

IMAGINE

A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on their green eyes and red hair. They are wearing a dark blue face mask with a white and black abstract pattern. The background is blurred.

WCU HONORS COLLEGE MAGAZINE 2022

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

INVITATION TO IMAGINE

Welcome to the 17th edition of Imagine magazine, the annual and signature publication of the Brinson Honors College. It is a remarkable, collaborative endeavor in which first year Honors Students share their perspectives on campus life at Western Carolina University. Imagine, indeed, what a wild ride these new college students have had. Intrepid newcomers to the campus in fall 2021, as the COVID pandemic continued to impact our community and world in so many ways, they have experienced a campus where norms and traditions continued to be in flux and where uncertainty and flexibility are expected. This year's new first-year class has demonstrated that they are up to the challenge, with an exuberance and resoluteness to seize the day, they have helped bring the campus back to life and return to a new normal. Imagine all that they will do next.

I want to express the Brinson Honors College's great appreciation to Jeremy Jones, associate professor of English, for his leadership in guiding and teaching this year's Imagine writing team and serving as the magazine's editor. Kudos also to John Balentine, senior art director, in the University Communications and Marketing department and thanks also to this year's magazine design team which has brought our writers' words to life on the page. I also want to express my appreciation to first-year Honors Scholar, Yazmin Cosme Escobedo, for her feature writing.

As you read this year's magazine, I encourage you to use this window to "Imagine" the multifaceted lives of our WCU community members from the varied perspectives of these new honors students and all of the potential yet to come.

I hope that this edition of Imagine will spark your interest in connecting — or reconnecting — with the Brinson Honors College through our social media. You can find us on Facebook at WCU Brinson Honors College, on Instagram at @brinson.honors.college, and on YouTube at Brinson Honors College. We LOVE to hear from our alumni and friends! Go Cats!



Dr. Jill Nelson Granger
Dean of the Brinson Honors College



WRITERS DESIGNERS



CONTENTS

BRINGING STORIES TO LIFE

08

BRING IT ON

06

DREAMING IN HORSEPOWER

12

CLIFFHANGER

10

INTO THE LIGHT

16

ISOLATION AND ADAPTATION

14

MAKING A POINT FOR ACTIVISM

20

TAKING CENTER STAGE

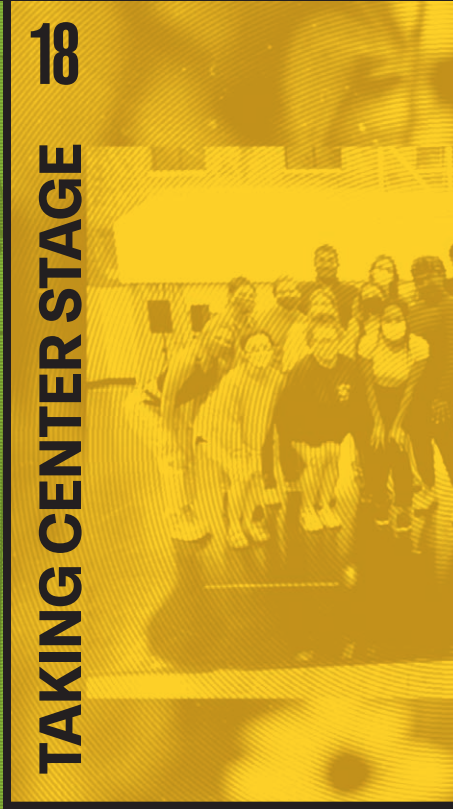
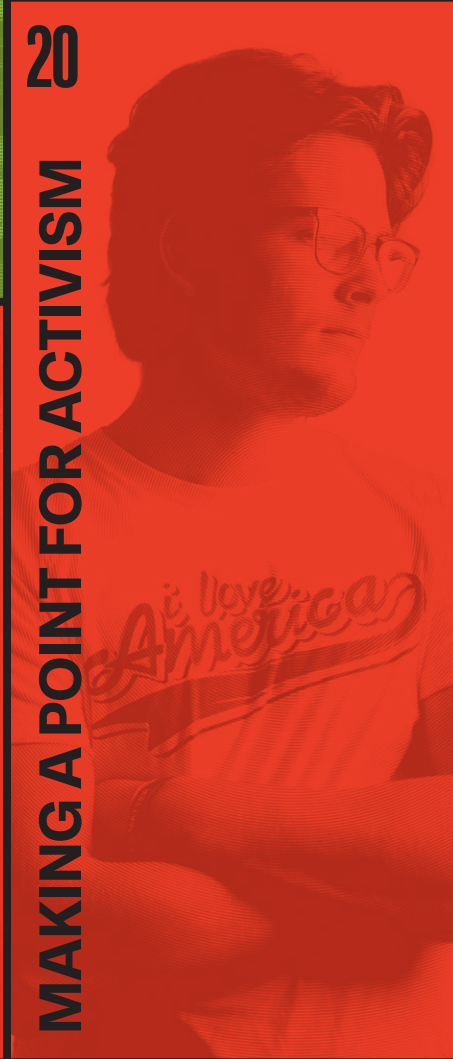
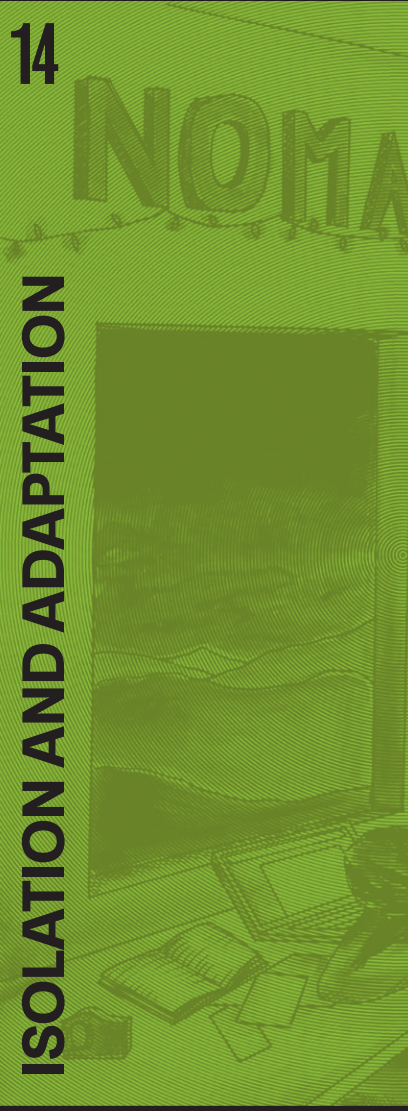
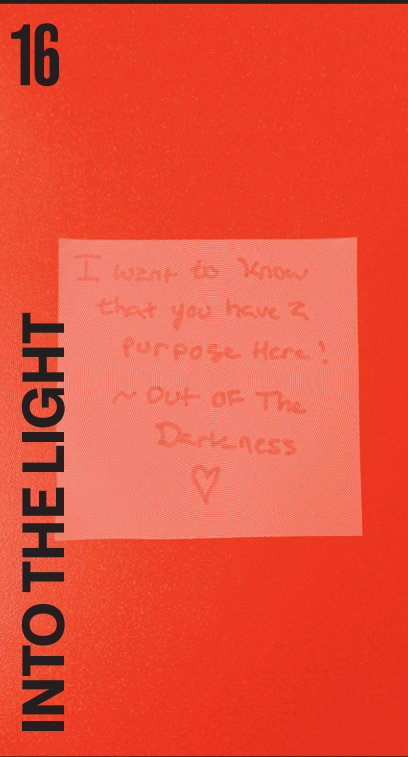
18

RESCUED

24

LOOKING DEEPER

22



BRINSON

Faith Robinson

Ballroom dancing might be one of the oddest clubs on campus. I mean, who still does ballroom dancing? What does a ballroom dancing club even look like? Isn't ballroom dancing something that only happens in movies? I had those questions too, but they were answered by my new friend and club president, Ian Anchors. To learn my story, you must first hear his.

