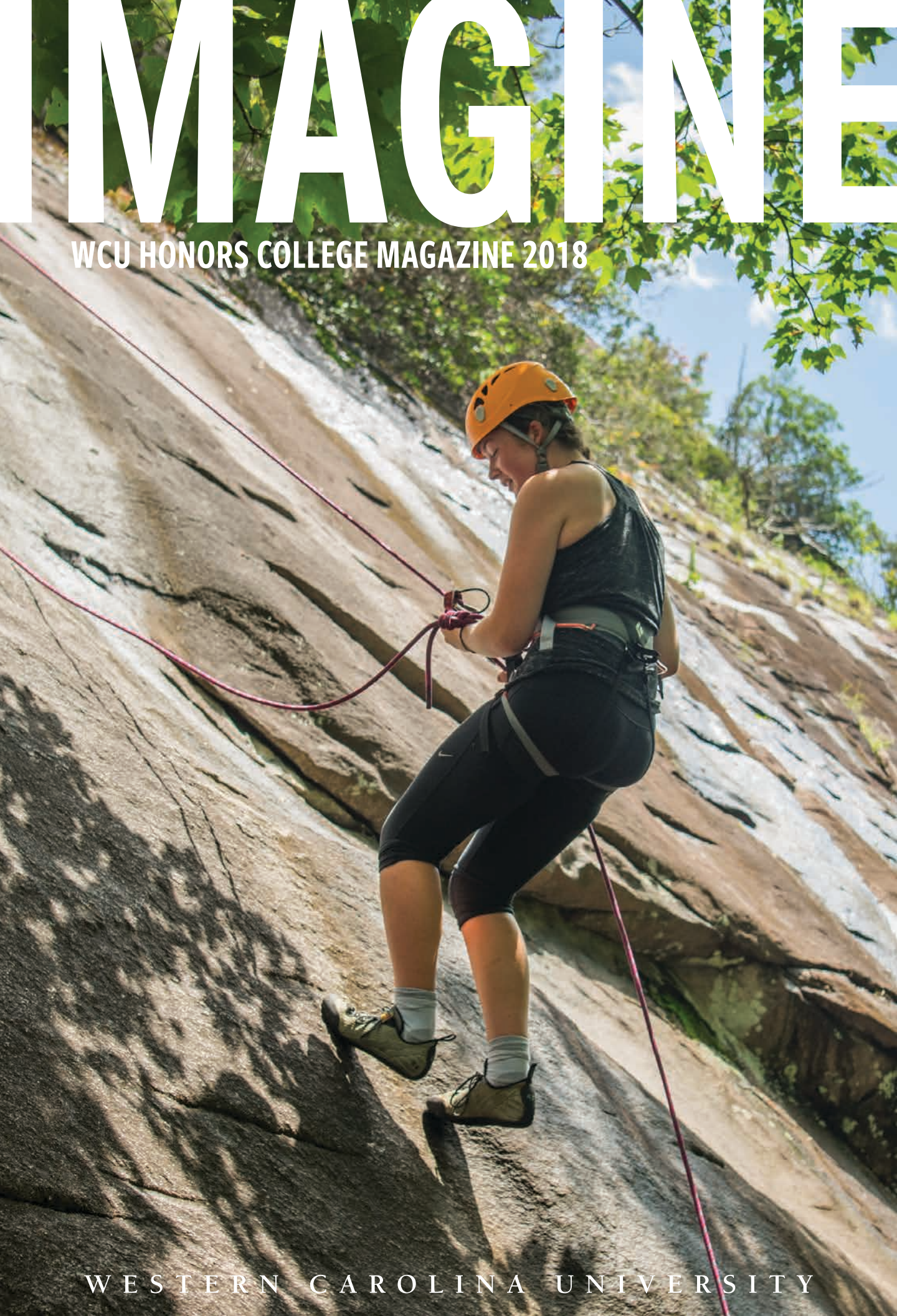


IMAGINE

WCU HONORS COLLEGE MAGAZINE 2018



WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

WORD FROM THE DEAN

Generous Minds, Visionary Leadership

This edition of *Imagine* magazine is dedicated to the visionary leadership of David O. and Susan B. Belcher.

Thought and expression are inextricably bound. *Imagine* magazine provides a platform for the stories of our writers, all of whom are first-year Honors Students, to be shared. Through these stories, we readers can gain insight into their thoughts and feelings about life at Western Carolina as new members of our community. We have a better understanding of what the students are thinking through the window of their writing. As I read their stories, I like to think about the writers' motivations as well. When we pay attention to what our students are compelled to write about, we have a better understanding of what they value, what concerns them, and what they intend to influence. I believe that this is an important window that *Imagine* magazine provides us as well – as it speaks to a diverse audience about the minds and hearts of our students.

I am honored to dedicate this edition of *Imagine* to David and Susan Belcher, our beloved former Chancellor and his dynamic wife, who epitomize what Emerson describes as “*the love and expectation of generous minds.*” Theirs is a leadership characterized by vision, responsibility, compassion, joy, and service. What you will read in this magazine, through these student-authored stories, is a reflection, an echo if you will, of the Belchers' compelling narrative to honor our region and each other, to be purposeful in our service, and to be in the business of changing lives. David and Susan's vision, their thoughts on higher education and, more specifically, their thoughts in service to the mission of Western Carolina remain evident and are expressed in innumerable ways, “*implied to truth.*”

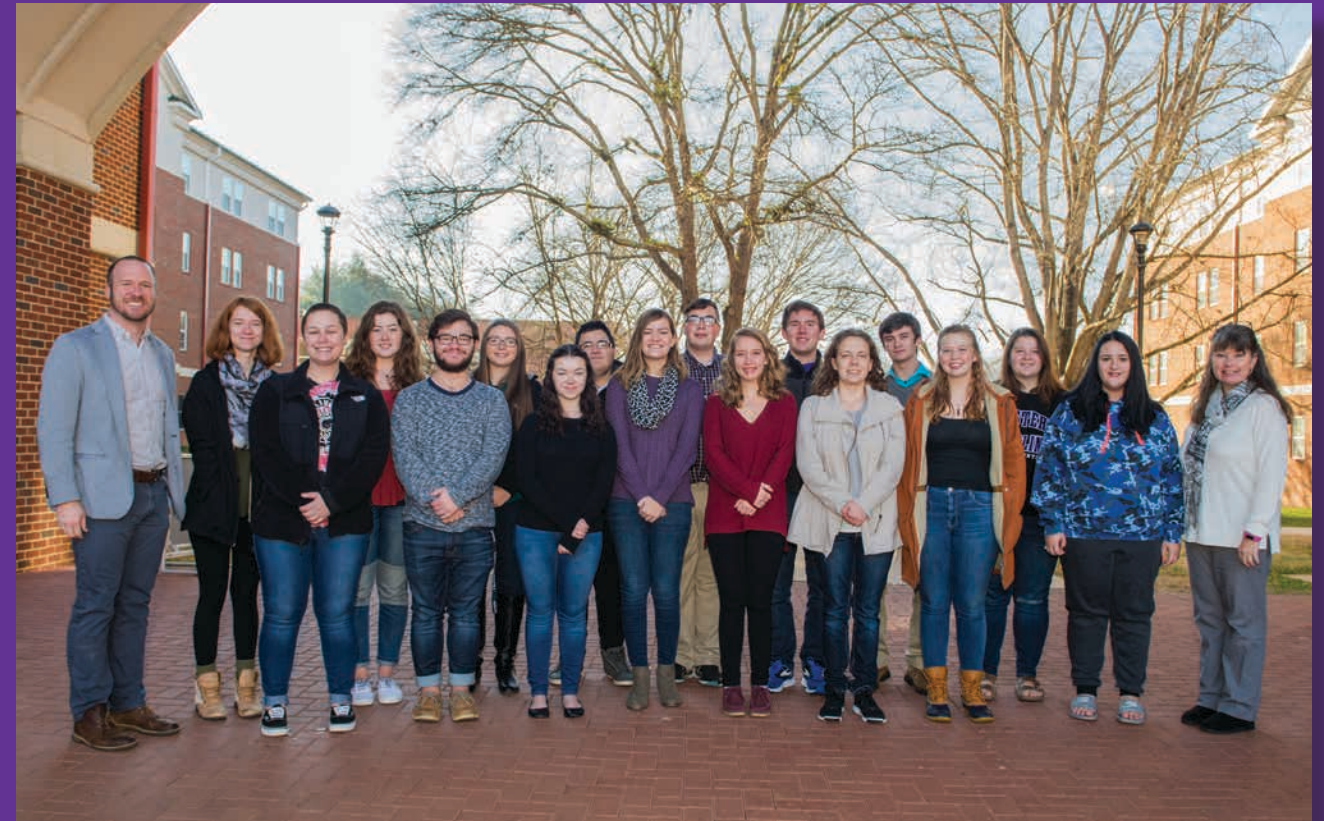
To those new to *Imagine*, welcome to a little glimpse of life in Cullowhee! We hope that this magazine will serve as a window into some of the ways in which The Honors College engages students in academic pursuits and along The Honors Path through experiences abroad, in undergraduate research, in leadership, in career exploration, in leadership, and in community service. For special friends, family, and alumni familiar with *Imagine*, welcome back! I hope that you will find this issue stimulating and will use this as an opportunity to reconnect. It has been a joy this year to work with so many wonderful and creative people including Associate Professor of English, Jeremy Jones, who advised, instructed, and directed our student writers; and our production staff, led by John Balentine in the University Marketing Department, who mentored our fantastic student design team. I feel very honored to be a part of this team effort in thought and expression - sharing with you, our friends, some of the stories that compel our newest students to share what it means to be a part of life as a Catamount. We would love to hear from you, to hear your stories, and we would value the opportunity to share more with you about the exciting things going on in The Honors College today. You can read more on our website (honors.wcu.edu) and we can be reached through email at honors@wcu.edu or by phone 828-227-7383.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!



