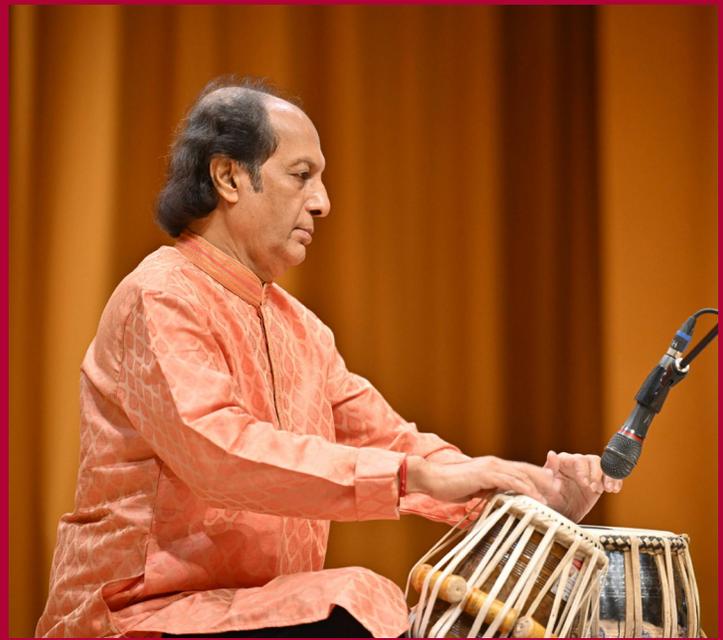




WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College

2025

ANNUAL REPORT



Message from the Dean, Grant Norton



Artificial Intelligence (AI), a most discussed topic in higher education, is making a significant impact on Washington State University. The integration of AI into higher education is profoundly reshaping how institutions approach their curricula.

Honors programs, known for their emphasis on critical thinking, interdisciplinary study, and student-professor mentorship, are uniquely positioned to lead this shift, moving beyond mere AI policies to a holistic integration that prepares students for an AI-powered future.

The primary challenge and opportunity is redefining academic integrity and intellectual engagement when AI tools can assist with everything from brainstorming to drafting. Rather than simply banning AI, many programs are developing AI-inclusive assignments and academic honor codes that treat AI as a powerful assistant, where the final work and original ideas must be the student's own. This

approach requires transparency and proper citation, ensuring students understand that using AI to completely generate content for submission is unacceptable.

Honors curricula are evolving to focus on the ethical and societal implications of AI, fostering interdisciplinary discussions that span STEM and the humanities. At WSU, honors courses like Professor **Samantha Noll's** "The Ethical Implications of Emerging Biotechnology" explore topics like ethical dilemmas around new technologies including AI. Upcoming honors courses will focus on AI topics in data analytics, criminal justice, and communications, among other disciplines.

Ultimately, the goal is not merely to train students to use AI tools, but to prepare them to be the human experts who can guide these tools responsibly. By developing a curriculum that integrates practical skills with ethical inquiry, honors colleges are ensuring their graduates possess the critical thinking, problem-solving, and accountability necessary to navigate a world where artificial intelligence is a pervasive force.

The Transformative Impact of Faculty-Led Travel

Faculty member **Colin Criss** designed his first study abroad trip guided by his love of Irish poetry. "The wheels start to turn, and you start to develop an idea of what a trip could be and how you could make it meaningful with academic study," he said. The two-week summer excursion to Ireland juxtaposes centuries old Irish verse and Emerald Isle scenery with visits to poets in their inspired locales.

"It felt like a good way into this larger question of traveling with a meaningful lens." Readings prior to the trip prepare students for travel while post-trip writing assignments offer opportunities for reflection.

"Students can think, 'Okay, I've been to the Burren, in west Ireland; here's a poem rooted in the Burren— how does that understanding change my interaction with the landscape?'"

Visits with Irish poets are reciprocal; students meet literary leaders, and poets discover what's surprising and memorable to the students.

"I'm trying to get the students to see their experience as a traveler in a place they've never been before—in a landscape they've never been before—through the lens of poetry; it makes the visit very meaningful," Criss said.

Students concur. "I've never been overseas or out of the country so being able to just experience Irish culture... that was really cool for me," senior **Diego Alcaraz** said.