Ian has always known he wanted to do something in music. He wants to work with soundboards and synthesizers so he's a commercial music and audio production major. His love for all things music led him to join the Ballroom Dancing Club in his second semester. He became the president of the club as a joke. He was nominated but never thought he would win. Ever since then, he's been a great coach and leader. Ian has a great sense of humor about the whole thing. "With great power," he said, "comes great responsibility."

Ian was the reason I came to Ballroom. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was walking to the Campus Recreation Center to finally start the workout routine I'd never had the time for when Ian stopped me.

He was wearing flip-flops in the shape of a fish, a giant smile across his face. He invited me to ballroom dancing at 8:30 pm.

Huh? Ballroom dancing? That's a club?

Of course, I said yes. I was home the moment I walked into the studio.

For the first time since moving to Western, I had friends.

Since then, I have attended as many practices as I could.

We started learning the waltz. It was as easy as one, two, three — literally! The dance is done in three counts. We've all seen a waltz in some form, like in fairytale movies. We've seen the princesses in their flowing dresses twirling around the dance floor. When I walked in, the coaches were in competition attire, meaning they looked like they could have stepped out of those fairytales. They wore dramatic makeup and styled hair .

My story is different. I showed up in exercise shorts and a T-shirt, like everyone else. Apart from looking out of place with the coaches, I did not feel it. Everyone was kind and no one commented on my lack of whimsical clothes.

I have mentioned coaches a lot so let me introduce them. Meet Matt, the head lead coach. Leads are the ones who make the decisions when dancing and keep their follow in line. Leads get to determine what move a couple does next. I tried to be a Lead, but it wasn't for me. I reach 5'3" on a good day and being shorter than your partner is very tedious.

I also don't like making decisions. That's why I'm so thankful for the lovely Follow coaches, Dara and Amanda. A Follow's role is mostly to move your hips and go all out. Follows take directions from the Leads and make it their own. We get to do all the fun turns and poses while dancing.

You don't have to stick to one role. One returning member, Clarissa, is learning the Lead role this year when last year she was a Follow. Once you learn the dances and practice for a little bit, you can do both roles flawlessly.

One of the most difficult things I had to learn in ballroom is confidence. To put it kindly, I had none. I was in a room with unfamiliar people doing something I was already a little nervous about. It is hard to be that vulnerable with something that is very easy to judge, but it was around the third meeting that I stopped caring.

The atmosphere is so encouraging that it is more fun to just give it your all.

I started feeling beautiful during cha-cha turns and adding my own flair to dances like an extra spin at the end of a move. I noticed others were too.

It's so much fun to see everyone's personalities through their dancing even as we all work together as a team.

To get to the heart of it all, join the Ballroom Dancing Club — or that one thing you were afraid of. Because I didn't let my fear overtake me on that one random Tuesday, I learned the answer to my earlier question. Who does ballroom dancing? I do.



BRINGING STORIES TO LIFE

HANNAH DAVIS

You crack open a fresh graphic novel, excited to be sucked into an enchanting new world. Just as you settle into the swing of the story, something catches your eye. Was that cat licking its paw? Eager to get back to the action, you brush it off and keep reading. But you're having trouble focusing. You swear you just saw lightning flashing across the page, but that can't be true. You try to continue, but you can't ignore it anymore. You stare down the ink and paper, failing to notice a shadowy creature climbing out of a panel on the next page, reaching out its claws...

This is what it'll feel like to experience ARTLAB's first project, an interactive graphic novel. As you're reading, you scan the pages with a device to see illustrations, photos, animations, music and other media. It'll be like a digital pop-up book.

ARTLAB started when Ron Laboray, an associate professor of painting and drawing, noticed that his students couldn't collaborate on large projects. They often requested to do assignments by making graphic novels, comics and animations, but they never could complete the work. That's when he came

up with ARTLAB. ARTLAB is a club where students interested in 2D arts (especially comics, graphic novels and animation) can combine those interests with technology in bigger ventures. In fall 2020, he spread the word about it in his classes, his advising appointments, graphic design classes he stepped into and on posters. Then in fall 2021, the club started meeting and worked on their graphic novel.

The first challenge the club faced was a common one among artists: where to start? They had the skill, but not the story. Fortunately, professor Laboray knew of *Nomad*, the student-run literary magazine. "Can we put this together?" he thought. "You know, the chocolate and the peanut butter? Make something tasty?"

The group requested horror-themed short stories and poems from *Nomad* in the spirit of spooky season. The works ranged from the tale of a cat protecting its owner to one about a consuming marsh. ARTLAB began to meld the components into one story using flashbacks, dream sequences and background details.

Students meet every Thursday in professor Laboray's office. Thanks to the sun shining through a large window, the room feels cozy. Artwork and supplies decorate the edges of the space, and club members sit around a small circular table as the professor sits or stands by an adjacent wall. Around the table, there's Skylar, a senior studio art major; Ray, a junior graphic design major and marketing minor; and other students from many different backgrounds. Some of them have been making comics and animations for years, while others have little to no experience.

Professor Laboray leads the open conversations, but everyone contributes. They make jokes and go on silly tangents, which often lead to real ideas. Sometimes they excitedly go through storyboards pinned on the wall. Together they decide how the final product will look while they set goals for the work each member should complete during the week. Then, the meeting peters out as students leave, excited to bring this project to fruition.

The harmony here is a bit surprising since many artists work alone. Skylar, for one, was worried people wouldn't pull their weight

or that she would end up doing the project alone. "I just got pleasantly surprised by how well it worked," she said. The passion of the members kept them together. Otherwise, students wouldn't have stayed."

"It's not like I'm doing this for free," said Zhane, another ARTLAB member, "This is an investment." Members can use ARTLAB to beef up their resumes by listing it as experience and a publication. It is also practice for integrating technology into art, the direction that advertising and publications are headed. They also sharpened their skills not only in artwork but also in teamwork.

When the graphic novel is finished by the end of spring 2022, it will first be published online. Later, *Nomad* will distribute physical copies. After its completion, ARTLAB has plans for other projects, including an open animation and comic-making workshop, as well as an augmented reality gallery. They hope to make a new graphic novel every year. They also wish to find more committed members who love the club. Whatever they do, they will continue to collaborate with the community. Overall, ARTLAB members hope you'll get chills, but watch out for that ghostly shadow behind you...