Jill Nelson Granger
Dean, The Honors College
April 1, 2018

WRITERS & DESIGNERS



Writers: Front row: Julz South, Andrew Norman, Lauren Chandgie, Nicole Day, Nicole Jones, Hailey Capps, Rachel Hanes, Bayli Piercy, Dr. Jill Granger
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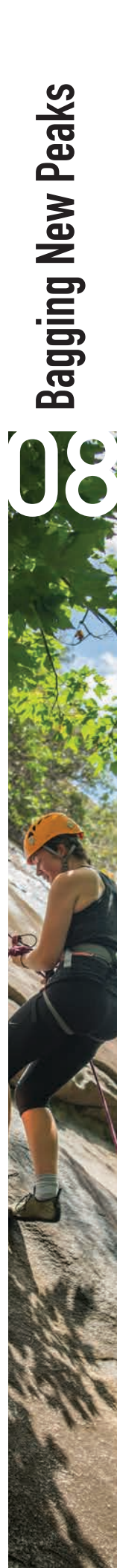
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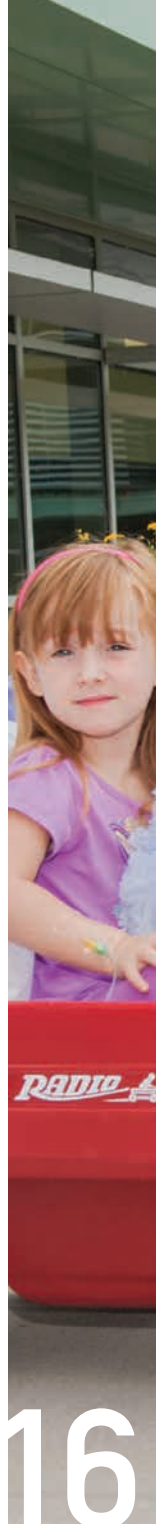
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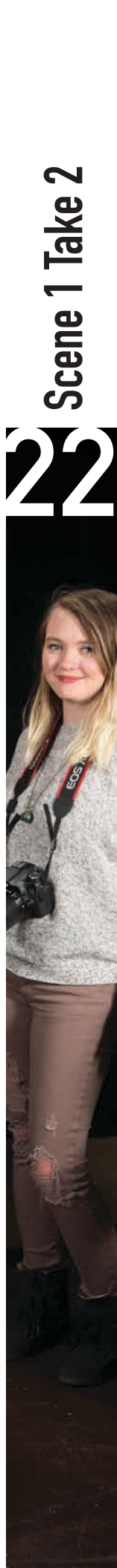
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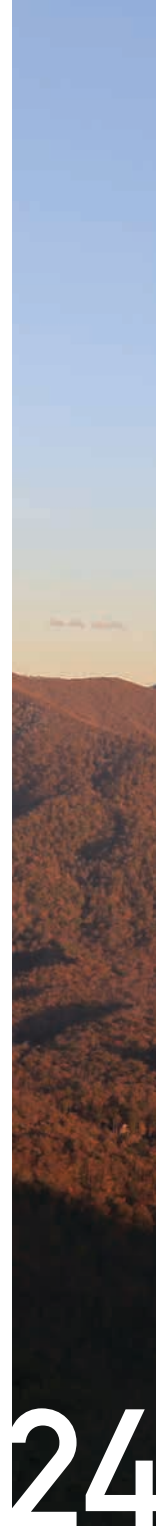
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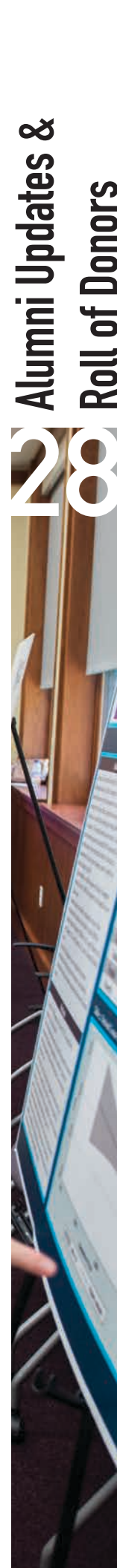
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“A Culture Shared”

Rachel Rae Hanes

Dark turtle shells and silver tin cans filled with beads line the calves of strong women. Stomping, the clanking can be heard for miles over the rolling hills. The outcome of a stickball game, or *anetsa*, does not rely only on the men playing; the team must have good relations with the women in order to remain safe and have successful outcomes. These women are known as the “rhythm makers,” and they dance each night before the game. Among them, WCU student Taran Swimmer dances; she dances to preserve and honor the traditions of her culture.

Looking back on the last four years at Western, Taran, a senior majoring in graphic design, knows her transition to college life was different from that of other students. Growing up on the Qualla Boundary, the protected land of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, she learned to speak Cherokee as well as English from a young age. “I would ask my teachers if I could get some ‘ama’ or water,” she says. “It took some time getting used to hearing only English at Western.”

It also took some time getting used to the size of WCU. She went from knowing everyone and their families to being in a huge pool of new faces. Compared to the Qualla Boundary, the student body at WCU was also very diverse; people of all backgrounds attend the university, and this diversity gave Taran the ability to share her culture while

simultaneously learning about other cultures. “There hasn’t been a moment where my culture wasn’t involved in my academics,” Taran says. Her professors often push her to use aspects of Cherokee culture in her art. In one piece in particular, Taran was instructed to design her own currency. She used aspects of basket designs and Syllabary, the written language of Cherokee, to create a Cherokee currency. “My professors like that I have a place to go for inspiration.”

Because Taran knows how to read and understand Syllabary, she and a group of students created a board game called “The Store Game” to teach children the language. The game was played by children at the new Kituwah Academy, on the Qualla Boundary, and is now kept in the Cherokee Archives at the Hunter Library.

Beaming, Taran widened her eyes beneath the silver crown hugging her forehead. Flowing, dark feathers nestled her shoulders. Across her body, a silk sash was fastened reading, “Miss Cherokee 2015.”

The Miss Cherokee pageant was created to highlight tradition, not merely beauty. Upon winning, Taran used her title to serve as an ambassador for her tribe and traveled to various museums and schools, including in Washington D.C and Oklahoma, to educate others on her culture. On campus at WCU,

she took many opportunities to speak about the culture, history, and current affairs of the Eastern Band, including in Native American Heritage Expo. At home, Taran works with a younger generation to celebrate Cherokee culture, as she coaches the Cherokee Middle School volleyball Team. “Tsalagi!” the players yell in the huddle. She implements the use of Cherokee phrases at the start and finish of each game. “Aniyvwiya’i!” brings the huddle to a close. These phrases translate to, “Cherokee! We are the principle people!” “I like my girls to say it after each game,” Taran says. She uses this opportunity to help the players recognize the uniqueness of their culture and therefore to honor it.

“There hasn’t been a moment where my culture wasn’t involved in my academics.”

After college, Taran plans to move back to the Qualla Boundary and teach graphic design to high school students. The schools currently teach traditional arts such as ceramics, painting, basket weaving and drawing, but she plans to bring this new art form that she practiced in college into the curriculum. She wants to create new opportunities for young artists to experience and share their culture at home and beyond.





