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**BRINSON HONORS COLLEGE MAGAZINE 2023**  
**WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**



# INSPIRED COMMUNITY

Thank you for leaning in with us to enjoy this year's 18th edition of Imagine magazine. This special student-authored and student-designed magazine is the signature publication of the Brinson Honors College. It is my great pleasure to help bring this unique perspective of student life at Western Carolina University to you and invite you to join our community through the eyes of these wonderful students.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Honors College at WCU. Rededicated in 2020 as the Brinson Honors College, to honor Jack and Judy Brinson and their family members in recognition of their gifts of love to our students and in "remembrance of their sons Kevin and Kristopher Brinson and their exuberance and love of life," the Brinson Honors College continues in the tradition of strong and active student leadership. New(ish) student leadership opportunities in the college include the Committee on Curriculum, the Dean's Cabinet and Diversity Leaders, which join long-lived honors mainstays such as the (student) Board of Directors, Honors Ambassadors and Alpha Lambda Delta. Our community is thriving.

Nationally, honors colleges are known to foster a student's sense of belonging. That can be seen clearly at WCU, whether that is through the residential living experience, a particularly meaningful honors course, the chance to work closely with a professor on an honors contract, or the co-curricular programming that brings students together for fun or for purposeful engagement, finding one's place at the university can be facilitated and enriched when honors students find each other and come together.

In this edition of Imagine, you will see the thread of Inspired Community woven throughout. These first-year student authors speak to a sense of belongingness, family and community while also reflecting on research, inquiry, the arts and current events. You will see that our students find themselves not only part of the BHC and WCU community but also more broadly.

I want to thank all the student authors and designers for their work and efforts to make this magazine one-of-a-kind. On behalf of all of us in the BHC, I want to thank Dr. Jeremy Jones, associate professor of English Studies, who has guided and mentored this student crew. His efforts and dedication ensure that Imagine continues to be a point of pride for WCU. And special thanks to John Balentine, senior art director in the University Communications and Marketing department, for bringing it all together and into your hands.

Enjoy your time perusing these pages and Imagine yourself here with us in Cullowhee. Whether you are an alumnus reflecting on how the community has grown, a long-time friend of the college, or a prospective student, we hope that this edition of Imagine helps connect you with our inspired community. I invite you to follow the BHC on (our student led) social media: Facebook at WCU Brinson Honors College, Instagram @brinson.honors.college and YouTube at Brinson Honors College. We love hearing from you.

Yours truly. And Go Cats!

Dr. Jill Nelson Granger  
Dean, Brinson Honors College





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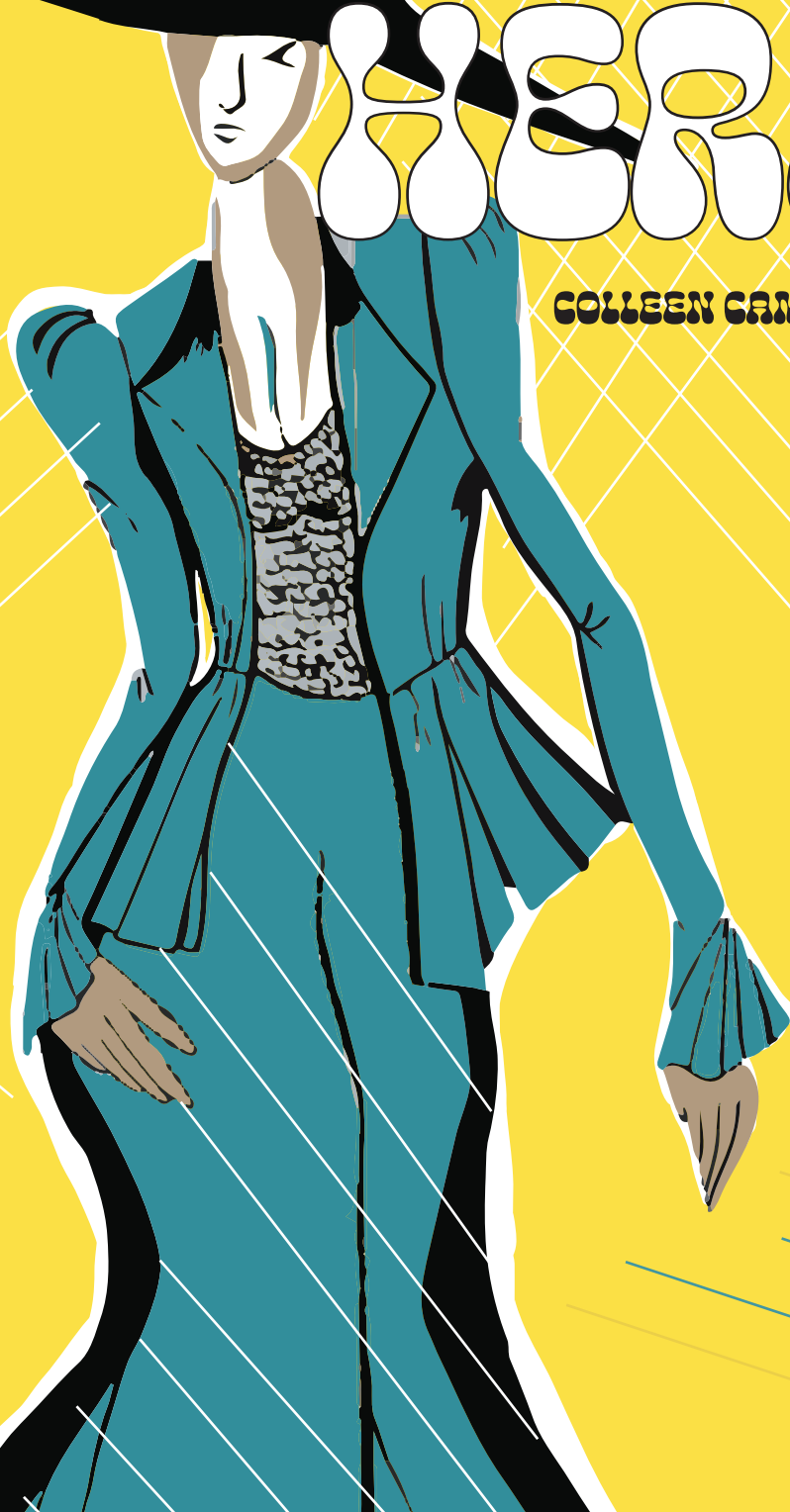
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# MAGIC HAPPENS HERE

COLLEEN CAMERON



**“Most students will never find or set foot in this room, but a select few who work within this shop have found a certain magic that comes from inside it.”**

Deep in the halls of the Bardo Arts Center, light pours through the windows and bounces off the tall ceilings of a special room filled with sewing machines, mannequins and fabrics. This room is the costume shop. At first glance it may look like a busy workspace for the School of Stage and Screen, but I can tell you that it is so much more. Most students who make their way through Western will never find or set foot in this room, but a select few who work within this shop have found a certain magic that comes from inside it.

My first week in the shop was nerve-racking. I walked in and every student was busy. They were cutting fabrics, running the sewing machines and weaving through the space. There was chaos in the room. But then I looked more closely at my surroundings. Everything had a pattern, and everyone knew exactly where to go. There was a kind of peace in this controlled chaos, and it immediately pulled me in.