Colin DeWall

I find myself in yet another unfamiliar place, tons of people surround me, but I don't recognize a single face. I feel like I should hide in my room, go somewhere that's familiar; I can't find anything to help me talk to people. Since coming to WCU, I realized there was much more to do on campus than the town I used to live in. I have been trying to take advantage of this to help me settle into WCU. I go to some of the events on campus, or the gym, or even go on walks. This all made adjusting to campus life easier, but what helped most was the rockwall and climbing club.

I first got to try the rockwall the Sunday after I showed up to WCU, at RecFest, an event that shows freshmen the facilities at the Campus Recreation Center. The rockwall employees set me up on one of the harder routes for beginners—I couldn't complete it. Failing that first route only made me want to go back again and keep trying until I could beat it. I was hooked and joined Climbing Club.

Climbing Club is a place I can fit in without trying. Everyone is supportive and will stop what they're doing to help to spot me or suggest how I might complete a tricky climb.

Some of the people I have met and seen at the wall are impressive and inspiring. I've seen some people crawl upside down like a spider and swing themselves on

holds like a monkey. These people look confident when they climb. They look like they've done this a hundred times. They make these terrifying and difficult moves seem like the easiest thing. Whenever I see people do those kinds of things it makes me want to work harder. The supportive environment makes it easier not to be jealous of those better than me, but to instead respect them and strive to be better.

When I first started, I went back to the wall any day that I could and I stayed for as long as I could. I didn't do specific routes. Instead I rainbowed up the wall, which is when you use any color holds. I saw rapid progress as I improved. I moved on to doing V2s by the end of my first month. The difficulty scale starts at V0 and goes up exponentially in difficulty with each number increase. Unfortunately, I hadn't built up the finger strength as quickly as I built up my endurance and techniques, so I became stuck at V2. It wasn't always easy, the road to progress was bumpy. Some routes took multiple tries. Once I did complete these seemingly impossible climbs, I was elated.

Being surrounded by inspiring people and having something I genuinely enjoy doing has helped me grow as a person as much as it helped me adapt to WCU. Had I never taken a step out of my comfort zone I wouldn't have realized how great this would be.

Lucy Miller is someone I met at the rockwall. She works there and she climbs on her own. She isn't part of the climbing club, but she sometimes shows up to talk with the club members she knows. She enjoys talking about climbing and used to have a problem with oversharing advice, which is a common problem with new climbers. The community is part of what kept her around. She enjoyed the competitive, welcoming and friendly atmosphere there.

Lucy continues rock climbing because of the accomplishment and fulfillment from completing a climb. She had a fear of heights when she started climbing, but she has mostly overcome that fear. The safety involved in climbs helps alleviate her fear of heights.

She has done impressive things in climbing outside, the hardest of which was her climb at Whiteside Mountain on the Gom Jabber route. This route is like a rite of passage—she and her group did it on a whim. The climb was intensive, it took five hours to complete. Even after they completed it, they had a 45 minute hike back down.

Lucy felt a strong sense of amazement and accomplishment in herself. She thought to herself, "I just did this. This is insane. I can't believe that I can accomplish this," on the trek down.



Dreaming in Horsepower

Nicole Vaughn

Everybody has dreams. Take, for example, a 6-year-old kid deciding to be an astronaut, a doctor or even the president of the United States someday. Adults do the same thing: they have dreams of getting married, having kids or finally getting where they wanted to be in their careers. No matter how old you are or who you are, everybody has dreams.

Camden Heiser's dream has always been riding horses. Cam has been obsessed with horses since she was a little girl, sitting in the front seat of her dad's Mustang, turning the steering wheel and playing with the small horse emblem attached to the center. The obsession only grew at age seven, when her grandparents took her on her first trail ride, and that was all she needed to beg her parents for the opportunity to begin taking lessons. Riding made Cam feel fearless and confident on and off the horse; riding extremely "green" or inexperienced horses, she would ride barefoot and even go swimming with her horses. On horseback, she was ready to do anything and tackle the world.



Sadly, Cam's fearlessness couldn't last forever. When she was 15, she moved to a new barn and was put on a horse that had been stall kept for several days. Experienced riders would have said no; a horse that has been stall kept without exercise can become antsy and unpredictable. But Cam agreed to ride, tacked up her horse and headed to the ring.

As the horse began to canter down to the first jump, he was smooth underneath her, and she could comfortably feel each stride beneath her. After successfully clearing the first jump — with no warning at all — the horse suddenly bucked in the air and threw his head down fast. Cam didn't see this coming and fought to stay on, but with too much force going down, she flew over his head and landed on the back of her head and neck.

Suddenly, Cam couldn't hear anything but a ringing noise in her ears, and everything around her moved in slow-motion. She looked up and could see her trainer running at her, but then everything went black.

"When I finally opened my eyes, they told me to move my hands and feet to check if I was paralyzed," said Cam. She panicked. "I was honestly worried for myself." Yet, Cam had a major concussion, and all her confidence was lost that day. She decided she needed a break to heal. Because of the lack of support from coaches and trainers, she had fallen out of love with her passion.

When Cam came to Western Carolina, her love for horses was still inside her somewhere. Her father encouraged her to join the equestrian club, and she figured she would give it a chance.

Once she agreed, she began from the basics again, relearning everything. Her coach, Julia Collins, knew about Cam's previous experiences, but still pushed Cam to do the best she could and to breathe. "You are your biggest enemy in that saddle," Collins tells Cam during one of her lessons.

While she still doesn't feel totally comfortable being back in the saddle after four years, her confidence is slowly growing. She now rides and competes alongside good friends and an amazing coach who refuses to give up on her. "It's a confidence builder," she adds, "if you have a team and coach who love and support you, you're set!"

Cam now knows it is okay to take a break, whether to recover from an injury or to take a mental break, but it's not okay to give up on something you love. All anyone can ever ask of you is to show up, put your whole heart into it, and give it your best shot, everything else that happens is life.



"You are your biggest enemy in that saddle"

Carolyn Rhodes

OUT into the LIGHT

Lyndsey Conway

Suicide.

It is a word that is tiptoed around, spoken only in isolated, dark corners of mental health crisis centers. Yet, it is an epidemic. Suicide plagues college campuses: each year, approximately 24,000 college students attempt suicide. However, there is a student-led club that is pushing to eliminate Western Carolina University's stigma regarding suicide and bring these conversations out of the darkness.

It is a Monday afternoon. The afternoon sun is bright. Members of Out of the Darkness are gathered around a table in the Dogwood Room in the University Center. Around the room there are nursing majors, education majors, construction management majors, psychology majors and others. Carleigh Ballard, the group's president, has her laptop connected to the projector screen on the wall and is broadcasting the agenda. The light from the projector casts a glow over all the members. What's on today's agenda? Besides talking about how to better educate themselves on how to advocate for mental health issues, the group members also write inspiring anonymous messages on sticky-notes to anonymously stick around campus. It is a small group with only about 10 members coming routinely to every meeting. Yet, their passion for advocating for mental health around WCU's campus is contagious.

Western Carolina University's chapter of Out of the Darkness is the only one in North Carolina. It was founded in 2019 and is partnered with The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Through numerous events during the school year, Out of the Darkness pushes students to have uncomfortable conversations and advocate for mental health awareness. During the month of October, for example, \$150 was raised for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention through a candy-gram sale in which students were able to buy candy bars and send them to other students with inspiring messages attached.