BAGGING NEW PEAKS

Julia Riddle

New town. New school. New state. I was 3,558 miles away from my home in Alaska with no idea what it was going to be like living in North Carolina. I was unsure of a lot of things in my near future, but one thing was certain: I was about to be trapped with 14 people I had never met before in the woods for a week straight. This was either going to be a great first experience at college or a disaster. I was just going to have to wait and find out.

“GO! GO! GO!” With that I knew my path was clear. I took off sprinting down the rafts that had once been carrying us safely down the river but were now flipped upside down and tied together to mimic a floating bridge: anchored to the shore at one end and leading to the deepest part of the

river on the other. I was trying my best not to trip and fall in before reaching the last safe step and catapulting myself into the cool water. I had two possible fates: reach the end of the boats and earn style points for screaming and flailing my limbs or be plagued with the shame of falling in early and failing in front of complete strangers. In the moment, it felt like life or death. This was the Troll Bridge: the first task of First Ascent.

First Ascent trips aim to help new students transition into their lives at WCU. By sending students into the woods together, BaseCamp Cullowhee, the program that runs these trips, expects freshmen will begin to form new relationships and become more familiar with outdoor resources they now

“With the support and encouragement from the rest of the group we came out on top of the world, ready to conquer any mountain in our way.”

have access to living in Cullowhee. In my experience, the trip also allowed a lot of personal growth. While we were hiking, white water rafting, canoeing and rock climbing, we were also all growing in our own ways. Every activity opened us up to new perspectives.

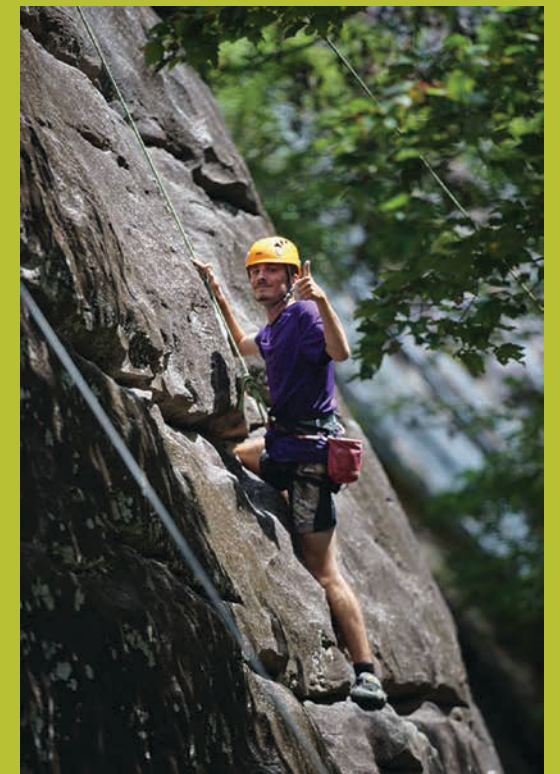
With the Troll Bridge and the first day in our wake, we eased into day two of our trip: grueling and demanding physical labor. Or, what others might call, a day on the lake canoeing. We spent the day paddling around jamming to Zac Brown Band, soaking up the sun and enjoying the lake time. Then came the day for rock climbing.

For a few of us this was our first time rock climbing, which made this day the most uncertain of all. Having my first experience rock climbing on display for people I had only met three days prior was a horrific thought.

Once we got going, the atmosphere was different than I expected. I could hear the cheering echoing off the mountain as we passed the hardest spots and tried more difficult routes. Some of us went in expecting very little from ourselves, but with the support and encouragement from the rest of the group we came out on top of the world, ready to conquer any mountain in our way. This was the day that made the most impact with the group. Relationships flourished. I soaked up the new energy of the group.

The First Ascent Trip made all the difference for me starting college. Coming to WCU from Alaska, without knowing a single person or much about the landscape I was going to be living in, I wasn't sure how my life was going to pan out. This trip not only familiarized me with the outdoor activities close by, like whitewater rafting on the Nantahala, rock climbing up to beautiful mountain views, and hiking the trails off the Blue Ridge Parkway, but it also introduced me to the people with whom I would later binge-watch TV shows, play KanJam on the grass, or skydive for the first time. That is something I am very grateful for.

Our last event of the trip was a sunrise hike to a view straight out of a National Geographic magazine. Though the trail was only lit by the white and red lights of our headlamps, we could see that where we were going was somewhere worth the early morning wakeup. Once we reached the prime spot to watch the sunrise, we sat and waited, watching the stars. Sitting under the stars at the end of the trip was as therapeutic as listening to waves crash on an empty beach or watching the coals from a campfire dance in the night air. When the sun finally broke the horizon, everyone fell silent. No one wanted to interrupt the daybreak happening in front of our eyes. As we sat, scattered across the mountain watching the fog move out like the tide only to have the piercing colors of the sunrise take its spot, we shared a silent agreement that there was no other place we would rather be.



Cole Cushman gives a thumbs-up as he races to the top of the mountain.



Aiden Power and Birch Newell belay a climber and help them scout out the best route.

Beyond Language

N.J. HADLEY



“SHE SAW HOW LANGUAGE COULD AFFECT PEOPLE.”

Colorful rectangular garments stretched across the room, almost entirely covering the walls and floor. Women, each wearing a traditional *traje* of a multicolored blouse and a wraparound skirt held together by a sash at the waist, worked expressionlessly and efficiently with their wooden tools to create the vibrant textiles. Alli Rios, a Spanish and English major at WCU, encountered scenes like this one in Zinacantán, Mexico during the summer of 2016 while taking part in the Summer Undergraduate Research Program. She went to Mexico to bring Mayan textiles back to Cullowhee for further examination. However, Alli’s journey neither begins nor ends here.

Before she traveled to Mexico, Alli conducted extensive research on the Mayan people. On a typical day that summer, she sat in the library researching, sipping periodically from her blue water bottle, keeping an intent focus on the text she was reading. She studied what the Mayans ate and why they ate it, she studied different patterns that could be found in textiles until she was able to recognize them and know what they meant, and she looked into the effects of political crises in Mexico on the indigenous population.

Dr. Paul Worley, an associate professor of English, believes that each textile can be looked at as its own piece of literature. He and Alli researched together; he hoped to change the perception of what is considered literature.

Alli loves language. She traces this love back to her father. While his family is Puerto Rican, he was raised in the United States and had to relearn Spanish later in life in order to communicate with them. Today, he works as an English as a Second Language teacher. His impact on his students and their families is a big reason why Alli chose to be an English and Spanish double major: she saw how language could affect people. “It was fascinating,” Alli explains. “Watching him working with the students, and he always came home with interesting stories.”

Alli’s captivation with language took her to Mexico with Dr. Worley and then to Spain. There, she immersed herself in a new culture and improved her Spanish while she studied abroad for a semester. These travels and experiences led her to an interest in arts, so the summer following her study abroad semester, Alli took an internship at the WCU Fine Arts museum – a place for which she continues to volunteer. Looking ahead, her fascination will lead her to even more places. Eventually, she plans to attend a graduate school with art administration programs – a passion discovered through her love for language.

For now, graduate school will have to wait because Alli has applied to the Fulbright program; if accepted into this highly competitive program, Alli would be given the opportunity to teach in southwest Mexico, as well conduct her own personal research. In particular, she hopes to teach the indigenous population how to speak Spanish, but if not awarded a Fulbright she plans to pursue other opportunities to teach in Mexico.

Teaching seems to run through Alli’s family, and the compassion that her family has for those who struggle with language barriers has been passed down to Alli as well. It is fitting that Alli is so adamant about wanting to be able to teach and make a difference in the place where she first encountered the indigenous people and the textiles. Her work with the textiles got her involved with art and that led to her taking an internship with the museum. Now she wants to pursue a graduate degree in art administration. Her work has brought her full circle, and she will continue to make a difference in language for years to come. No matter what program she ends up in, she will make a difference, and she will help those who don’t have a voice be heard. That’s what language can do, that’s what language has done and that’s what Alli is doing.

Dreams Do Come True

Bayli Piercy

Since she was a young girl, Nicole Evans – a senior English major, concentrating in motion picture studies – has always had a deep admiration for the world of Disney. It was this love of Disney that sparked her initiative to be a part of their community. In 2017, she received a coveted internship at Disney World. “My role,” she says, “is in attractions operation at Living with the Land, which is a boat ride in Epcot that takes guests through our greenhouses.” I asked Nicole about her internship and her love of Disney.

BP: What made you decide to apply when you did?