At the time, the shop was in charge of a very important aspect of the upcoming fall show, “Quilters,” — making the quilts. With no sewing experience, I was terrified of helping out, but by the end of the first week I had learned how to use a sewing machine and was quilting away. Of course, this wasn’t an easy task for me. But with the support of the shop manager, Holly Hill, I managed to make a few squares without destroying the machines.

Holly found WCU amid the COVID-19 pandemic when she saw that the position for shop manager was open. She took the job and found the shop to be different than she expected. It was practically empty. Few students found time to work in the shop or showed interest in learning to sew. Holly made it her mission to change this, and in less than a year she succeeded. This semester, Holly works with 22 people in her shop. They come from many different majors, and all have varying levels of experience, but she is always supportive of her students’ growth.

An example of this is third year student Kate Haney. Kate works as a shop assistant and spends countless hours in the shop. She had sewed a bit as a child and found a hobby out of it, but ever since she came to the shop, she said that she has been learning new things all the time. She now sees a potential career opportunity there.

The shop just wrapped up working on the second mainstage show of the year, “Clue,” based on the murder mystery movie and classic board game. Students took time sewing together vintage dress patterns and looking through storage to find dapper suits and accessories. I was around during the assembly of both “Clue” and “Quilters,” and seeing the difference in both shows revealed the talent and work it takes to put an individual production together. For example, the amount of detail and fabrics added to Mrs. Peacock’s dress in “Clue” took much time and practice, but those added layers made her costume fit the character and represented her high-status personality.

You may ask, why is this costume shop so important? I asked Holly a similar question: “it’s a place where magic happens.” Holly wants the shop to be a comforting area for students to try new things, mess up and learn from their mistakes. I had no clue what I was

doing at the beginning of this semester, but now I’ve caught on to the pattern and found guidance from Holly. You should visit the shop. Holly is very proud of the differing types of students she sees come in and wants students to sit down and try something new. And don’t worry if you don’t know what you’re doing. “You can literally make anything in the costume shop!” Kate Haney says. “And if you can’t, Holly can!”





# Ready Or Not

Alyssa Nadeau and Ry Vega



"We're just gonna roll with it... we're just gonna go with it," Riley Ready repeats to herself before stepping on stage. After a lead actor fainted on the day of the final dress rehearsal of "Quilters," Ready has no choice but to go on mid-show. Nerves course through her body, but she's done this before. She shoves the fear of disappointing others – and the fact that she hardly knows Act 2 – off her shoulders. There is no time for planning when it comes to being a swing.

"It's more than an understudy," Ready says about playing a swing. "It's getting to know the show front and back, being needed when you're least expected and making it look like you're actually a part of the show." In short, a swing learns multiple roles simultaneously to fill in for characters. Before working on "Quilters," Ready was a swing for 14 ensemble roles in a production of "The Addams Family." This meant she had to learn the choreography and vocal parts for 14 characters – and be prepared to fill in for any of them at unexpected moments. Ready compares working in an ensemble to a house: "The ensemble are the

ones who build the walls and decorate the inside so that actors can live inside. Without the ensemble, the show is boring."

The first moment Ready saw her sister perform on stage, she knew she had to get involved in theater in any way she could. She was a freshman in high school and started with dance and cheer, but she felt more uplifted by the theater community than any flier on the cheer team. Her hard work of playing Olaf's understudy in a community production of "Frozen" and then a palm tree in "Aladdin" paid off when she got her first lead role as "Cinderella" in a local show. These roles inspired her to apply to the musical theatre program when she arrived at Western. The professors saw something in her that others may have ignored.

In Ready's eclectic room, inspiration for her craft is scattered across her walls; "American Beauty Rose" by Frank Sinatra hums in the background. The bright, 70s colors in the room reflect her vivid personality with "Breakfast Club," "The Doors" and "Wandavision" posters behind a string of



fairy lights. This room is one of many places she reads over lines and practices choreography for "Quilters." Her cornucopia doll, a star of the show, sits on her desk slumped against her cassette player.

"I've never felt more connected to a story before, and a show has never been able to make me cry on cue before this," she says about "Quilters." Getting into the mind of the character is still the most challenging part of her job, especially since she's not always rehearsing onstage with the rest of the actors. Many days, Ready is in the wings, figuring things out alone, despite her head being full of multiple character lines and choreography. Thankfully, she has the support from directors such as Claire Eye.

"She encourages us to take risks and have fun with it," Ready says. Claire is not a director who focuses purely on perfection. "Instead, she wants us to try something new every time," Ready says, which has helped her to improve her confidence. Working



towards being more comfortable while performing has been a constant journey that she is still working hard towards.

Ready is currently enjoying her sophomore year as a musical theatre major and dance minor and is thankful for her part in "Quilters" as a swing and ensemble member. Despite the often strange circumstances, her favorite parts of being a swing are the adrenaline – and not knowing exactly what's going to happen – but still having fun with it. With hard work and encouragement from professors and friends, Riley Ready will always be ready for the unexpected.





# Family Across Borders

Marie Spencer  
Clementine Everhart

"Unfortunately, many of the refugee families in this project do not have this built-in support. Ana hopes to be that support."

In 2022, thousands of Ukrainians fled to the United States to escape their war-torn country. Four of these refugee families found help in western North Carolina in the form of a senior nursing student named Ana Korolchuk. Like them, Ana is a Ukrainian immigrant and knows all too well the struggle of making a home in an unfamiliar place.

Ana and two other nursing students gather weekly in a large room with these newly arrived families. The students teach the Ukrainians about American healthcare, insurance, nutrition and mental wellness. These lessons are often paired with a meal that blends American, Ukrainian and Moldovan foods in a fusion of cultures, allowing a sense of community to take shape. Part of a capstone service learning project in the nursing program, these weekly lessons are aimed at helping the families adjust to life in America and find a sense of belonging in their new country.

Ana arrived in the US as a young child.

Her family was fortunate enough to have other family members already here to rely on for support. Unfortunately, many of the refugee families in this project do not have this built-in support. Ana hopes to be that support. She hopes her work will offer these families the help she received as a child. Although she knows the difficulty of adaptation, Ana manages to find the same motivation for the families that she had as a child, stating that, "If you don't try, you don't learn."

The determination of the refugees to create a new life while grieving their old is what inspires Ana the most. In one family, two teenage children were uprooted from their otherwise ordinary life when the Russians invaded their homeland in 2022. The son was in his final year of school, making this transition to the US especially hard. However, he plans to finish his academic career despite these challenges. "The family's positivity, despite clear challenges, is contagious," Ana says.

The hardest part about moving to America for Ana's family and many others was to learn a foreign language. Ana recalls picking up the language quicker than her parents and often being stuck as a translator at doctors' appointments and other high-stress occasions. Now, a decade later, Ana is happy to translate whenever needed – in this program, at church or out in the community. She feels a strong connection to the families she helps and finds inspiration in their experience, remembering back to her own early years in America.

Knowing Russian, Ukrainian and English has proven useful for Ana as she navigates this project and begins her career as a nurse. Once she graduates, she will begin work at Mission Hospital in Asheville. Eventually, she hopes to work in the hospital's critical care unit, where she will be able to help people in many difficult situations. In her work with Ukrainian refugees, she has learned that she has something to offer in a crisis: herself.