Yet, why do these undergraduate students choose to spend their free time advocating for mental health awareness and suicide prevention?

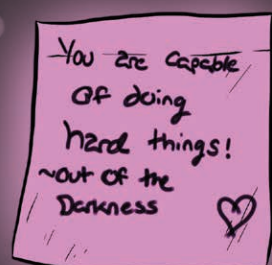
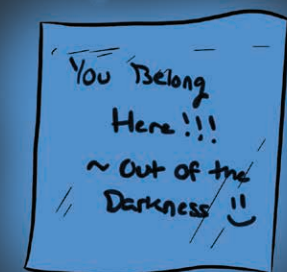
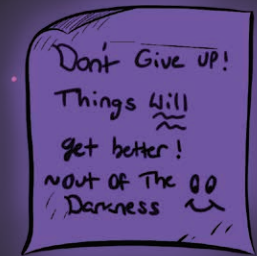
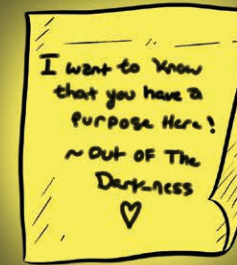
Chapter president Carleigh Ballard is not pursuing a career in mental health; she is a nursing major.

Yet she knows how important it is to advocate for mental health awareness. "Learning how to care for people's minds is an integral part of my future career as a nurse," Carleigh says. She believes that this work is not only important for her career but could help save a life.

Even students outside of the social sciences understand the importance of Out of the Darkness' work. For first-year middle grade education major Ella Egan, joining OOTD is important because she has personal experience with its purpose. Having struggled with depression, Ella knows the importance of ensuring that students know they are not alone. She believes that community and a feeling of belonging are integral to helping other students with their mental health struggles. As a part of Ella's experience in the club, she attended the tabling event that Out of the Darkness held in October for World Mental Health Day. On par with the season, the tabling event's theme for October was that it is not spooky to talk about mental health and that students should not be afraid to talk about it.

As seen by the varying majors of members of OOTD, the dedication to advocating for mental health awareness stretches far beyond CAPS and the psychology department — which is exactly what Carleigh wishes to see. When asked what her goals are for OOTD, she said that she wished for it to be "an outlet of hope and safety." She states, "I want students to feel comfortable expressing their mental battles and learning to support each other." The goal of Out of the Darkness is clear: it is meant to be an inclusive, safe space for all WCU students to know they are not alone in their mental health struggles. No matter if you are the senior nursing major and current president or if you are a first-year middle-grade education major, Out of the Darkness is meant to help and support you.

"I want you to know that you have a purpose to be here." "You belong here." "The sun will rise and you will try again." These quotes are just a few examples of what Out of the Darkness members write on their sticky note. The members hope that these messages will find the right soul. It may be a small gesture but the uplifting message could change a life if it finds the right person. As they write the notes, a small gentle flow of chatter fills the room. Carleigh has gentle, low-fi music pouring from her computer as soft background music. The smallest hints of sunshine filter into the room through the window. The sun has begun to rise over Western Carolina's campus and the members of Out of the Darkness are working tirelessly to make sure it never sets.



TAKING CENTER STAGE

LUKE YOUNTS

Empty stage. A spotlight fades in. The orchestra plays the first note. A cast appears. They are performing a show called “Songs for a New World,” a show first written for a predominantly white cast. This cast? All of color. The performers are part of the Black Theatre Ensemble (BTE), a student-led organization that explores the power of people of color, celebrates their skin and recasts traditionally white plays to celebrate diversity, from the lead role to the final bow. BTE is open to anyone, regardless of race, but its mission is to share the excellence

and love of Black people in theatre. Recognizing the American theatre didn’t often cast black actors in leading roles or give people of color prestigious awards, professor Al Wiggins started BTE in 1986. Unfortunately, the club faded away over time, but in 2018, a group of students reintroduced it. BTE understands theatre will always be an art for everyone and works to make it so. I sat down with some BTE officers, Ariana Haylock, HK Wall and Caleb Spainhour, to ask about how this group has impacted and shaped them.

Luke Younts: Why is diversity important?

HK Wall: Diversity is important because we have a privilege to live in a country where it’s diverse and at a certain point you are going to have to work closely with someone that is not going to look like you, and if we don’t want to stay stagnant, we have to be diverse. If I’m doing a character from New York, and I’m not diverse, I’m going to portray a caricature of what I think or what I believe. If you’re not diverse, how do you know how to light your students of color on-stage, how do you know how to do their makeup, how do you know how to do their hair? We are all integrated together so if you don’t learn about the people that you are surrounded by, we’re going to end up repeating history and there isn’t time for that.

Luke Younts: Why is BTE important to you? And to everyone?

Ariana Haylock: As a person of color, it’s important to me because it makes me feel seen and I know that it helps other Black and just minority people feel seen in the program. That’s really important because representation matters, and we have to advocate for ourselves. It is important to everyone else because it shares that we care about including other people and I think that’s also important because we’re pushing for accommodating for every kind of person. People need to see that and see what we are doing, stand up with us and join us in creating art.

Luke Younts: What is the future of BTE?

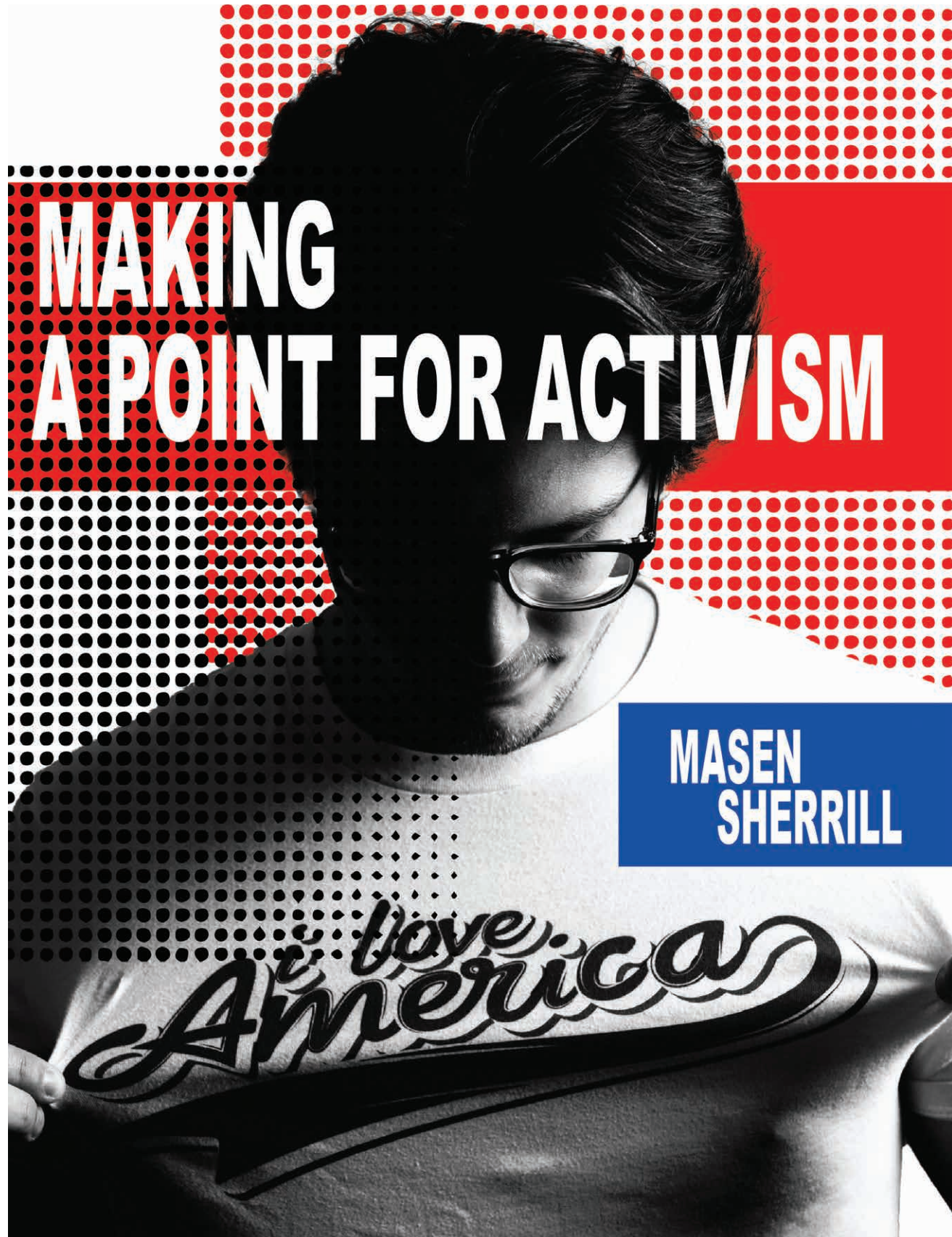
Ariana Haylock: I’m honestly kind of worried about the future of this group because there aren’t that many people of color in the stage and screen program. That’s why BTE exists so more Black people see at Western when they audition there is a place for them. We want to see it for years and years to see it still running and being a home for people of color.