NE: I was sitting in my room one day and it all just clicked. Every reason I had for not applying for this program was now irrelevant. I had nothing to lose. I looked up the application deadline and it happened to be that exact day. I threw my application together and six days and a stressful process later I received an email notifying me that I had been selected into this program. It truly felt like I was destined to do this.

BP: What is your favorite part of the job?

NE: My favorite part is doing ride through. At least twice a day, we send a cast member on the ride to check for show quality and ensure the ride is fully operational. So there are some days where I am actually getting paid to ride a ride!

BP: Which Disney character(s) would you say has inspired you the most, or has been your role model?

NE: It's a toss-up between Belle and Lilo. I choose Belle because she has a thirst for knowledge and teaches girls that they can be both beautiful and smart. I also really admire Belle because she is so independent and doesn't care what others think of her or her choices.

BP: What would you say are some of the notable accomplishments you have made since your internship began?

NE: Walt came up with what is called the four keys, which are keys to a successful business. They are, in this order of importance, safety, courtesy, show and efficiency. Being able to achieve all four of these keys at once is what our company strives to do. So, when a cast member is recognized for achieving all four keys at once they receive a Four Keys Recognition, which goes on their permanent record with the company. Since I have arrived here in late August, I have received three different counts of this type of recognition.

BP: Is Disney where you want to spend your life working?

NE: Potentially, yes. My major is English with a concentration in motion picture studies, so ideally I want to work somewhere in media production. If I could achieve that with Disney, then that would be fantastic. However, media production is such a competitive business, and I'm still not 100% sure if that's what I'll end up doing. Right now, I'm just focusing on networking with the Walt Disney Company and seeing where it takes me and what opportunities unfold for me.

BP: What does the quote, “Dreams really do come true!” mean to you?

NE: I think Walt said it best when he said “If you can dream it, you can do it.” If you have a dream, go after it. The only person who can stop you from chasing your dream is you.

WE ARE

Julia South

The smell of hairspray and a light haziness fill the green room of drag queens, each one in an intricate costume that was pieced together over the course of many days. Eyeshadow and contour palettes clutter the tables as the queens prepare to exit. One queen named Burgundy lingers in the room for just a moment while putting on the final touches. Then they all file out in a line filled with the scent of makeup-setting spray and walk to another room where they await the appearance of the special guest: the queen of Ru Paul's Drag Race herself, Alyssa Edwards.

She walks in the room, her blonde hair cascading side to side and her sky-high stilettos clicking on the floor. She's here and everyone is so excited to meet her.

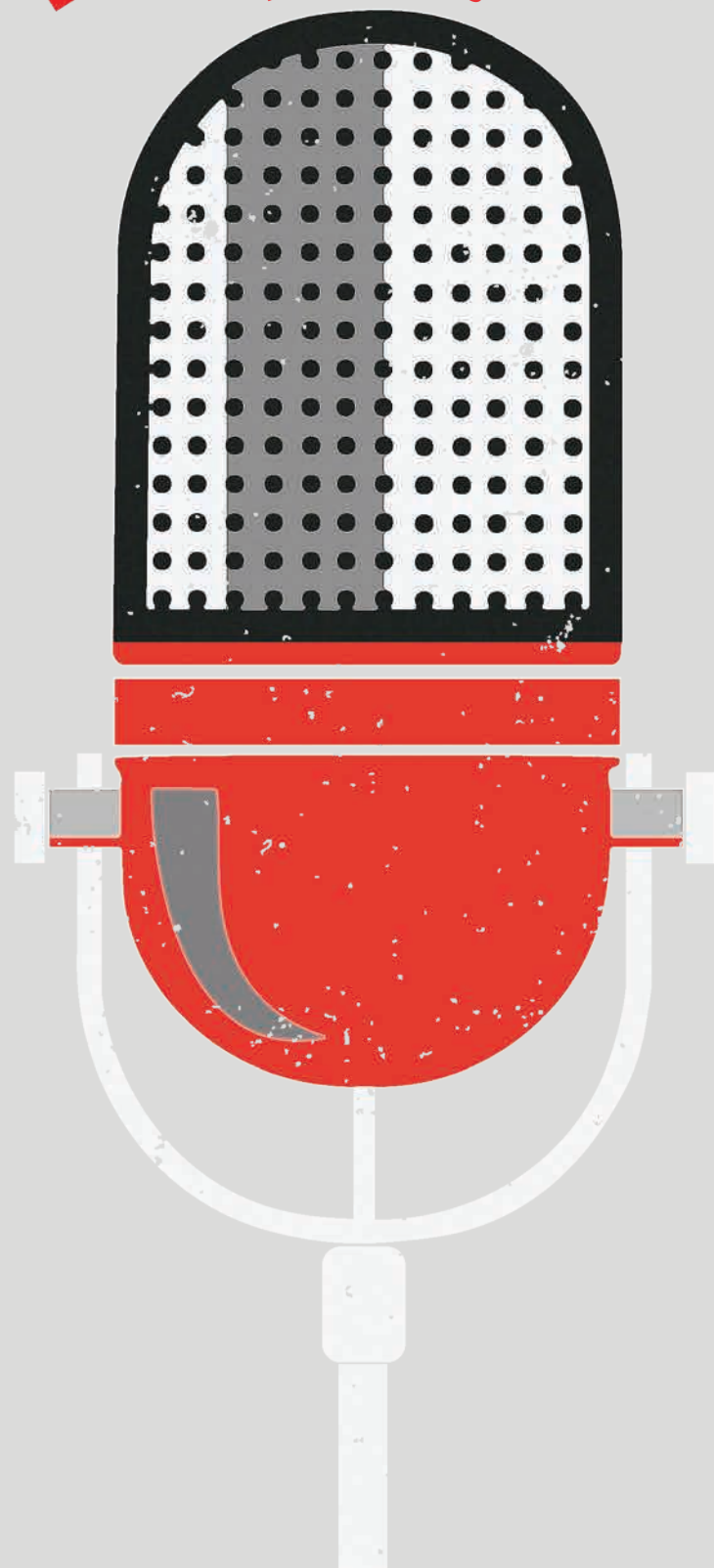
On October 11, 2017, the members of the Sexuality and Gender Alliance (SAGA) came together with many other Western Carolina students to watch the second annual Drag Show. Organized in collaboration with the student-run Last Minute Productions, the show featured professional drag queens and kings as well as some student performers who are members of SAGA.

SAGA's mission is to create a safe space on campus for everyone, especially people in the LGBT+ community. Part of this mission is through education. The group takes part in Safe Zone Training, an educational two-part course on minority groups, concentrating mostly on the LGBT+ community. These sessions take place all over campus, and in the past year SAGA's membership numbers have grown exponentially. An average SAGA meeting is meant to be a safe space for everyone, too—but also an especially lively and exciting environment.

Imagine walking into a room with many bowls of Halloween candy and the scent of popcorn through the air, you are greeted with a smile by every person you see. The group settles in and everyone decides on a game or movie but when the split is 50/50, it is decided that both can take place at the same time. “SAGA is a group that wants everyone to be understood,” SAGA's president, sophomore Max Ringenbach said. “And nights like Halloween movie night truly show how SAGA can solve even the tiniest problems. We're slowly growing not only as a club but also as a community.”

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

NICOLE JONES



There is a saying in radio: speaking into the microphone is speaking into a single person's ear. Each volunteer at Power 90.5 – Western's radio station – is taught to make conversations personal and to create relationships with individuals rather than speaking to the masses. Travis Bilger, the station's general manager, works every day to teach volunteers how to make these connections.

Bilger, a senior studying communication, has fostered his own talent and ability over the last four years hosting his own radio show Tuesday nights from 8:00-10:00. This year he not only hosts his own show, but works at two off campus radio stations as well. With his networking starting before graduation, there is great potential for the future.

"I'll be famous one day. . . eventually. . ." Bilger explains, as he is set to graduate in May of 2018. "The goal is just to live comfortably; I know I'll get there; it might not be five years or even twenty, but I'll get there."

This charismatic socialite has not always been this driven; in fact, he says five years ago he was a "debby downer" with little guidance as to where his life might go and little confidence in the person he was. With grades slipping, minor struggles mentally taking over, and a lens only as wide as Canton, NC,

Bilger felt stuck. He was stuck in a mindset of accepting life as it is given, instead of chasing it for all it can be. This attitude was greatly shaken, however, after the suicide of a close friend. He knew the small difficulties that led to her decision, and so Bilger came to a sudden conclusion. He took on a new mindset. "It was time to get out of my own head, realize what was really important, and how not difficult life should be."