# THE PERFECT BALANCE

*-Reece Robion*

*“If you’ve got  
nothing else to say  
to them, you could  
just ride away.”*

Classes are out, and everyone is relaxing for the weekend – a faint rumble echoes in the distance. As the sound gets closer, a guy in a sleeveless shirt zooms past on a skateboard. With his yoga mat tucked securely under his arm, he looks determined. It is Benji, a sophomore in the pre-nursing program. He is a full-time honors student on the way to his part-time yoga gig.

On that skateboard, Benji seems at ease. Off the board and surrounded by people, he is the same: always eager to meet new people. However, he hasn’t always been this way. In high school, Benji found himself in the dark, feeling more and more distant from everything he loved.

Like many students, he’d been forced to take the better half of his high school education online. He missed out on a lot socially. He didn’t get to dress up for prom or spend late nights out after basketball games. Quickly, Benji found himself feeling more and more distant from everything he enjoyed. He had to say goodbye to all of his favorite parts of school.

Halfway through Covid, Benji’s family decided it was time for something new. They packed their things and moved to Asheville in hopes of a change of pace and fewer Covid restrictions. This move allowed Benji to attend in-person school for his senior year, but things weren’t the same. The hole that Covid had made in his life was still there. He felt disconnected from people at school after not being around other students for so long. His anxiety took over.

“Most of the friends I have from Asheville are people I met through skateboarding,” he said. He found that skating allowed him to feel more social again. It was easy to talk to skaters. Benji said, “If you’ve got nothing else to say to them, you could just ride away.”

Soon, Benji discovered other physical activities evened him out and connected him to others. Yoga morphed into a habit that became his morning routine. He felt like he was taking good care of himself while meeting people who enjoyed doing the same.

When he arrived at Western, he began to lose sight of what he had fallen in love with over quarantine. He was eager to be more social, but immediately he felt lost as everyone scrambled to find connection at college. He couldn’t find his people and started to become lonely.

Benji began reverting to his old ways. He started hiking by himself again or riding his board to blow off steam. This was when Benji started to feel more at home. “Do what you genuinely enjoy, and people will notice,” Benji said. He ran into people skating and hiking. He joined a yoga club and found all sorts of avid yogis.

For Benji, he felt at home when he found connection. Now, he is thriving at college, riding his board to the cafeteria or teaching one of his yoga classes. He has found a better sense of belonging after feeling like he has been missing it for so long.

He has incorporated those elements that provide him with perfect balance.



# THERE'S ALWAYS A PLACE 4 U

*"Project CARE is also where I met my best friends."*

*Lindsay Hannah*

In the week before classes begin, dozens of strangers come together to experience life-changing activities within the Project CARE program. This program started to provide resources to underrepresented groups on campus but is now open to all first-year students. Students partake in a week-long retreat aimed at bringing everyone together and forming a safe place free of judgment. Once the retreat is over, mentees get paired with their mentor, and the program continues throughout the year hosting fun events, mentor/mentee check-ins and more.

Two members of Project CARE, Miranda Connor, a second-year communication sciences and disorders major and a mentor; and Aster Black, a first-year pre-nursing major who is currently a mentee, agreed to answer questions about why they chose to join Project CARE.

**Lindsay Hannah (Interviewer):**  
*If you had to pitch Project CARE to incoming first-year students using just one word, what would it be and why?*

**Miranda Connor (Mentor):**  
Eye-opening. Because you are meeting students from all walks of life and are encouraged to share your experiences.

**LH: How has Project CARE impacted your life?**

**MC:** Project CARE helped with my transition to college, which

was incredibly needed since I was coming out of no socialization due to COVID. Project CARE is also where I met my best friends.

**LH: What made you decide to become a mentor in the Project CARE program?**

**MC:** I decided to become a mentor because my mentor impacted my first year here at WCU.

**LH: What do you hope to accomplish as a mentor?**

**MC:** I hope to help my mentees make WCU their home while they are here. A big component of Project CARE is retention, so I would like to see my mentees stay until graduation at WCU.

**Lindsay Hannah (Interviewer):**  
*How did you prepare yourself for college?*

**Aster Black (Mentee):** I went to an early college, so I was already pretty used to the flow of classes. The thing I really focused on was getting familiar with the campus.

**LH: Would you recommend Project CARE to others and why?**

**AB:** I definitely recommend it to others. It is a fun experience, but it does not just stay at the surface level. It allows you to get to know others and really think about your life. We often had days with deep conversations about our lives and the way different activities made us feel and perceive differently.

**LH: How has Project CARE impacted your life?**

**AB:** I am non-binary and bisexual and wanted to find people who wouldn't judge me. I also wanted to become more equitable and culturally aligned. It has allowed me to meet many amazing people, given me connections, and created a safe place. It has also allowed me to learn about the experiences and hardships of others and has made me feel less alone.

**LH: What is your favorite memory from Project CARE?**

**AB:** My favorite memory is when we got in a circle and would step in if a statement applied to us. It made me feel less alone, but it also made me realize the hardships of others and grounded us as humans. I feel that we sometimes get so stuck in the way we are perceived that we don't truly see the person beneath our appearance and the appearance of others. This activity broke down the barriers of our perception and allowed us to see deeper.

**LH: How is your relationship with your mentor, and what is the best advice they have given you?**

**AB:** We have a respectful relationship and check in with each other weekly. We often discuss our academics but focus on our mental health and energy levels. We're concerned about how well we're both taking care of ourselves. She offers insight, but it is a mutually caring relationship.

*"It's a mutually caring relationship."*





# TO BE BELIEVED

## Emily Presson

We sit in Coulter 303 on a Monday afternoon. It's the first meeting of the year, and the topic is lighting. "That's our biggest one right now," says student director Rayna Teague. Ask any of the directors of this group what their current goals are, they'll all bring up lighting. This is not a university assigned course about electricity, but rather a club, one by the name of Students Against Sexual Assault.

Students Against Sexual Assault and its directors, Rayna Teague, Berkley Joyner and Kyarra Beck, work to get the word out on safe sex and healthy relationships across campus. Groups members meet routinely, set up tables on the University Center lawn, create outreach events and even go to freshmen classes to discuss sex and safety. This is why we're talking about lighting. Good outdoor lighting can be the difference between safety and danger when someone is walking at night.

Something that is especially important to this group, even more than lighting, are the survivors themselves. Because SASA deals with such a heavy topic and heavy emotions, many survivors find comfort and support there. "You're in a spot where you know the people are not just supporting you," student Berkley Joyner says, "but if you were to say something about what you've been through, they're going to be respectful." All three of the directors try to make SASA a safe space – and even in some way a happy place. As a survivor myself, SASA is my safe space, and the people there make it one of my happy places.

When a victim of sexual assault talks about their experiences, they often are told by others that something like this could never happen. "If you weren't wearing that it never would have

happened," people might say. Or "he's such a good person, he would never do anything like that." SASA aims to change these ways of thinking and empower the survivors to reclaim what happened to them. Reclaiming something terrible that has happened to you can take years; I know for myself it has been a work in progress for over a year. The constant guilt and blame affect the way we reclaim our experience.