Luke Younts: How long have you been doing shows with BTE?

Caleb Spainhour: Since my first semester, freshman year. My first show that I did was called “Flesh and Blood” and I remember getting the text from the director of the show and he was like, “I want you to be in the show.” I honestly saw the name of the group and I texted him, “Hey, just so you know, I’m white.” Some people for whatever reasons always ask me if I’m mixed. I don’t know exactly what it is. He said, “no I know, I just want you to be a part of it.” It has been so amazing to see that anyone can create with BTE and watch people grow and get a chance to have a voice.

Luke Younts: How did you become a better actor because of BTE?

Caleb Spainhour: I have become a better actor because I’ve gotten to work with so many people and I have gotten new viewpoints. I have learned a majority of things by watching the other actors and watching their processes. It really pushed me and motivated me to get better because I see them and I’m like I want to do that.



In my first semester on Western Carolina University's campus, one certain table set up outside Courtyard Dining always caught my attention. Each time I would walk past it, someone at the table would ask the question, "Do you like freedom?" When I slowed down to look closer, I saw that the table was adorned with buttons and rubber bracelets that bared phrases such as "BIG GOV SUCKS." I later learned this table belongs to the on-campus club, Turning Point USA. It is one of the largest clubs on campus, boasting 1,500 signups. Signups refer to students who come to their table or reach out online to give contact information to receive updates on the club. Western Carolina's chapter is one of the nation's leaders in signups for Turning Point USA. The president of this club is Brendan Chafin, a second-year criminal justice major. Brendan doubles as both the president of Turning Point and the vice-chairman for the College Republicans. He estimates that he spends an average of 15 hours a week working for Turning Point USA. He is not paid for his work. Brendan interned in Washington, D.C. last summer with the Leadership Institute, a nonprofit organization whose goal is to train conservative activists. He continues to write for this organization while juggling all his leadership roles, as well as being a full-time student. I sat down with Brendan to ask him about his activism.

MS - How did you get into politics?

BC - My freshman year of high school, because of the 2016 election. I started to see partisanship with teachers and it made me start to be a little bit more outspoken about my beliefs. Going through high school the next couple of years, I was known as the "political kid." My senior year when I took civics, we were able to do debates and I really took off then. I got really involved in politics when I saw Madison Cawthorn, our congressman, get elected in this district because he was really young and it helped me to see that young people really can make a difference in politics. I saw that, came here and helped start the Turning Point chapter.

MS - How did the Turning Point chapter get started here at Western?

BC - We started last year, and I was vice president. I found out about it online and it had gotten started the day before, so the president needed a vice president and I said I would do it. It got kind of lackluster, so we went through an impeachment process and removed him from office, so I became president. Ever since then, which was the spring semester of last year, our club has gotten progressively better.

MS - What are your duties as president?

BC - Mostly I do all of the behind-the-scenes work. I talk to donors, I get people to talk on campus, I work with the school, I work with the dean of students, I get all of our core points done through ENGAGE, and I tell people what they need to do for the organization. I am pretty much the liaison between the club and the school.

MS - Do you ever experience struggles balancing the club with your schoolwork?

BC - Not yet. I mean, I'm a sophomore, so that could change.

MS - What has been your favorite memory with Turning Point?

BC - The Madison Cawthorn event, by far. That is probably one of the biggest student events that has happened on campus. There were around 150 people there. It was a great event in my opinion.

"DO YOU LIKE FREEDOM?"

MS - How do you deal with backlash against your club?

BC - We just tell them they have the right to say what they want, as long as they're not saying things that are untrue. We have people come up who ask us questions when we table that come in kind of hostile, but once they see we're willing to actually sit down and listen and talk, their mood generally changes.

MS - If someone were to tell you that they choose not to vote, what would you say?

BC - I would say vote. Even if you're not going to vote for someone I agree with, you need to vote. It is one of your most important rights in America. If you're tired of the way things are going, and a lot of college students do seem to complain about how things are going, then get out there and just vote for the people who you think are going to make the best decisions for you. Last year, we (Turning Point USA) registered about 150 people on campus to vote. That is one thing I push for a lot, and I think is really important.

MS - In your opinion, what is the best way to become active in politics?

BC - Start a club on campus! Start a College Republican, start a College Democrats, start a Young Socialists for America, start a Turning Point chapter, do whatever you want- just help mobilize other activists who want to help your cause. The side with the most effective activists is the one who's going to win the race. If you really want to make a difference on a college campus, then you need to have effective activists.

Looking Deeper

Madison Sumser

“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.” I bet most of us have referenced this famous Aristotle quote at least a few times in our lives, perhaps more recently throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. But for students in professor Tichich’s photography class, the quote takes a whole different spin.

Professor Tichich recognized this unprecedented time and wanted to record it in a creative way that would connect our community and bring hope to those in need. One thing Tichich figured everyone can relate to recently is wearing masks, which draw attention to the eyes.

“The eyes are a window to your soul.” Variations of this quote have been attributed to sources like Shakespeare, Cicero and Matthew in the New Testament. Tichich took this idea and

turned it into an ungraded passion project for his students. He simply instructed them to go around campus and capture photos of people’s faces wearing masks. The photos would then be accumulated into a collage to display on campus.