The idea that he could choose his own path, make his own happiness, began to shape the decisions he made and person he became. After high school graduation, Bilger spent a year at the local community college. Still living at home, spending time with the same people and lacking motivation for a long-term career, Bilger decided a university experience would better propel him to something beyond his hometown.

Coming to Western as a transfer, he let the university choose his schedule for him – assigning him to a radio production class that required "lab hours" at the radio station. Becoming a volunteer "slightly by force," Bilger started his first show – "The Fresh Hour" – and fell in love with radio.

Spending more time at the station each year, he slowly evolved his show, from

his freshman Classic Rock show, to his sophomore show called "R.A.M.P. (Randomly Assorted Music Playlist)," to his junior and senior years with techno – dubbing 90.5 "Cullowhee's only techno station." Using popular music from video games, gifs and other internet related sources, he called the shows "The Techno Tantrum" and "The Data Stream 2.0." His shows highlighted his hobbies, his editing abilities and his witty comments on today's issues – mostly video game related, of course.

The university experience allowed Bilger to find purpose and a career in radio. In just five years, Bilger transformed into all he is now.

Sometimes life takes turns that are unexpected but necessary for success, call it destiny or fate, but the story of Travis Bilger is not just of undergraduate success but of self-appreciation. In his own words, the journey has been a "trial by fire that lit the fire inside my soul for radio."

Bilger redefined success, choosing to see things positively, to have hope in the future and to persevere no matter the effort required. Put simply, high school isn't everything, dreams are accidents and success is a choice.



Precious Cargo

Ashley Vuncannon

Excitement fills a little girl's face as soon as she sees the bright cherry red wagon. She gets in and feels the wind on her face as she is rolling down the steep hill. In this moment, this wagon is happiness, but for some children, the enjoyment of a little red wagon is out of reach because of chronic illness. Faculty and students in the nursing program at Western Carolina University are working to help medically fragile children experience the happiness of a red wagon.

"It feels amazing knowing that I am impacting someone's life, especially sick children," Jordan Jacobs, a senior nursing major, says about the Whee Wagon Program. Along with fellow students Kristen Bellas and Katelyn Townsend, Jordan helps to provide children in hospitals with specially equipped IV Pole Radio Flyer wagons free of charge. In hospitals around the world, these little red wagons give children the ability to enjoy being a child, despite being ill.

When Whee Wagon Program Coordinator and assistant professor Susan Hester was a nurse at Children's Health Care of Atlanta, she saw these red wagons equipped with IV poles rolling through the halls. Months later, when Dr. Hester took a position at WCU, she remembered the smiles on the children's faces in Atlanta and knew she wanted to start a similar program here in North Carolina. In 2015, the Whee Wagon Program began.

In the beginning, the goal was to donate at least three to four wagons a year, but after three years, 35 wagons have already been given out. The program started by delivering wagons to the local hospital, Harris Regional Hospital, but students and faculty have since traveled to other places such as Asheville, Charlotte, Scotland and Jamaica.

The wagons are built in Georgia by a man named Roger Leggett. He started building the wagons when he founded Chad's Bracket in 2011. Chad's Bracket is a non-profit organization created after Roger's son Chad died, and after his granddaughter was diagnosed with leukemia at a young age. His wagons now make their way to Dr. Hester and her students at WCU, and they then take them out to deliver to the hospitals in need.

For the nursing majors taking part in the program, this service-learning experience is not only rewarding, but also educational. "The Whee Wagon Program is

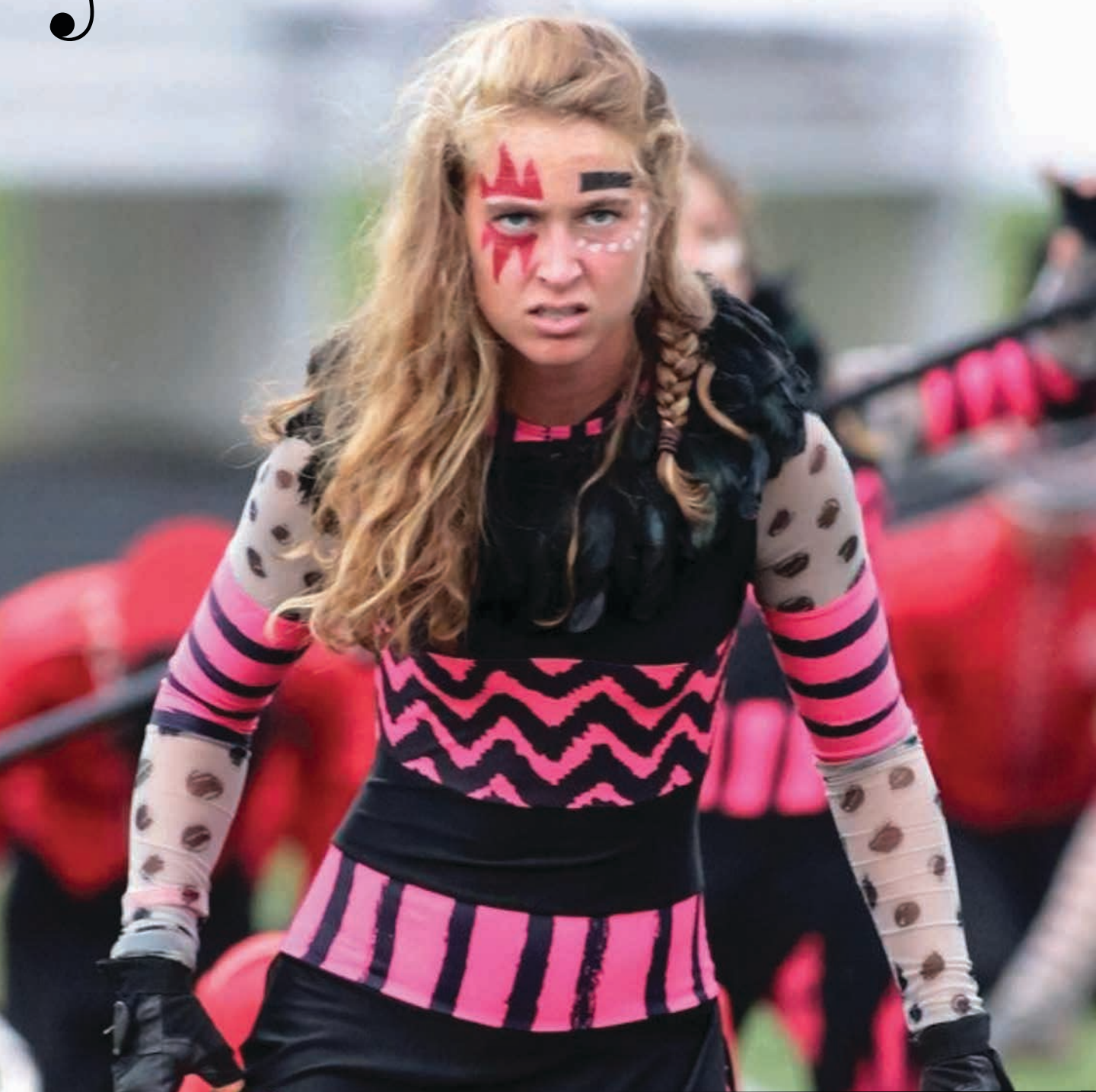
allowing me to gain knowledge about the importance of play when children are sick," Jordan Jacobs says. Studies show that play is a vehicle for children to show their emotions and experience a sense of understanding over their recovery in moments of stress and trauma. "And now," Jordan says, "I can carry this knowledge into my future career as a pediatric nurse."

"These little red wagons give children the ability to enjoy being a child, despite being ill."

This year, Dr. Hester and Jordan, along with the other students, will load up the wagons, and head to Brenner's Children's Hospital in Winston Salem. There, they will unload the wagons, walk them into the hospital and hand deliver them to the nurses on duty. Before long children will climb in to be transported. "The families and workers show pure delight on their faces," Dr. Hester says, "when they see these therapeutic wagons in use."



THE SOUND



Hailey Hartley



OF FAMILY

The marchers moved swiftly across the field. The beating drums intensified. The perfect pitch of the first note roared through the excited and anxious crowd. There, among flashes of spinning flags and rifles, marched Anna Beach. Last summer, she—along with 30 other members of Pride of the Mountains—participated in Drum Corps International, the best of the best.