Walking into the University Center Illusions room, I'm greeted with a trio of friendly faces. Three volunteers from SASA ask me to fill out a nametag with my name, pronouns and the reason that I came out tonight. They also let me know that this event is non-mandatory reporting until 9pm, so if I wanted to share any experiences with sexual assault during the event, no one can report it to campus police, even mandated reporters (professors, resident assistants, etc.). From there I'm able to walk around and view community partners and other student-run organizations that showed up to provide their own resources. Soon enough I hear the student director of SASA, Rayna Teague, explain that three more volunteers are going to come up to the mic and read survivor stories, and invite others to share their own if they feel comfortable. These stories are intimate and intimidating, so before the group leaves to walk around campus everyone is offered hot chocolate, apple cider and cake.

"Out of the dorms. Into the streets, we won't be raped, we won't be beat" is one of many cycling chants you'll hear as the group marches into the night together. This chant is especially compelling when you listen to – and believe – the voices saying it.

"Out of the dorms. Into the streets,  
we won't be raped, we won't be beat!"



TAKE  
the n BACK  
g h t





***Sincerely,  
Kelci Owen***





# CAT CAMPS INNER AWAKENING

MADISON WOOD, MARGARET ANN BONNELL, MARIE REICHARD

**“HONESTLY, I NEVER IMAGINED HOW COMFORTABLE I WOULD BE AROUND A GROUP OF STRANGERS, BUT THEY REALLY BECAME LIKE FAMILY IN THE TWO WEEKS THAT WE HAD.”**

A bright dust cloud of red, green and blue surrounds everything in sight. As people huddle into one large group, delightful screams come from every angle as more campers throw color into the air. Soon enough, every inch of clothing contains the colors of the rainbow. Just days ago, these students didn't know each other, but now they're family. This is Western Carolina University's Cat Camp.

Cat Camp is held every summer for incoming freshmen to meet other students, participate in fun challenges and form meaningful connections. This camp lasts approximately a week and allows campers to move in earlier for college, adjusting to life away from home.

“The experience was definitely not what I was expecting,” camper MK said. She had been to camps before, but Cat Camp stuck out as something different and special. She was surprised by how open people were to her, despite everyone being a stranger at the start. “Honestly, I never imagined how comfortable I would be around a group of strangers, but they really became like family in the two weeks that we had,” she said.

Before attending, MK was anxious about starting a new chapter of her life. She'd had the same friend group for years and, even though they still stay in touch, she felt like she would have to start all over and was unsure on how to do so. She remembered getting the email inviting her to Cat Camp: “truthfully, I wasn't sure if I really wanted to go at first.” In the end, she decided to give it a chance.

MK and the other campers were separated into groups called litters, and that's when she realized that making new friends wasn't going to be that difficult after all. Each day, she talked a little bit more and participated in new activities.

She blossomed in those two weeks, and she believes that she wouldn't have made the transition into college as well as she did without Cat Camp. MK got an early start on making life-long friends.

“What makes Cat Camp ‘Cat Camp?’” Lori, a counselor for two years, takes a second to let the question sink in. She hums in thought trying to answer. “I'd say it's all the vulnerable activities we do.”

As part of Cat Camp, the campers are asked to participate in activities that can open up the most fragile parts of themselves. It is a challenge by choice, but many campers, as Lori saw, found comfort in opening up to a group of strangers.

One such emotional activity is “Step Into the Circle.” As the name suggests, campers and counselors stand in a circle. An announcer prompts participants to step into the circle if the question asked applies to them, and as the game continues, the prompts get more personal. The gymnasium was quiet, the only sound came from the shuffling of feet and sniffles of crying campers. “These activities make us the close-knit community that we are,” Lori says, her eyes gleaming with a sort of nostalgia. After the event, the campers exited the gymnasium ready for a better future as they left their emotional baggage on the dusty floor.

At Cat Camp, students find community, despite all the nerves that come with starting a new chapter in life; this community lasts throughout college. “I just did a litter meeting with my campers,” Levi Sweat, a previous camper and counselor said months after the camp ended. “I always check up on them. If you were in Cat Camp, you always have a connection to someone on campus.”





“I want people to understand that I don’t want to fit in; I just want to be accepted.”



# LIGHTS CAMERA ACCEPTANCE

FALLYN COLLINS

Grace-Ellen Rison rarely felt that she was accepted. In school, she was always being told to calm down, to stop talking. Sit on her hands to prevent movement. Understand social cues and try so hard not to make a scene. Act a way her brain wasn’t programmed to behave. It’s hard to accept what isn’t understood, and instead easier to try to control it rather than let it free. School often made her feel more like an animal that needed to be caged rather than a human.

Home wasn’t much better. She lived on the poverty line, and while her family supported her the best they could, her father was rarely in the picture, later dying from substance abuse.

Though the loss of her father consumed her, Grace credits her father’s death to helping her find her passion of theater. Theater became the light that got her out of her darkness, the constant in her world of chaos. Grace mentions how she became more involved because she had people who relied on her, especially when obtaining main roles like Belle in Beauty and the Beast. And through the years her love of the fine arts thrived, which led her to where she felt like she belonged, the musical theater program at Western Carolina University.

“They treated me like a human rather than a statistic,” Grace says. “They saw me.” Grace talks about one experience she had with the faculty at Western, where instead of them asking her shallow questions such as her height or trying to get the audition over with, they engaged in a genuine conversation. They laughed with her, and she spent a good part of her audition

going on a ramble about a form of native throat singing with them rather than answering questions about her appearance. This interaction put Western apart from the other schools she applied to because she felt that she was seen as a person, and not an accessory.

The school gave her a chance, and now that she’s here, she’s here to make a statement. She takes every day head on with her strawberry backpack and determined disposition. Running around to get to class throughout campus in her leotard to staying out all hours for rehearsals, Grace always finds the time to still enjoy the family she’s found in the musical theater program. From joining multiple clubs like CatarActs, Western’s improv club, and working hard for the school’s newest play “All Wrapped Up,” she has quickly found a way to not settle into the norm, but rather enjoy who she is.

“I don’t think I would’ve been as happy anywhere else as I’ve been here at Western,” Grace says. She has learned to be herself, knowing there are other neurodiverse students here that understand her. She no longer feels that she needs to hide who she is; instead, she embraces herself and her quirks. She has finally found a place where the norm is not how people should act, but rather who she is.



# BEHIND

## THE EXHIBIT

Gogaji Yang

Art is a way for you to shut off and enjoy something that's beautiful

I find myself in a white room and surrounded with studio glass creations. This is “Cultivating Collections: Glass,” an exhibit in Western’s Bardo Fine Art Museum, and I am staring in awe at one in particular: a glass sculpture in shape of a small bird. As I draw closer, I see there are three more speckled birds and past them, an abstract wall branch. As I look underneath the piece, I find a story about the artist, Shane Fero. I learn about his inspiration with the piece. But below his story lies another name: the name of someone who helped bring Fero’s artwork to life in this room.

Amber Rousseau, a senior majoring in studio art, was the name I found below Fero’s story. Most would call her a “bird lady.” Birds influence her imagination, especially her paintings. In last year’s Exhibition Practicum course, Amber was a student curator. When she started the course, she wasn’t sure what she would encounter. Soon, she was tasked with picking an artist in the studio glass collections who interested her. When it came time to choose, she had no doubt: Fero’s glass sculpted birds.