Ezri Villiard was seduced by the originality of the project and excited to take part in it. She describes the work as, “Enhancing the beauty in people wearing masks and making it easier to appreciate the circumstances.” At first she was uncomfortable to get in strangers’ personal spaces to take headshots, she feared rejection; however, she quickly became comfortable when she learned that most people were willing to help her once she approached them.

Ezri knew that she wanted to find people wearing exciting masks. “One of my favorite portraits I captured was of a girl

with bright red hair wearing a black mask with pumpkins on it, the contrast made for an eye-catching photo.” Ezri knew that it was important to capture people from all walks of life in order to showcase diversity; she made sure to search through all the different buildings on campus from the CRC to the Bardos Arts Center. She ended up taking about 20 pictures; half were used for the project display and posted to WCU’s social media. In the end, she described the central goal of the project as, “Finding the beauty in an ugly situation.”

To add to the display of portraits, student Cheyenne Hall was asked to write a quote to tie the photos all together. Through much revision and hours of staring at the photos to figure out the deeper meaning, Cheyenne came up with this: “Whee are diverse, each of us tell a different story,/ strengthened together whee stand and a loving community is what whee are,/ look closely, no, even closer,/ no not the different masks,/ the eyes, students have come together to forge history in the making,/ have you seen it? see what you say, just look,/ because the eyes, the eyes have it.” Cheyenne expressed that she was not a poet beforehand; however, Tichich recognized her writing abilities and encouraged her that she could do it and in the end, neither one of them were disappointed with the results.

The project is now a traveling display in effort to reach all members in our community and bring hope to those in need. The exhibit started in the Bardo Arts Center; it then moved to the Harris Regional Cancer Center in Sylva. Since then it has gone to offices at the Harris Hospital. The plan is to move the exhibit about every three months and professor Tichich is always looking for new locations.

“The Eyes Have It” is only the first project in the series. Other parts of the series include “Looking At You” and “Looking Up,” which will depict the ways that life is getting better.

This display is not simply pictures of people’s eyes, but if you look deeper, it is a great viewing of what each individual has gone through up to the point of capture. No individual picture stands out; instead, the collection represents a diverse and strengthened community through all of this.





MADELINE TYSON

RESCUED

Jan Snotherly sits crushed in her car in the middle of the highway. Everything around her is in slow motion. She hears sirens, which encourage her to climb out of the car. But the pressure on her head becomes too much and she starts going in and out of consciousness. The fire and rescue squad are first on the scene. The crew pulls her to safety; some members keep her company as she calms herself down. She notices how efficiently the fire and rescue squad moves to help her and the others involved in the accident. She realizes in that moment that she wants to spend her life helping others, too.

Today, Jan is the one rescuing people. Currently a freshman at Western Carolina University, she majors in criminal justice and is minoring in forensic science. Freshmen like her have days filled with classes and homework and group projects and are happy to relax after a busy day. But not Jan. Most afternoons, Jan drives to the Jackson County Rescue Squad, where she might soon be called up to deliver medical supplies, direct traffic or help anywhere she is needed. There isn't anywhere else that Jan would rather spend her free time.

It wasn't until a couple of months after the accident that Jan decided to join the fire and rescue squad. During that time she was recovering in her hometown of West End. When her family decided to move into a new house, one of the neighbors offered to

carry in boxes, and it turned out he was the West End fire chief. After talking for a while, he joked about Jan joining. The rest is history.

Jan is currently continuing her service in her hometown of West End as well as in Jackson County while in college at WCU. After college, Jan plans to be a homicide detective. Her volunteer experience with the fire and rescue squad has helped her with these plans since she is sometimes on the scene of devastating and tragic events. Her love for helping others is something she believes will be in her forever. Wherever she goes, she plans to always volunteer at the closest fire and rescue department. She will always try to further her training so she can help as much as possible.

Today when Jan goes out on a call, she occasionally experiences flashbacks from her accident that still hold her back to this day. On that day years before, Jan was going to work when someone slammed their brakes in the middle of the highway. She was too tired to react quickly so she crashed and swerved over to the side and was knocked out immediately. On calls with the squad, she notices certain smells such as gunpowder and loud noises remind her of her accident. But she always keeps in mind the reason she is volunteering. Knowing someone was there when she was hurt was what helped her the most. She wants to be that someone. Even though she is busier than a typical college student, she has no regrets.

HONORS COLLEGE DONOR HIGHLIGHT

YAZMIN COSME ESCOBEDO

Bob and Suzanne Thomas

Business leaders Bob and Suzanne Thomas, both graduates and passionate supporters of Western Carolina University and its Brinson Honors College, carry a lifetime of experience in the business world. Their generosity and attentiveness to the WCU's Brinson Honors College has nurtured its community and helped continue the legacy of the Bob and Pam Thomas WCU Honors Scholarship, previously established by Mr. Thomas and his first wife, Pam Thomas, who passed away from pancreatic cancer in 2020.

Part of the Thomas' decision to contribute to the Brinson Honors College was the keen focus and career readiness Brinson Honors Students have. Mr. Thomas states that he "wanted to make sure there was help available to good students that needed it." These efforts have helped numerous students at the BHC pursue their careers, whether they be business or engineering.

Bob Thomas retired in 2017 as Chief Executive officer of EIS, Inc., a division of the Genuine Parts Company, which he had first joined in 1999. He carries decades of outstanding experience in international business sales, marketing, and executive leadership, being recognized for his excellence in business leadership. Mr. Thomas entered the business industry after serving in the Vietnam War. He realized his calling was business and pursued sales at Kimberly Clark Corporation and Scott Paper Corporation in Houston, Texas, where he learned the language of business, revenue, customer interactions, and interpersonal relationships. His position as general manager there prepared him for future jobs, such as various senior executive and vice president positions — some of which he managed in multiple locations like Hong Kong (Asia Pacific Business).

Mr. Thomas worked with Kimberly Clark and Scott Paper for 23 years. He later joined Morgan Crucible Plc., a publicly traded British company located in the United Kingdom, where he was the president of the Specialty Chemicals and Products Division for Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Moreover, Mr. Thomas obtained executive training at Stanford in international marketing and honed his skill set through self-education, something which he says he "highly recommends," emphasizing the importance of continuing post-graduate education.

His experiences at WCU influenced his skills in interpersonal interactions. During his alumni years, Mr. Thomas was an officer of a fraternity. Through WCU, he learned the importance of collaboration and involvement with the student government, senate, and men's house government. He says, "I learned a lot of things at Western in human interaction: how to work together on projects, and how to get involved," — They are skills that he employed regularly in his career.

For Mr. Thomas, these focuses were life-changing in that he was able to gain fulfilling experiences on campus, some of which he states were "a mixture between academics and fun." WCU provided him with the opportunities to interact and learn to work with diverse individuals. As a result, he says that WCU will always carry a warm place in his heart, which has encouraged him to give back to the community as a BHC Advisory member, and previously as first vice-chair of the WCU Foundation for six years.

Likewise, Suzanne Brown Thomas says WCU "opened up opportunities" for her, like allowing her to connect with others and explore different career fields. Her fond experiences at WCU have significantly impacted her view of collaboration and teamwork. She says, "Through the projects and athletics, it was about collaboration. You had to collaborate to accomplish anything you were doing . . . collaboration was the key to do that."