“I ate like 4,000 calories every day over the summer,” Anna said, “because I burned like 4,000 calories per day.” You might not imagine this quote to come from a member of the marching band, but according to Anna Beach, a senior colorguard member in Pride of the Mountains, the intensity of DCI requires going all-out. After sleeping on a gym floor, members wake up to 12—14-hour day rehearsals and performances with only 30-minute lunch and dinner breaks and the occasional, but rare, water break. DCI is basically the NFL of marching band.

Within DCI there are different divisions and the most well-known is the World Class Division, containing around 25 different bands. The bands perform nearly thirty times throughout the summer and compete in the DCI World Championships in mid-August. These bands are bigger, faster and louder than the average marching band. They are composed of brass, percussion, and colorguard members and are extremely competitive. Students spend countless hours practicing for auditions and getting in shape so that when it comes time for DCI, they are mentally and physically prepared. Only the best of the best make the cut.

Walking into drum corps, almost everyone’s a stranger, but weeks of sleeping, showering and training in the same place creates instant bonds. Alyssa Marseilles, a senior, has marched trumpet for four seasons with the corps called Spirit of Atlanta. “My favorite part of my drum corps experience is the friends I have met,”

she said. “I have friends from all over the place. You meet some pretty amazing people who all want to do the same thing that you do.”

As a part of the drum corps called Music City, Anna Beach said it took about a month and a half to learn a full show. Their show last summer was called “Tribe,” and before each performance, the corps did

a tribal chant that showed how bonded they were as a family. Anna said that her drum corps became really close because early on in the season, a member passed away. The members had to bond together so they didn’t all break down because it was a rough time for

them. “The chant helped show that we were all just connected as one.”

Alyssa also emphasized how important a family connection is within her drum corps: “We sing Salvation, we play it here in PotM, but in Spirit, it has a whole different meaning. After semi-finals, you sing it for the last time with those 150 people and no one can sing because we’re all just crying.” They know that with the end of that song comes the end of a season with their newly formed family.

Coming back to Western, the DCI veterans bring back many skills that their experience with drum corps has taught them. They come back as leaders. They bring back a sense of community and family that carries throughout Pride of the Mountains and WCU.

“DCI is basically the NFL of marching band.”

HONORS COLLEGE

CELEBRATING

20 YEARS

JENNA WALDEN & ANDREW NORMAN

Previously, Western's honors program was small, but Chancellor John Bardo saw its potential. He asked a group of professors, led by Dr. Brian Railsback, to work on expanding the program into something more. The first year it opened, the Honors College consisted of one office and seventy-seven students. Within the next two years that number doubled, now the Honors College students account for almost a third of the population. Dr. Granger, the current Dean of the Honors College said, "Dr. Railsback had a great vision of what the Honors college could be and worked so hard all of those years to build it up to what it is now. That is a fantastic foundation."

The biggest goal of the Honors College is to promote undergraduate excellence, and it shows. Students and professors work together each semester to create an atmosphere where students can thrive and be their best. The honors designated dorms are located in the middle of campus and create a community for like-minded students to interact, work on projects, do research, among other things. Justin Kleberg, an

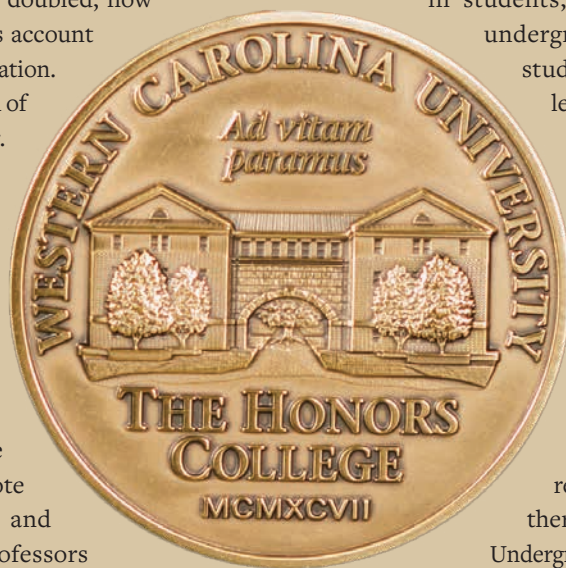
alum that lived in Reynolds as an honors student, said, "My honors college experience revolved around the community and friendships that I made my freshman year living in the Honors College Dorm."

To promote the idea of undergraduate excellence in students, there is a major focus on undergraduate research, as well as study abroad, interning, service learning and leadership. For the past few summers, the Honors College staff has orchestrated a summer research program where incoming students get to work full-time, one-on-one, with staff on a research project. It gives the students extensive resources to learn how to do good research and present that research. Furthermore, each year there is a National Conference of Undergraduate Research where students take their projects to present. Western has had the largest number of students at the conference the last few years.

"The board is a big part of the Honors College, because we assist Dr. Granger directly in planning events. We

planned the Birthday Party," said Jordan Thompson, Secretary of the Honors College. Western Carolina is one of the only universities in North Carolina to be run by a student Board of Directors. The students on the board set the standards for admissions into the Honors College, and they plan all of the activities that the HC does throughout the year. That is one of the many unique qualities to set the Honors College apart over the years.

Dr. Granger said that, from here, she hopes to "build a regional and national reputation." This coming year five students from the Honors College are going to the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in Atlanta. They will present there and represent Western Carolina's Honors College. That will help to put Western's honors students in a national conversation. The biggest goal is for the Honors College to grow from where it is now. There is a bright future on the horizon.



The room is a hive of activity. Dozens of electrical cords snake across the hall and into the classroom. “Camera moves!” an operator announces, carrying the camera across the room. Two actors strike poses and make faces at the camera as they wait for filming to begin. Jokes, movie references and impressions fly, the atmosphere filled with excited energy over the last day of filming for the senior thesis film, “Chain of Smoke.”

Until this year, the Film and Television Production program only shot one senior thesis film per semester, but this year the program is tackling six thesis films, starting with “Chain of Smoke.”

Producing additional student films is just one of dozens of changes made by Program Coordinator Josh Russell to revitalize the Film and Television Production program and expand its capabilities and achievements. By increasing the number of senior thesis films shot, Russell hopes to provide students with more opportunities to express themselves.

“Our philosophy is that, if we train students more broadly... then they are able to take more opportunities that come their way,” Russell

says. The changes in the curriculum expose students to all facets of the film industry, helping them discover their passions. Due to the program’s small size, only accepting roughly 30 percent of applicants per year, the faculty can form one-on-one connections with the students and guide them to where their talents lie. It was professor Brenda Lilly who suggested that student Charlotte Lee take the role of producer for “Chain of Smoke.” “I didn’t know I wanted to be a producer,” Charlotte admits.

Professor Russell describes the efforts the program makes to place students in the field or graduate schools as a “multi-prong approach.” This involves not only utilizing a wide network of people either in the film industry or part of graduate schools, but building a family of Western Carolina students working in the industry. Some of the program’s most successful graduates have been those who made a feature film together after finishing school, Russell says.

In recent years, the program has been successful in placing students in diverse roles in the film industry. About 85 percent of graduates are placed in various facets of the

film and entertainment industry, while others attend graduate schools like the University of Southern California or start their own independent film companies. Despite the film industry’s notorious reputation for being difficult to break into, Russell hopes that, of the 2018 graduates placed in entry-level jobs, about 40 percent will work in production studios like Paramount Studios and Warner Brothers Studios. That would be nearly twice the number of graduates from the Class of 2017 placed in major studios.

The program has also shown recent success at placing women, often underrepresented in film and television production, in entry-level positions at major studios after graduation. Patricia Brown, a 2017 graduate, works as a Production Assistant on the CBS series “Scorpion.” Another 2017 graduate, Emily

Pressley, works as a Production Assistant in the writer’s room on the Fox Network series “The Resident.” Both professor Lilly and Josh Russell have expressed their enthusiasm for the increased presence of women in different areas of the film industry. Like Patricia and Emily before her, current student and director of “Chain of Smoke”, Leah Sitterson, wants to find a job in LA: “I want to work my way up to directing and writing.”

In the end, Professor Russell and the rest of the film and television production faculty want to create strong, independent filmmakers with authentic voices. “That’s the bottom line for the entertainment business,” Professor Lilly says. “We’re story-tellers. Your job is to tell a story.”

BRENDA LILLY, CHARLOTTE LEE, ARIANNA EVANS, LEAH SITTERSON, AND JOSH RUSSELL



CHAIN OF SMOKE

“Chain of Smoke” is the first film to be written, produced, and directed by all women, a major milestone for the Film and Television Production program. The film features two sisters living in rural America and their experience with abusive relationships. Arianna Evans was inspired by her own relationship with her sister and their childhood in the South: “I wanted to write something featuring sisterly bonds, and important relationship that’s not talked about.” She hoped that

a female would direct it, and was thrilled when she heard that Leah Sitterson had picked up the project.