After selecting Fero to research, she realized she knew little about him. As a curator, it was now her job to learn information. Luckily, she was able to find his website and soon interviewed him about his work. With her gathered information, she now needed to bring his story to life – to craft a brief glimpse behind his work.

Being a curator is similar to the work of a detective. Amber and another student curator, Tina Thames, were both searching for another artist named David Nichols, who had seemingly vanished from Western during the 1990s. Amber and Tina started emailing people he had once known, such as colleagues and family members. Nobody knew where Nichols was. About a month into the search, Rousseau and Thames finally got ahold of him. They would come to learn that a health condition kept Nichols from creating his unique patterned vases and bowls. It was sad to learn he could no longer create his work as he used to, but they had the chance to write his story.

As an artist myself, when the thought of a curator comes to mind, I think of someone who designs a gallery room to showcase an artist’s work – and only that. It’s true curators still go through this process, but most of their work involves trying to create a story for the viewers and the artist. In short, curators help bring the exhibit to life.

Today, Amber continues to use the skills she has learned from being a student curator. She works for the WCU Fine Art Museum and finds herself applying these skills in writing biographies for other artists, allowing her to help design and set up an exhibition. In the spring, she will be setting up her very own exhibition in the gallery 130 space at the museum. As for Tina, she learned how to communicate effectively. She too also hopes to have a future exhibit of her own.

“Art is a way for you to shut off and enjoy something that’s beautiful,” Tina says, “to do something that you care about or have a moment to look at something nice, and to not be in your own world for a second.” Upon stepping into the beauty of the studio glasswork a second time, I can now acknowledge all the work behind the scenes that allowed me to appreciate myself to shut off and enjoy.





# The FOREST

Brianna Key



*"It's not as creepy or scary as people imagine...It's honestly really peaceful." -Noah Smith*

In the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains of Cullowhee, North Carolina, bodies upon bodies lie lifeless, waiting to be examined. Miles away, in a human identification lab, Noah Smith gathers information on the effects that continuous rain, bugs and ruthless animals have on these bodies. Some days scavengers will eat away at the bodies and others will show mercy and leave them in peace. He never knows what – or who – to expect.

These bodies belong to the Forensic Osteology Research Station (FOREST), which is a decomposition site in the woods for bodies that were donated by people upon their death as a way for forensic science majors to learn and conduct research on the way nature affects their bodies. Senior Noah Smith, forensic anthropology and forensic biology major, has immense respect and gratitude for all the past and current donors who have given their bodies for research. Many people use the term body farm to refer to the FOREST, but "it's actually disrespectful to our donors," Noah says. Considering the FOREST as a body farm belittles the generosity of those who give their bodies to science. A body farm without context is a place where bodies lie to decompose, but the bodies that live in the FOREST are placed there with consent to further the education and information of the decomposition process.

Noah discovered an interest in genetics during grade school. Every time genetics came up in science class, he quickly engaged in learning more. He enjoyed learning the process of applying genetic methods and techniques in legal settings. Noah completed two associate degrees before arriving at Western. When he first got here, he decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in forensic science; however, something unexpected happened. Unfortunately for Noah, he could only take some of the necessary forensic biology courses he needed at the time when he registered for classes, so to fill in the gaps within his schedule, he decided to double up and major in forensic anthropology as well. According to Noah, his interest in this specific field of study "came out of left field." This newfound concentration was what led him to discover his current job. He now works under Dr. Rebecca George,

preparing the donors, maintaining the facility and training the incoming interns and volunteers.

The thought of seeing bodies laid out across a wide stretch of land out in the woods where only certain people know the location of might seem pretty frightening. "It's not as creepy or scary as people imagine," Noah says, "It's honestly really peaceful." There are some instances, however, where turkeys and black vultures will be present on the site, but as soon as Noah and the other interns move in, they move out. There is always wildlife lurking around the woods, but so far none have tried to interact with Noah while he is collecting in the form of photographs and documentation of the decomposition process. The FOREST presents many opportunities for students like Noah to conduct hands-on research. For this, Noah is not only grateful to the donors but the wildlife and weather too for increasing his understanding of the decomposition process and its effects.

Currently, Noah is working on an undergraduate research project with Dr. Frankie West and Dr. Nicholas Passalacqua regarding the reassociation of commingled human remains. Noah's goal for this research is to determine how many individuals are represented in the assemblage of remains. This information is conducted through STR analysis, which in simple terms is a common type of DNA profiling that is commonly used today for criminal cases and other forensic uses. Noah is set to graduate in December 2022 and strives to continue to further his education and one day get his Ph.D., but he has yet to decide on a specific career path: "Honestly, I'm not sure. There are so many directions that I can go, and most are very intriguing to me." For now, he is happy to be in the FOREST.





Ryan Reynolds, Paige Strickland, Cora Haste

# Volunteering

At Western, we are part of a community. And not just a community of students, but of an entire region. Getting involved in organizations that serve that community speaks to a large part of the university's identity. Penny Vermeulen, Diana Vallejo Bueno, and Nadia Blow are three students at Western with very different backgrounds but a similar heart for serving their community.



**Penny Vermeulen**

By: Ryan Reynolds



Imagine having a whole life with a job, a home and a future... And then starting over. That's precisely what Penny Vermeulen did when she decided to leave her job as a biological engineer and come study recreational therapy.

Penny was born and raised in Canada and in her previous career had worked for several large companies refining manufacturing processes. But that all changed in 2017 when her husband passed away. In the aftermath, Penny re-evaluated her life: "I was like 'you know what?' I am done working my butt off to make money for some big corporation." But what could she do? She had spent countless years building up her career in one field, so starting over so far in seemed a daunting prospect.

But luckily for her, it wouldn't be long until she found a profession that spoke to her. Through a chance reconnection with an old friend, Penny discovered recreational therapy, a career in which people provided physical therapy through purpose-designed recreational activities. From there, it was off to the races for Penny – or rather, off to university again.

Soon, Penny would be enrolled in Western's recreational therapy program, where students were required to do service for the community as part of the curriculum. That was no problem for Penny, as she had been passionate about service for her whole life, even stretching back to when she was a Girl Guide leader (the Canadian equivalent of the Girl Scouts).

Since enrolling back in college, some of her volunteering work has included dedicating many hours to the COVID vaccination clinic on-campus during the height of the pandemic and volunteering at Haywood Pathways, a

center aiming to assist the homeless, as well as Aston Park, a skilled nursing facility.

One specific volunteering experience that illustrates her dedication is her experience at Hinds Feet Farm, a facility in Asheville helping to rehabilitate people with traumatic brain injuries. Penny went above and beyond for this opportunity, taking hours of online courses so that she could be qualified to work with these people.

And as if that wasn't enough, Penny completed a project with one of her classmates called the Fall Festival in which they invited local people with intellectual and learning disabilities to come to campus and participate in purpose-driven recreational activities. This experience is the one that Penny says was most fulfilling. "Just seeing the smiles on their faces and how they would come up and thank us," she says, "they were so happy, of course that feels fulfilling because you know that you've positively impacted that person's life." Fittingly, this is the project that earned Penny the Lily Award with Distinction, a step even beyond the Lily Award, which is an award given by the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning to outstanding volunteers.