As an international business leader and market researcher, Mrs. Thomas has taken these opportunities and explored areas across South America, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, involving herself with the local history, which she says "gave [her] a broad perspective of how people live."

Early on, Mrs. Thomas worked in public relations at Carolina Power and Light and was also an affiliate of Lewis Bank in the PR department, where she created promotions and wrote commercials. She found happiness through creative freedom and enjoyed working in environments that drove her creative abilities.

However, her career shifted when she decided to research gourmet coffee. She found passion in working in the coffee and tea industry and published the first national consumer newsletter about coffee. She later represented several coffee companies such as Procter and Gamble, General Foods, and the Melitta Coffee company as a media spokesperson. While working with international clients, she was motivated to obtain her Master of Business Administration with a concentration in International Business to help with legal, moral, and cultural knowledge.

Mrs. Thomas currently works as a global marketing strategist at Suzanne Brown Associates. She emphasizes the idea of self-marketing, where she states that "you are your own marketer, and you have to bring the business."

The Thomases are incredible advocates for education. They highlight the importance of learning through both experience and academics and believe that there is always something new to learn. "College gives you the education and learning experience, which is really the beginning of a lifetime of learning," Mrs. Thomas remarks.





ALUMNI UPDATES

ALEXIS MOSER — By Lyndsey Conway

Alexis Moser graduated in May 2021 with a B.S. in science in communication sciences and disorders and a minor in English and special education. She was a member of the National Students Speech and Language Association, Book Buddies, The UP Program and a Brinson Honors College Ambassador. She now attends East Tennessee State University, where she is a graduate student in the department of speech and language pathology. Following graduate school, Alexis hopes to become a certified speech-language pathologist working with pediatric speech and language disorders in a private practice.

What fictional character do you think captures your personality?

“I feel like I’m a mix between Rory Gilmore from The Gilmore Girls and how she always had her head in a book and was always studying and David Schitt from Schitt’s Creek and how he is stressed all the time.”

JOSH GEIGER — By Luke Younts

Josh Geiger graduated summa cum laude in 2021 with a double major in criminal justice and emergency and disaster management. In his senior year, Josh was the vice president of the Honors Board of Directors. After school, Josh went to the Police Academy and works for the Sylva Police Department. His future goal is to become a K9 handler. He got involved in K9 training as a student at Western and hopes to get involved in K9 training any way possible in the future.

What TV/movie character is like you or describes your personality?

“I would have to say Shawn Spencer from Psych. I am actually a very sarcastic and easygoing person like he is in the show and we both work in law enforcement!”

AMELIA KONDA — By Masen Sherrill

Amelia Konda graduated in 2021 from Western Carolina University with a double B.S. in history and anthropology. At Western, Amelia participated in the Anthropology Club for two years. Currently she is a first-year master student at Texas State University studying biological anthropology with an emphasis in forensic anthropology. In her future, she hopes to work in identifying individuals from mass graves in order to not only bring justice but return them to their families. Amelia’s advice for Western Carolina students is to go to class! She also advises students to get to know your professors well because they will be the ones able to open doors for you in the future. She personally would like to thank Dr. Passalacqua and Dr. Zejdlik from the anthropology department, as well as Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Szabo from the history department for inspiring her as professors.

What’s the number one thing on your bucket list?

“To retire as a history teacher!”

CONNOR HENDERSON — By Carolyn Rhodes

Connor Henderson graduated in May 2021 with a degree in environmental health and art. While at Western, Connor participated in the Environmental Health Club, Med Cats, and the Honors Ambassadors Club. She worked as a building monitor at the Bardo Arts Center on campus and received many awards, such as the National Environmental Health Award. Connor is currently studying at Harvard to receive her master’s degree in environmental health. Connor’s career goals include finding a field where she can continue to research environmental health and receive her Ph.D.

What TV/Movie Character is like you or describes your personality?

“I would choose Willowdean Dickson from Dumplin’ because she reminds me of myself, and I can relate to her.”

DIXIE LAWS — By Faith Robinson

Dixie Laws graduated in the spring of 2021 as a double major in psychology and criminal justice. In her time at Western, Dixie was very busy. She was a member of the Criminal Justice Club, the Psychology Club, as well as an ambassador for the psychology program. She was active in the Honors College Board of Directors and an honors ambassador. While in college, she took a class specializing in clinical and counseling and knew she had found her career. She is currently in graduate school at Lenoir-Rhyne to become a fully licensed school counselor. One of the top items on Dixie’s list for the future is to travel the world. Germany and Scotland are the highest priority, but she fears planes! (We are all rooting for you Dixie).

What TV/movie character is like you or describes your personality?

“My personality is very similar to Chandler from Friends. Though we are of different genders, our personalities are very much alike. I am also extremely sarcastic, and always seem to crack jokes at the worst times!”

PATRICK BARCHETT — By Colin DeWall

Patrick Barchett is a double major in forensic anthropology and international justice and disaster management, which is an interdisciplinary major he created himself. He minored in German and he graduated in the spring of 2021. He went to WCU knowing that he wanted to major in Forensic Anthropology and minor in German. After taking some classes in Criminal Justice, Political Science, and Emergency and Disaster Management he loved it and decided to turn those into a major. While at WCU he received multiple awards; such as the Chancellor’s, the Distinguished Scholar Award, and a Leadership Award through the Brinson Honors College. He worked as a German tutor during his time here at WCU. He gained many close friends through clubs, even though he wasn’t in them long. For him, what stood out about WCU the most is how willing people are to make WCU a better place. He is currently working on his MA in anthropology with a forensic certificate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He, his advisors, and peers are trying to balance the hard sciences with social advocacy. He gets to apply the tutoring and teaching skills he gathered to the Teaching and Learning Center at UNL, too. He is an office assistant and once again a tutor. He hopes to be on the ground after a disaster strikes to identify the remains of the deceased. He wants his career to take him in a direction where he feels he has helped others, so he can look at himself in the mirror and say “I helped someone today.”

What is the number one thing on your bucket list?

“The number one thing on my bucket list is to visit all seven continents. I have only done two so far, but I am hoping to add my third, South America, in January of 2022.”

KATE MCCOSH — By Madeline Tyson

Kate McCosh graduated in May 2021 with a bachelor of fine arts in Theatre/Acting. As a military kid who was always moving around, she was glad to plant her roots into Western Carolina. During her time at WCU, she served on the University Players of Theatre and Film executive board as social media manager and then became president her senior year. She encourages current and future students to attend on-campus events because you never know what you may learn or who you’ll meet. Since graduation, she has not moved far and currently works as the office manager at the Jackson County Arts Council in Sylva. In addition, she is also on the staff at Calliope Stage, a new theatre company in WNC, as the associate artistic lead. Sometime in the future, she plans to move to Atlanta to pursue a career in acting. But the dream is to travel the entire country of Canada while living in a van, in addition to hiking North Carolina’s Mountains to Sea Trail.

What TV/movie character is like you or describes your personality?

“Belle from “Beauty and the Beast” because I am an introverted and a bookish nerd. However, I’m also not one to shy away from adventure and the people I love are the most important thing to me.”