Professor Brenda Lilly and Josh Russell expressed that it had been their intention to bring a group of women together on a script that “deals with, thematically, issues that women are going to be able to relate to.” Charlotte Lee was brought on as the producer, and the passion all three girls have for the film is palpable. “Chain

of Smoke” is Leah’s eighth senior thesis film and Charlotte’s sixth. As an acting major, this was Arianna’s first experience with the pre-production of a film. “It was surreal to see the first cut of the film. It was in my head, and then people did it,” she said. “It’s the first [writing] project I’ve ever finished.” Set to be about twelve minutes in length, “Chain of Smoke” is one of several highly anticipated senior thesis films this year.



Feet pound the pavement as students and professors labor up one of the many steep slopes found all along the Blue Ridge Parkway. They struggle for breath inhaling the crisp mountain air, their arms pumping and muscles straining from the effort. Knowing the end is within reach, the runners push themselves to crest the last incline of the 175-mile race. This is the Mountain Jug Run for Research, a relay named after the Battle for the Old Mountain Jug, a longstanding football rivalry between Western Carolina University and Appalachian State University.

This year, 16 runners participated in the relay, a mix of faculty, students and alumni. “This event makes you closer to other students and your professors in more ways you would probably ever want to be,” student Brittany Williams said. The runners spent every second together for two days, cramped in vans when not running up and down the steep hills of the parkway. They ran across city streets, in back alleys and through the night to reach Appalachian State. They ran legs in pairs, took breaks and then continued racing soon after, eventually completing 175 miles. The runners persevered through injuries

and imminent storms to reach their goal. “The students participating in this race are not all decorated long distance runners. They are regular people...who chose to get up at 5 AM before class to run and train for this event,” said Floyd Graber, an alumnus, who ran the relay for a third time.

“Knowing the end is within reach, the runners push themselves to crest the last incline of the 175-mile race.”

The participants do not simply run for fun; they are raising money and awareness for their future careers, as all donations go to the National Athletic Trainers’ Association’s Research and Education Foundation. The relay was started by James Scifers, the former director of the athletic training program at Western Carolina, in 2008. Ashley Thrasher — an assistant professor in the Athletic Training Program — organized the run this year — and thanks to the tireless efforts of ATP students and professors, the Mountain Jug Run grows stronger each year. “It is invigorating to be surrounded by a dedicated group of individuals and support a cause to advance the future of your profession,” Brittany Williams said.

“This year proved quite eventful for all runners involved.” The Blue Ridge Parkway was closed for 35 miles along the intended route due to inclement weather. “We had to run unfamiliar backroads in the darkness of the night with an uncertainty of the fate of the run,” Brittany Williams said. Fellow students Richard Taylor and Carlee Hickman had to make their way through the middle of Asheville as the sun was setting.

As the runners from this year grew closer to the finish, the energy level skyrocketed. Though exhausted from running miles across mountainous roads, each participant pushed harder the nearer they got to the ending point. They persevered through the pain of their injuries, each lift of the leg feeling like picking up immense weights. As they ran across the finish line, a collective exhale was released, knowing they had accomplished their goal and helped to further the futures of athletic trainers throughout the nation. “I wanted to show everyone that we do these things to raise money to keep the legacy of Athletic Training going,” Richard Taylor said, “not just at Western but across the whole entire foundation.”



Andrew Norman & Lauren Chandgie

Imagine walking into a room full of strangers and being expected to sing with them; the thought is terrifying. Looking around the room, you see different reactions. Some faces are stricken with fear, other seem completely relaxed. However, the mood shifts when everyone begins to sing.

This is what it’s like to be in Western Carolina’s a cappella group: different people with a shared love for music coming together to make music and have fun.

Rehearsal starts with a simple warm-up. Everyone is given different notes to sing and, on cue, you begin to sing. A few measures in, the fear slowly begins to fade. The once terrified faces soften. The singing gets louder. The group begins to walk, sway, and clap to the rhythm. The energy in the room is so strong you can almost feel it.

“Rehearsals and performances are very relaxed,” says group veteran and stage and screen major Stephanie Hurtado. “Compared to other choirs, we have a more relaxed and care-free feel — but in a good way! We’re not just sticks standing up there.”

The style of a cappella – singing without instrumental accompaniment – has become a pop culture phenomenon in recent years thanks to groups like Pentatonix and media representation such as “Pitch Perfect” and “The Sing-Off.” Collegiate and professional a cappella groups have grown in popularity and compete in national competitions. Although the a cappella group at Western isn’t yet at that level, President Wesley Walker has his goals set high. In the next five years he wants to start going to competitions or doing more public performances to attract people to Western’s School of Music.

Wesley’s goal for the next year is to work on solidifying a routine within the group; how rehearsals are ran, how to run procedures within the group, how to find soloists, and how to bring in new members. Another part of this process is to reduce the amount of performances until the group has found a niche within itself. This may take much time and effort, but Wesley insists: “We are not going anywhere.”

Wesley leads the group with assistance from fellow student Claire Lemke and faculty advisor Dr. Allison Thorp, who

has worked with a cappella performance groups in the past. On leading the group, Wesley said, “It’s given me a really good opportunity to explore music from an ensemble point of view but also employ my arts and management side of my career to that field.”

In addition to being the president of the a cappella group, Wesley balances being a member of multiple clubs on campus, being a double major with hospitality and tourism management as well as musical theater and double minoring in music and business law.

The a cappella group aims to provide an opportunity for all students – regardless of their major – to perform and be a part of the musical community. Another member of the group, Chase Rivers, would agree.

“It’s an awesome way to meet great people who love music and spread your talent to many others,” says Chase. “My favorite part of the group is the shared passion we all have. When we all get together and start singing, it means so much more because we all want to be there and enjoy the sound we create.”

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

BELOW ARE THE PROJECTS ACCEPTED, TITLES, STUDENT PRESENTERS, AND THEIR SPONSORS FOR NCUR 2018. FUNDING FOR TRAVEL TO NCUR 2018 WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY LOCAL TUITION FUNDS EARMARKED FOR SUPPORT OF THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN AND UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH IN PARTICULAR.

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ALUMNI UPDATES

ALEXANDRA CEBULA | *by Nicole Day*

Alexandra Cebula graduated in May 2017 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre. She currently works as a music teacher at Summit Charter School in Cashiers. It’s a position she never imagined herself in, but Alexandra loves her students and the experience. While she has no specific future plans, she hopes to work somewhere where she can do the most good. “If I can do good in Cambodia, Lithuania, China, or Haiti, I will. But if I can help more kids in Chicago, I will head that way. The plans we make almost always go awry, but the good we do remains.” As a student at WCU, one of her favorite memories is being with her friends around the fountain, playing their instruments and taking requests from those who stopped to listen. Her advice to freshman? “Take risks and don’t feel like your major is the be-all end-all.”

If you were a professional wrestler, what would your name be?

“I would have to go with “The Taco Tangler.” I would definitely be the wrestler who constantly got into tight tangles that should be impossible to escape, and who doesn’t love tacos?”

ALISSA NELSON | *by Nathaniel Hadley*

Alissa graduated from WCU with a B.S. in chemistry and biology. After her graduation from Western she was accepted into veterinary school at NC State. It’s difficult to get into veterinary school and it’s extremely rare to be accepted immediately following college. When not in school Alissa works at an emergency vet hospital in Greensboro. One day she hopes to own her own veterinary practice specializing in large animals —particularly cows. At Western, Alissa enjoyed the mountains, the small school atmosphere and the excitement everyone had for what they were doing. Her biggest advice for incoming freshmen is to build a relationship with the professors, and understand that those relationships will lead to more opportunities further down the road. Alissa said, “It may be intimidating at first, but it’s beyond worth it.”

What is your spirit animal?

“I would be a giraffe because I’m really short and they’re really tall.

I would really like a new perspective on things. I’m like five foot something and I never get to reach the top shelf, so that would be cool, and they spend a lot of their time eating, which is nice.”

ASSAEL MENDOZA-SANTOS | *by Andrew Norman*

Assael Mendoza-Santos graduated from the Honors College at WCU with a B.S. in business management and a B.S.B.A in finance. Born and raised in Chicago, Assael was drawn to WCU by the mountains and the affordability. He is now working as an assistant manager at his family’s body shop near Gastonia, North Carolina, but aspires to be a top financial manager or advisor within the next few years. During his time as an undergraduate, he was a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity and served as treasurer and as an alumni advisor for a semester after graduating. He advises incoming freshman and current students to get involved early. Assael also says, “Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone.”