After having to start over after a full life and career, Penny Vermeulen has excelled. Not only that, but she has dedicated that success to helping others. In the future, Penny plans to finish her degree in recreational therapy and find a job at a behavioral health hospital, where she'll no doubt continue to do good and help people. After all, as Penny says, recreational therapy is "the helping profession."



# Diana Vallejo Bueno

By: Cora Haste



Immigrating to a new country comes with a lot of challenges. Diana Vallejo Bueno knows this all too well. Moving to the US from Mexico as a child meant adopting a new language and culture. Diana struggled to find role models when it came to seeking higher education. Her parents worked hard but she wanted to broaden her horizons beyond the world she knew growing up. She did. Now, as a first-generation college student, Diana is not only fulfilling her dreams but helping others like her find theirs through a community outreach program called LEAP.

LEAP, hosted by the College of Education and Allied Services, is the Language Enhancement After-school Program. Students from Cullowhee Valley Elementary School who are learning English as a second language attend the no-cost after-school program at Cullowhee United Methodist Church where dedicated teachers like Diana help them develop skills as English speakers.

LEAP, however, is more than just an educational experience; it is a place where children can find community. As one walks through the halls of Cullowhee United Methodist on any given afternoon the sounds of children ages 5 to 14 can be heard. Diana remembers the struggles that arose during her childhood in classrooms full of students and teachers who did not understand her experiences. She hopes to provide guidance for the children.

"I want to be someone the kids can look up to," Diana says, "I just want to be a good example for them."

After she graduates, she plans to become an ESL teacher, and LEAP provides her with hands-on experience in the field. Diana relays a story from her first day at the program when a six-year-old had a challenging tantrum: "It was just like this very big moment... I remember thinking to myself, okay what could I have done differently?" Diana intends to take what she is learning in these difficult moments with her into her own classroom. More than anything she is learning; she is especially proud to be someone who looks like these students and understands their experiences. Diana is proud to be that role model she never had. "I'm glad I am able to be a part of this," she says.



# Nadia Blow

By: Paige Strickland



On the edge of Western Carolina University's campus sits a small building that you would never expect to have such a huge impact on so many lives, yet it does. After walking through the door of Homebase, you are greeted by warm, welcoming faces. One of these faces belongs to Nadia Blow, a small-town girl who came to Western to study social work.

Nadia grew up in rural Trenton, North Carolina, and has always wanted to help her community. A professor once told her that social work would allow her to do this: "I looked into it and loved that idea." Once at Western and settled into her major, Nadia began to recognize the needs around her here, in her new community. "I have seen how so many college students struggle with not having the funds they need to even be able to supply basic everyday necessities," she says. This is why she decided to intern for Homebase.

At Homebase, Nadia works as the building manager and event coordinator, where her job includes everything from checking the safety of the building, cleaning and providing supplies and planning events on top of taking care of whoever needs help at any

time. Every day she comes out with a welcoming smile ready to help at any moment. Growing up in a small community has helped her to learn how to work with people that she would see on a regular basis.

When I asked her to describe Homebase in one word, she said "home." Homebase is more than just a shelter for those who need it. Homebase is a place for anyone and everyone, regardless of age, background, race, or religion. Volunteers provide clothes to those who need them, and housing and basic needs for any students. The organization relies on donations from community partners like Baptist Student Fellowship.

During her time at Homebase, Nadia has learned about her community and herself. She has learned how to push through hard times and how to work with people that she has never worked with before. She has learned she can make a home for all who need it.







I was 8 years old when I first stepped onto Western's campus. The only thing I remember from that visit was the large arch connecting two buildings. I knew that the bridge was a central part of campus, and I knew that it represented the Honors College. The buildings that arch joined were where honors students lived and studied. 10 years later, I live in those buildings and am a part of that community. At 8, I did not think I would come to WCU to stay, but what convinced me years later was that bridge: the Honors College and the culture and community it is steeped in.

When the Honors College began in 1997, Dr. Brian Railsback and a team of students traveled around the country in search of what would best fit an honors college in Cullowhee. "That was the beginning of a radical notion," Dr. Railsback, who later became the Honors College's first dean, says. That radical notion was that WCU's Honors College would rely on an advisory board made entirely of students.

Michelle Gurley Ekstrom was one of the students on that tour and later became the president of this new advisory board. When Dr. Railsback and others made decisions about any Honors College matter, they did so with the board's consultation.

Michelle has used what she learned as a leader in the Honors College throughout her career. Today she is the lead speech language pathologist in the Rutherford County School system and a program specialist for the special education department. Even today, Michelle describes the honors college as "our college." She found a place where all students receive ownership of the college. Every opinion was valued.

The group also decided that WCU's honors college would be residential. The idea was that students living together would create a tight-knit community. They would not only attend classes together, but they would play games and watch movies and discuss their research in the residence halls. The Honors College became the first residential

honors college in the UNC system and is now the oldest and one of the largest.

At first, honors students lived in Reynolds Hall, far from the center of campus. The administrative offices, however, were in the Stillwell building. Everything felt too disconnected.

In 2005, conversations began about constructing new buildings somewhere closer to the center of campus for honors students and offices to be together. "We had all these pie in the sky ideas, throwing around – crazy stuff – and we had this idea, this archway between two buildings," Brett Banther, who was the president of the board then, says. The board's goal was to "build the culture of the college," Brett says, and these two buildings became the way to do so.

Brett finished his undergrad degree at Western, came back to do his graduate studies and now works as a Rapid Center Project Engineer at WCU while also teaching a senior capstone course. His time as an undergraduate would not have been the same without the community of honors students. "It's a pretty special program," he said. "It kind of gives you that ability to supercharge your four years here."

Four years after he graduated, the ground was broken for the two new buildings, Blue Ridge and Balsam Residence Halls. I now live in Balsam, next to the bridge I saw when I was 8. Living in Balsam Hall, I have formed relationships with students from all majors and experiences and made connections with leaders in the Brinson Honors College. I get support from students and faculty every time I need it.

Michelle believes that Western is that "same special place" she attended. And I agree. I am an English major and on that Board of Directors that Dr. Railsback and Michelle helped start 25 years ago. I get to make decisions with today's dean, Dr. Jill Granger. My voice is heard, and the opportunities and connections given to me by the Brinson Honors College are unlike anything I could get elsewhere. I love it here.

# Building Bridges

Elizabeth Pennell







## BRINSON HONORS COLLEGE DONOR HIGHLIGHT

BY SARAH MORGAN

Gayle Watkins and Andrew Chmar hope to inspire more Brinson Honors College students to study abroad, and have established two endowments to help make that dream come true.

Watkins and Chmar believe that undergraduate experiences abroad help students develop a global perspective that aids them in their careers and lives. They served in the United States Army for 22 years, and had many opportunities to travel. They believe that international experiences make people better citizens of the United States and promote cross-cultural communications. Chmar hopes that students will consider international careers after spending time abroad, and that more business opportunities will come to Western North Carolina.

While they served as professors at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, they realized the importance of helping students and faculty travel. Watkins and Chmar have created the Chmar-Watkins Study Abroad Endowed Scholarship, which will help Brinson Honors College students who study abroad

pay for housing, a passport, meals, and other costs that may arise during their time overseas. They are also establishing a scholarship for faculty members called the Watkins-Chmar Faculty Support Fund. This fund will allow professors to travel abroad and discover places they should bring students on a faculty-led trip. These endowments will begin providing support in the 2023-2024 academic year, and will increase opportunities for students and faculty to travel.