MADDOX BULRIS — By Madison Sumser

Maddox Bulris graduated in May of 2021, leaving behind an inspiring and impressive academic career. She achieved two degrees, a BSBA in business administration and law and a BS in integrated health sciences. She was named a university scholar at graduation due to her 4.0 GPA. Aside from academics, Maddox was extremely involved in her community. She was an active member of the Alpha Phi Omega sorority, the Alpha Lambda Delta Honors Society, the Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society, the Pride of the Mountains Marching Band and she served as the president of the Brinson Honors College Board of Directors for two years. Maddox was also a campus tour guide, tutor and office assistant in the WaLC. Her biggest goal for her future is to aid in eliminating disparities and inequalities in the healthcare system, ensuring healthcare is a right for all people.

What TV character is like you or describes your personality?

“At this moment in time, I see myself kind of similar to Bonnie from the Vampire Diaries. She is very selfless and is constantly figuring out how she can better herself to help others. Her character is something I always admired, plus how cool would it be to be a witch?”



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Below are student presenters and their faculty sponsors, listed by college and department, for NCUR@Home, the 2022 virtual conference hosted by the Council on Undergraduate Research April 4-8, 2022.

MADISON CURTIS — By Nicole Vaughan

Madison Curtis graduated in May 2021 with degrees in business administration, management and marketing, as well as a minor in philosophy. During her time at Western, Madison was involved in the Brinson Honors College Board of Directors for all four years. Currently, Madison is working as a deputy clerk of Superior Court at the Caldwell County Courthouse. She will take this experience working in the courthouse and apply it to her future of attending law school sometime soon. Upon her graduation from law school and passing the bar exam, Madison hopes to be a practicing attorney somewhere in North Carolina to help people in need.

What TV/movie character is like you or describes your personality?

“A TV/Movie character I have always related to is Hermoine Granger from the Harry Potter series. Like Hermione, I have always placed an extremely high value on education, compassion, and loyalty to my friends and family.”

MIKAELA COX — By Hannah Davis

Mikaela Cox graduated in May 2021 with a double major in forensic biology and forensic anthropology. While at Western, she received the Brinson Honors College Distinguished Scholarship, the Brinson Honors College Board of Directors President’s Award and other honors scholarships. She also participated in the Brinson Honors College Board of Directors, Alpha Phi Omega, the anthropology club and worked as a tour guide. Currently, she works at Asheville Genova Diagnostics as a molecular genetic lab tech, where she tests for parasites and runs COVID tests. She believes working there will be good experience for finding work in crime labs in the future. Her advice to new students is to get involved. She made long-lasting friends by getting involved.

What TV/movie character is like you or describes your personality?

“Just because I’m obsessed with ‘The Lion King,’ I’ll go with Simba. I went through a phase when I was younger where I was not very confident with myself. I ran away, and I came back king.”

College of Arts and Sciences

BIOLOGY

Annotation and analysis of the Impl2 gene in multiple Drosophila species

Presenter: Lorien Helm
Faculty Sponsor: Indi Bose

Detecting Autophagy with Flux Inhibitor Controls: The State of Autophagy Research in the Field of Biomaterials

Presenter: Melissa Rogers
Faculty Sponsor: Heather Coan

CHEMISTRY AND PHYSICS

Regeneration of Ground Peanut Hull Biosorbent after Methylene Blue Uptake

Presenter: Emma Auch
Faculty Sponsor: Carmen Huffman

Exoplanet Transit of Qatar 1b

Presenter: Joseph Mintah
Faculty Sponsor: Enrique Gomez

ENGLISH

“I Feel Really, Really Good:” Carmen Maria Machado and Body Dysmorphia

Presenter: Caitlyn Cable
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

What It Means to Be a Parent in Jesmyn Ward’s Sing, Unburied, Sing

Presenter: Cameron Perry
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Apples and Androids: Don DeLillo’s Look into Humanity’s Reliance on Technology in The Silence

Presenter: Elliott Kerns
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

The Horror of Silence

Presenter: Gabrielle Fraga
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Lincoln in the Bardo: George Saunders and 19th Century Influences

Presenter: Grace Chastain
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

A Fictional Existence: Dissociation Through Postmodernist Literature in “The Husband Stitch” and “Once Upon a Time in Georgia”

Presenter: Gretchen Thomas
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Lessons on Living from the Dead: George Saunders’ Lincoln in the Bardo

Presenter: Madelin McEuen
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Here Be Monsters: Poe and Baratashvili’s Exploration of the Mind

Presenter: Victoria Grasty
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Women and Self-Esteem: Carmen Maria Machado’s Indictment of Society’s Beauty Standards

Presenter: Aimee Roberts
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

The White Witch and White Wizard: Prideful Evil in Narnia and Middle-Earth

Presenter: Elias Hutchinson
Faculty Sponsor: John Whitmire

Redemption and Penance: Physical Humiliation, Bodily Harm, and Death Not Included

Presenter: Nathan Travis
Faculty Sponsor: Katharine Mershon

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Multinational Review of the Long-term Effects on Education after Pandemics

Presenter: Aran Brunette
Faculty Sponsor: Ingrid Bego

Family Issues and the Correlation Between Media and Congressional Hearings

Presenter: Emma Blankenship
Faculty Sponsor: JoBeth Shafran

“Untitled”

Presenter: Dominique Buteau

College of Business

SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Drivers of Continuous Improvement Effectiveness During Covid-19: Evidence from the Nigerian Healthcare System

Presenter: Fuad Hassan
Faculty Sponsor: Bukola Bakare

College of Education and Allied Professions

PSYCHOLOGY

Internalized Homonegativity: Interactions Between Childhood Maltreatment and Religiousness

Presenter: Jessica Bell
Faculty Sponsor: David Solomon

College of Engineering and Technology

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

A Design Methodology for a Rack and Pinion Type Wave Energy Converter

Presenter: Brayden Beaver
Faculty Sponsor: Bora Karayaka

Thermal Analysis of a Glassblowing Furnace

Presenter: Jake Toney
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

Battery Size Optimization of a Hybrid Generation Framework which includes Small Modular Reactors and Renewables

Presenter: Lindsey McGregor
Faculty Sponsor: Bora Karayaka

3D Bioprinter with Double Extruding Capabilities under a Pneumatic System Capable of Printing a Number of Bio and Hydrated gels

Presenters: Morgan Patton, Devin Berry
Faculty Sponsor: Nazmul Ahsan

Radiation Shield Optimization for a Californium 252 Source

Presenters: Rylan Paye, Lauren Bryson, Jordan Davis
Faculty Sponsor: Joseph Tang

David Orr Belcher College of Fine and Performing Arts

SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

Research into Interactive Design

Presenter: Christina Perry
Faculty Sponsor: Mary Anna LaFratta

Approaching Design for Health, the Role of the Built Environment, and Our Aging Population Living Within Poverty in Western North Carolina (WNC)

Presenter: Joslyn Stinson
Faculty Sponsor: Shelby Hicks

How Does Student Intuition or Knowledge Align with Proper Mudras?

Presenter: Thomas Odell
Faculty Sponsor: Richard Tichich



Western
Carolina
UNIVERSITY

Brinson Honors
College

HC 101 Balsam Hall
1 University Drive
Cullowhee, NC 28723-9646

828.227.7383
honors.wcu.edu

WCU is a University of North Carolina campus
and an Equal Opportunity Institution.