What would be your super power and why?

“I would probably choose teleportation, because in college I always had so many meetings to get to, so that would help me to arrive on time.”

EMMA CASTANHO | *by Rachel Hanes*

“Have fun and don’t take it too seriously.” Emma Castanho advises freshmen about college. Emma graduated in 2017 from the College of Engineering and Tech with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. “I loved my major,” Emma recalls, “If I went back [to Western Carolina University] I would probably just add a language.” While at Western Carolina University, Emma enjoyed hiking, exploring waterfalls, and watching meteor showers with friends. “It’s a good four years to explore.” After graduating, Emma rewarded herself by traveling across Europe for the summer. She settled down in Florida, where she works in engineering, consulting gas turbine engines for the company Agilis. A typical day at her job consists of catching up on new terms as well as working on different projects for clients. She admits that her job is everything she expected it to be after college.

If you were a professional wrestler what would your name be?

- After careful contemplation; and help from her boyfriend, “Thunder Fists.”

ELIZABETH-ANN DIEHL | *by Jemma Walden*

Elizabeth-Ann Diehl graduated in May of 2017 with a B.A. in English, a B.S.E.D. in Education and minors in art and TESOL, (teaching English to speakers of other languages). She is currently living in Durham, NC, working as an ESL teacher and case manager at Northern High School. She teaches, tutors, and helps students whose first language isn’t English navigate an English dominated school. Elizabeth said, “Every day I know that I’m helping them gain the skills they need to have a successful, happy life. That’s a wonderful feeling.”

What is your spirit animal?

“Phoenix [because] like most people, I’ve been through some dark times, [but] now I am truly happy, so I feel as if I rose from the ashes so to speak.”



EMMA TATE | *by Nicole Jones*

Emma Tate graduated from Western in May of 2017 with a Bachelors of Science in Political Science. Along with her major, Tate spent six months in China learning Mandarin, earning her an international studies concentration. Hoping to one day change environmental health through policy and conflict resolution, or work for a major non-profit, she is now attending the University of Chicago for her Master’s degree. Such a big city is a learning curve for Tate, as a Kitty Hawk native, she is proving that big dreams start in little places like Cullowhee; highlighting the small class size, beautiful area, and personal relationships with mentors, Tate says her future plans are much more possible because of the foundation from her undergraduate degree. While Chicago is a different world from her home state, Tate says the experience and education from Western Carolina University is above many other options she had, and wouldn’t have wanted to spend her undergraduate years anywhere else.

What is your spirit animal?

“Probably a Unicorn—that’s what people used to call me because of my ability to write papers last minute. It was like magic.”

JOSHUA CHILDERS | *by Rachel High*

Joshua Childers graduated from Western Carolina University in 2017, with a Bachelor of Science in Education and a major in social sciences. He now lives in Elizabeth City, North Carolina and works as a social studies teacher. One of Childers’ favorite memories from college was meeting his wife and marching with the Pride of the Mountains in the 88th annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. His advice to incoming freshman is to read. “Take advantage of the library you have. Use your years in college to read some of the great thinkers from throughout history.” If given the opportunity to come back to Western Carolina and do it all over again, he wouldn’t change anything, except maybe take a few more history courses.

What is your spirit animal? Why?

“My spirit animal is definitely a lobster because I’m just kind of quirky like that. Lobsters can live in hot or cold climates, they’re overlooked as animals you wouldn’t want to have as a pet, and they make fantastic sandwiches.”

LEA PARKER | *by Owen Schnitzler*

Lea Parker graduated in the spring of 2017 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts. After graduating, she moved to New York City, where she works as a children’s birthday party entertainer (dressing as a clown or princess) while also auditioning to advance her career. She had no idea that she would be in the Big Apple this soon, expecting to get there after about a year after graduating. Lea was drawn to Western originally as it had a well-established theatre program with a great community of students and staff but wishes that she could go back and tell her college self to not be so worried about the opinions of others and cut loose more. She’s now sees that “it’s just school and everyone around you is too busy worrying about themselves to worry about you.” In ten years, Lea hopes to have an established career and possibly a family. She does not know if she will stay in New York, but she hopes that wherever she is, she is happy with her life.

If you were a professional wrestler, what would your name be?

“My wrestling name would be Subtle Fury, because I seem really sweet until something ticks me off. And also, because I’ve never thought of having a wrestling name until five minutes ago.”

LOGAN MARKS | *by Ashley Vuncannon*

Logan graduated from WCU in May 2017 with a Bachelor’s of Fine and Performing Arts. In ten years, Logan hopes that his career will take him to Broadway. He is currently living in New York City, New York, where he is working at a restaurant and selling merchandise in Broadway theaters, on top of auditioning for a spot as an actor. While at Western he was very busy as he sang, performed and danced for musicals and plays, when not performing his time was spent in the outdoors. “Time will fly faster than you ever thought possible,” he advises first year students, “so enjoy every minute and push the limits.”

If you were a professional wrestler, what would your name be?

“Lubdacious Vanilla Cherry. When I was younger I could never remember the word for “voluptuous” so I unknowingly called things “lubdacious” thinking it was the right word. I now know better but still think my invented word is pretty great. And a homeless man called me “Vanilla Cherry” on the streets of New York last week so there you go!”

LYNNLEEANN JEFFERSON | *by Gregory Regling*

LynnleeAnn Jefferson earned her bachelor of science degrees in psychology and speech pathology. Originally from Chandler, Arizona she still attends Western working on her master's degree. Her day-to-day life consists of around five hours of reading and writing papers. She tells the younger generation to "take a breath" and to think of Western as the blessing that it is, and hopes that they realize this amazing opportunity. Her favorite memory at Western is pranking her hall mates by putting furniture in front of their doors during finals week, and wrapping each other's cars in tin foil. She ended her interview with this, "I'm a Western Girl through and through and have never been sorry for coming here, in fact, I am proud to say even when I die my body will enter Western's Body farm to help others further their educations."

What is your spirit animal?

"A wolf, because of the loyalty they show and the rare trait of monogamy."

MACKAYLA OLSON | *by Julia South*

MacKayla Olson, an alumni of Western Carolina University, received her B.S.Ed. in elementary education. Today, MacKayla resides in Indian Trail, North Carolina where she is a fifth-grade teacher. She has also recently enrolled in graduate school while also working as a full-time teacher. MacKayla came into Western as a declared major student and did not change her major while attending WCU. MacKayla says she could not see herself doing anything but teaching. When choosing a college, she "simply just felt right" at Western. With the outstanding reputation of the teaching program and the student to faculty ratio, MacKayla found everything she was looking for here. In ten years, MacKayla plans to be married with kids and pursuing her PHD.

What is your spirit animal?

"My spirit animal would probably be a beagle because they love to play and be adventurous, but are also very loyal to the people in their life."

SHELBY PRUILL | *by Hailey Hartley*

Shelby graduated in May of 2017 with a B.S. in both psychology and biomedical sciences. While at Western, Shelby was involved in the pre-health club, the ballroom dance club, and a member of the Honors College Board of Directors. Shelby said her favorite thing about Western was the outdoor activities. She recalled her favorite memory while at Western to be the Balsam Trail clean-up with Pisgah Conservancy that she participated in with the ballroom dance club. Currently, she works as an EMT in Roper, NC and plans to attend graduate school to become a Physician's Assistant. In ten years, Shelby hopes to be a Physician's Assistant in the military. Along with being an EMT, she has started her own program as a softball instructor for girls ages five and up, teaching them the fundamentals of softball. Some advice Shelby has for incoming WCU students is: "Enjoy your time and don't constantly stay stressed."

What is your spirit animal?

"My spirit animal would be a mountain lion because they stay in the mountains and I really love the mountains."

SUTTON ATHA | *by Lauren Chandgie*

Sutton Atha graduated from Western Carolina with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice. He is currently employed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and deployed to Puerto Rico, aiding in disaster relief as an applicant service specialist. His job focuses on one-on-one assistance to disaster survivors at a Disaster Relief Center. Important aspects of his job include providing emotional support as well as technical assistance. "I work at what we refer to as a high-intake center. Sometimes I service as many 300-350 people in a day. It's pretty hectic."

When Sutton was in school he was always focused on doing well in his classes, but wasn't worried about a 4.0. "It either happens or it doesn't, what matters is staying on top of things and doing the best you can." His advice for incoming freshman: "Try your best. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask for help."



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