Watkins and Chmar joined the Brinson Honors College Advisory Board in 2018. Watkins also began serving on the Western Carolina University Foundation Board of Directors in July of 2022. When they came to Western Carolina, they were impressed by the degree of excellence that Brinson Honors College students and faculty pursue. To Watkins and Chmar, Western North Carolina feels like home. They hope that their donations will continue inspiring Western Carolina students to study abroad in the many years to come.



## ALUMNI UPDATES

### AMY EDWARDS — by Colleen Cameron

Amy Edwards graduated in May of 2022 with a degree in recreational therapy. She loved her psychology classes and her recreational therapy professors while here. She now lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, working with Community Workforce Solutions, an organization that helps high school students with intellectual disabilities obtain knowledge for a career in the workforce. Amy is considering pursuing her master's in vocational evaluations and assessments.

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**  
*There's a song called "Last Hope" by Paramore, and I just think that it's kind of inspirational.*

### DANIEL HUTCHINSON — by Fallyn Collins

Daniel Hutchinson graduated in May 2022, earning degrees in finance and management. At Western he was a part of the Board of Directors for the Honors College for four years, an honors ambassador for his last semester, a member of the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity "for forever" and a member of the Greek honors society, Order of Omega. After graduating, Hutchinson returned to a job that decorates for weddings and other venues while he looks for what he calls his "big boy job."

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**  
*"Buy me a Boat" by Chris Janson because throughout the song he talks about sitting on the beach on a truck with something cold to drink. If I can follow that song and complete it, then I did good in life.*

### FAITH DILLARD — by Kelci Owen

Faith Dillard graduated in May 2022 with a degree in English education. Faith has always enjoyed reading; her favorite thing to do on campus was going to a cozy place and reading for hours. While at Western, she hoped that she would eventually go on to work as a teacher in Cherokee. Today, she is doing just that. She teaches 12th grade English at Cherokee High School. She hopes to eventually get her master's degree and teach English at the collegiate level, maybe even at Western.

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**  
*"Anyway You Want It" by Journey. It reminds me that if you want something bad enough you can achieve it, you just have to set your mind to it.*

### TAYLOR HASICK — by Lindsay Hannah

Taylor Hasick earned her bachelor's degree in biology and forensic anthropology. She now lives in North Dakota, where she is obtaining her master's degree in public health at the University of North Dakota. She wants to effect change in indigenous communities through health promotion and community outreach. She minored in Cherokee studies, which impacts what she wants to do in the future, and the courses she took for her minor made her time at WCU memorable. She also really enjoyed all that the outdoors Cullowhee had to offer. These days, you can catch her at "any all-you-can-eat sushi bar" she says, as she could live off sushi forever.

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**  
*"Chiquitita" by ABBA because it is connected to many good memories*



## JAZMINE DAVIDSON — by Elizabeth Pennell

Jazmine Davidson graduated in 2022 with a double major in English education and English pedagogy. She is now teaching 8th grade English at Enka Middle School in Candler, N.C. She marched with the Pride of the Mountains Marching Band for her freshman and sophomore years. Sadly, COVID cut her time with the band short. Before that, she marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, a memory that has become one of the highlights of her life. She also enjoyed her adolescent literature class with Dr. Michael Boatright. She is very thankful to Western for getting her where she needed to be in her life.

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**

*“Keep Your Head Up” by Andy Grammar. I always try to be positive and that’s one of those songs where if I am having a bad day, I listen to it and I’m like, you know what, it’s all going to be alright, I’ll make it through it.*

## HANNAH GOINS — by Marie Reichard

Hannah Goins received a degree in environmental health. While at Western, she had many memorable experiences, but field trips during her junior and senior year stick out the most. For example, Hannah looks back at the weekend mosquito trip to Hobcaw Barony in South Carolina; she did field work near the saltwater marshes and saw how saltwater affects the mosquitoes in the area. After college, Hannah moved back to her hometown in Lincoln, North Carolina. While there, she works at the Water Treatment Plant as a Water Quality Technician for the City of Hickory. Hannah is unsure what she wants to do long-term, but she is grateful for her job and hopes to buy a house of her own one day.

**If you had one song to describe your life, what would it be and why?**

*If I had to choose one song to describe my life, it would be “Just Keep Swimming” by Dory in “Finding Nemo.” No matter what life throws my way, I remind myself to keep moving forward. I may need to take breaks and focus on my mental/emotional health, but I still keep moving forward.*



## RENEE ADAMONIS — by Emily Presson

Renee Adamonis graduated in May 2022 with a bachelor's degree in athletic training. During her studies, Renee completed immersive clinical training at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh, PA, and NC State. She was an active member of the Honors College Board of Directors and enjoyed attending football and basketball games with her friends. Renee was also able to study abroad in Edinburgh, Scotland one summer where she got the amazing opportunity to study the global ethics and impact of sport. Renee is now a graduate assistant at NC State University as an athletic trainer with the football team. She is working towards her master's degree in parks, recreation, tourism and sport management. She hopes to score a full-time job as an athletic trainer with a Division 1 college football or ice hockey team.

**If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?**

*“Probably pasta, especially my great-grandma’s lasagna. I just like that there’s so many options and different ways to make pasta!”*

## SERENITY CORTES — by Madison Wood

Serenity Cortes' dream before leaving Western was to work as a clinical physician. To pursue this path, she studied integrated health sciences with a pre-physician assistant concentration. Upon graduation, Serenity began working in a clinic but ultimately found that this wasn't what she wanted to do. However, her degree was not for naught. Now living in Virginia Beach, Serenity has applied to Virginia Tech to pursue a degree in general engineering, where she hopes to concentrate in biomedical engineering and put all the work she did in health science to use. And even though she has moved on from Western, she still keeps in her heart all the great memories from her classes, like her anatomy and physiology class with Dr. Karen Kandl. “She helped me realize that I could overcome challenges in difficult courses and still enjoy myself,” Serenity says.

**What song best describes your life? How so?**

*“Wildflowers by Dolly Parton, Lina Ronstadt, and Emmylou Harris. I believe this song describes my life because I constantly have the desire to grow and follow my dreams regardless of where they take me.”*

## SOFI KISER — by Ry Vega

Sofi Kiser graduated with degrees in education and music and a minor in Spanish. One of her favorite aspects about studying at Western was taking liberal studies courses. “Being able to go out and learn different things was so cool,” she says. Kiser is now a music teacher at Washington Street Elementary in Rockingham, N.C. “It’s truly rewarding work,” she says. In the future, Kiser hopes to continue to inspire students to love music so it can have a positive impact on their lives: “I believe that music has such an important role in our society, and people overlook it.”

**If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?**

*“French Fries, hands down French fries. Specifically steak cut fries with lots of seasoning.”*

## LANDON GREEN — by Paige Strickland

Landon Green graduated in 2022 with a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics. He is now attending Appalachian State University to earn a master's degree in nutrition. On a rainy night, in the corner of a quaint coffee shop with jazz music in the background is where you will find Landon Green. Landon's favorite memory from attending Western Carolina University was his senior year, when he had a class with Dr. Mickey Randolph. “She was the only professor who didn't use PowerPoint or Canvas or any technology at all,” he says. “She was really engaging.” Landon hopes to find his “niche in nutrition” and is currently discovering the areas in nutrition that he is most passionate about.

**If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?**

*Probably a barbeque platter with cornbread, collards, mac and cheese – and cole slaw obviously.*

## LILLIAN CARTWRIGHT — by Alyssa Nadeau

Lillian Cartwright graduated in May 2022 with a bachelor of science in anthropology and a concentration in forensics. Her most memorable time at Western was working with the Mountain Heritage Center, where she discovered her love for museums while working in the collections facility. Logging artifacts into databases and helping set up installations made her realize museum work was what she wanted to pursue. Today, Lillian lives in Camden, NC, working to preserve Old Cape Henry Lighthouse. She is currently applying to graduate school for a master's in history. She says she chose history because talking about and sharing excitement for the past with others is something she loves and wants to continue with for a long time.

**If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?**

*I would probably say tacos because you can always have a variation and like fun toppings!*

## MEAGAN MORISI — by Margaret Bonnell

Meagan Morisi graduated in 2022 with a degree in forensic anthropology and a minor in history. At Western, Meagan was a part of the club cheer team and, was a member of the anthropology club and she did an internship with the Mountain Heritage Center for her last semester. She then went on to graduate school at University of North Carolina Wilmington to continue what she majored in. During her first semester there, she faced some personal and family challenges in her life. She reflected and realized that the graduate-school path wasn't for her; she now is looking to start her life anew and find a job that she will love and enjoy.

**What would the theme song of your life be?**

*“Here Comes the Sun” by the Beatles... I may not always be, you know, sunshiny and whatnot... but I really do try to make other people happy and I always try to put everyone else first... Be bright and try to be that positivity for people!*



# NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

CUR 2023, the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, was held at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire from April 12-13, 2023. Student authored papers and poster presentations that were accepted for NCUR 2023 are listed by college and department, with student presenter(s) name(s) and faculty sponsor. The group photo of students who presented at NCUR 2023 was taken on the UW-Eau Claire campus next to the Chippewa River.



## College of Arts & Sciences

### ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY

Applicability of Malocclusion Scoring Within the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection

Presenter: Sean Gallagher  
Faculty Sponsor: Rebecca George

### CHEMISTRY AND PHYSICS

Bovine Serum Albumin Encapsulated Poly-L-Lysine-Graft-Poly(ethylene) Glycol (PLL-g-PEG ) Nanoparticles: Synthesis, Characterization, and Evaluation of Stability in Serum

Presenter: Dallas Dean  
Faculty Sponsor: Rangika Hikkaduwa Koralege

Evaluating the antioxidant properties of berberine metabolites using computational chemistry methods.

Presenter: Elvis Perez Galarza  
Faculty Sponsor: Channa De Silva

Nuclear Fuel Remediation: A Computational Study

Presenters: Keanu Ammons; Nicholas Eckert; Joaquin Gabriel Layno  
Faculty Sponsor: Channa De Silva

Single-Hop Parallel Algorithm Comparison

Presenters: Keanu Ammons; Nicholas Eckert; Joaquin Gabriel Layno  
Faculty Sponsor: Channa De Silva

Current Determinations of the Biochemical Mechanisms of the Amatoxin Alpha-Amanitin: A Literature Review

Presenter: Mage Naef  
Faculty Sponsor: Jamie Wallen

The Use of Essential Oils in Increasing Potency of Insecticides on Mosquitoes

Presenter: Taylor Gregory  
Faculty Sponsor: Scott Huffman

Investigation of Weathering on Automotive Clear-Coat Formulations Using Fourier Transformation Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) for Forensic Purposes

Presenter: Carrie Lee  
Faculty Sponsor: Nuwan Perera

Analysis of human decomposition odor using Gas Chromatography Mass Spectrometry

Presenter: Emylee Pollock  
Faculty Sponsor: Nuwan Perera

### ENGLISH

Emotional Baggage: Delayed Mourning, Jealousy, and Femininity in Hamlet

Presenter: Rachel Hooper  
Faculty Sponsor: Mary Adams

Irony vs. Sincerity in the Works of Stephen Crane and Vazha-Pshavela

Presenter: Ryan Reynolds  
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Humanity's Greatest Strength: Survival and Gender Identity

Presenter: Rachel Hooper  
Faculty Sponsor: Annette Debo

The Knight in the Panther Skin: Empowerment of Genders Through Animal Imagery

Presenter: Ethan Hamm  
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Romanticism Through Two Cultural Lenses: Baratashvili and Poe

Presenter: Makayla Humphrey  
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

A Country's Survival: Aka Morchiladze's Post-Modern Comparison of Georgian and Foreign Culture

Presenter: Rylee Guess  
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

All Hell Breaks Loose: Georgia's Unrealistic Post-USSR Goals in "Once Upon a Time in Georgia"

Presenter: Rachel Hooper  
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Railsback

Empathetic Portrayals of Homelessness and PTSD in Home and Stories from the Shadows

Presenter: Xing Aldridge  
Faculty: Brian Railsback

A Quill in Honor of The Nation: Rustaveli's Knight in the Panther Skin and Whitman's "Starting from Paumanok"

Presenter: Moya Kramo  
Faculty: Brian Railsback

### HISTORY

The Korean War: China's New Precedent

Presenter: Nicholas Locy  
Faculty Sponsor: Gael Graham

Black American Music as a Language of Protest

Presenter: Aubrey Bell  
Faculty Sponsor: David Walton

### PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION

An Analysis of the 'Good Life' Through a Lens of Submission to Institutional Power

Presenter: Amaranth Schmoyer  
Faculty Sponsor: Katharine Mershon

A Desire for Suffering: Escaping the Good Life through Camus and Sartre

Presenter: Jared Ross  
Faculty Sponsor: Katharine Mershon

## College of Business

### SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Stream Mitigation Market and its Effect on Water Quality

Presenter: Adam Mottershead  
Faculty Sponsor: Sean Mulholland

How Gen Z views incentive and productivity in the context of continuous improvement (CI)

Presenters: Sara Franz; Zach Collins; Veronica Funes  
Faculty Sponsor: Bukola Bakare

### College of Education and Allied Professions PSYCHOLOGY

Personality and Social Influences on Personal Relationships and Daily Behaviors among University Students

Presenter: Matthew Kelley  
Faculty Sponsor: David Scales

### College of Engineering and Technology SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Evaluation of the Mechanical Properties of Cervidae Anterior Cruciate Ligaments, Patella Tendons, and Achilles Tendons

Presenter: Allison Royer  
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

Small Modular Reactor Based Microgrid Cost Optimization

Presenter: Brayden Beaver  
Faculty Sponsor: Bora Karayaka

Using a Filter and Arduino to Increase a Pump's Functionality

Presenter: Helen Hester  
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

Investigation Into the Creation of a Biodegradable Croc

Presenter: Ryan D'Amore  
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

Gravity Irrigation Subsystem for Watering Plants

Presenter: Sierra Norris  
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

Soil Moisture Sensor

Presenter: Sommer Allen  
Faculty Sponsor: Martin Tanaka

### College of Fine and Performing Arts SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

Homeless Shelter Design in America

Presenter: Brandi "Nyx" McDougale  
Faculty Sponsor: Shelby Hicks





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