"Through this trip, I met a really close friend... we did everything together; we went swimming in the Irish sea which was seriously so cool," senior **Maddie Eaves** said. The experience gave her the confidence to apply for an internship in Paris.

"Overall, it was such a life-changing trip... to be able to take a 300-level honors class in a country abroad... with Colin, who is by far the best professor I've had at WSU... It was just such a great opportunity."

Dillon Kamin ('25) found the trip meant stepping out of his comfort zone. Meeting students, poets, faculty, and the grandfatherly bus driver were memorable experiences.

The Cliffs of Moher, Slieve League, Newgrange, and Galway Bay also made lasting impressions that were often difficult to process immediately.

"It's really fun to unpack it in writing; you're encouraged to journal... that's a very valuable part of it." Kamin remembers staying out well into the night, deep in discussion for hours.

"It's transformative; there's no other way to put it...everything you're doing is exciting."

On campus, Criss offers unique courses on contemporary Irish poets. "The tentacles of the trip are very long."



Bornander Chair's New Course Unlocks the Power of Music

When **Melissa Parkhurst** heard that Anantya, renowned North Indian classical music and dance troupe, was touring in Seattle, she sought to bring them to Pullman for her HONORS 380 (Music and the Mind) students and the campus community.

Parkhurst's course, created through her 2025-26 Bornander Honors Distinguished Chair appointment, focuses on the power of music in cultural traditions and in healing. Anantya focuses on these things, too.

"I knew it was going to cost somewhere between \$6,000 and \$6,500, and no one sponsor has that," she said. Partnering Bornander funding with Indian faculty contributions, donor gifts, and School of Music staffing made the university-wide event a reality.

"We brought the musicians to the community and also organized a demonstration workshop for HONORS 380," Parkhurst said. Anantya's Kaberi Sen took students through Odissi, a Northern India dance form, focusing on arm gestures so seated students could participate.

Kimbrough Hall's main event played to a full house, including honors students and local Indian and Bengali communities. "It was intergenerational—there were grandmothers, small children and babies. It was really lovely," Parkhurst said.

Music and the Mind uses ethnomusicological pedagogy to incorporate music perspectives from a variety of cultures and traditions, examining music's role in aspects of our lives from biological evolution to mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.

The Bornander Chair also supports Parkhurst's research. She presented at two Northwest conferences and attended the

Society for Ethnomusicology Atlanta conference, where she connected with UC San Francisco gerontologist Teresa Allison, who she is working with toward an NIH grant. "It's something that I would not have considered before."

Conferences allow Parkhurst to stay current in ethnomusicology and community engaged scholarship. "This relates to us here with our land grant mission; how we design our research in collaboration with communities around the great state of Washington so that we can help people live better lives and improve in tangible ways."

Honors students **Sairaghav Gubba** and **Jasleen Dhaliwal** e-mailed Parkhurst after Anantya to share their experiences. A first-generation immigrant of Indian parents, Gubba said it harkened to Lohri and Diwali, temple holidays with Indian instruments and Odissi dance.

"The Odissi dance reminds me of the Indian classical dance, Bharatanatyam, which both my mother and sister do," he wrote.

Dhaliwal, from California, enjoyed tabla maestro Arup Chattopadhyay's drum performance. "It was a delightful experience... I could close my eyes and almost see myself back in the temple I go to at home, and it brought tears to my eyes," she wrote.

Walking to her car she listened to Punjabi music. "...not being near people who are the same religion as me kind of makes me distant from my roots, so this experience connected me back to a big part of me."

Those interactions are what Parkhurst wants for her students. "It was transformative getting embodied in how music can make us feel better and leave us in a different place than we were half an hour ago; I looked around and saw a lot of smiles."



Director of Development, Gary Hyatt

Recently, I took a step back to reflect on why I value meeting people. I genuinely enjoy hearing their stories, especially from those who have an affinity for honors. When I was recruiting students in Texas, I learned quickly that people in the South wanted to know who I was and where I came from before having a real conversation. That experience has stayed with me. I found that I best serve others when we have the chance to meet, talk, and understand each other.

Sometimes, finding free time in our busy lives or being in the right headspace to talk with a development officer can be a real hurdle. That is why I am so grateful for the time people share with me, whether they open their homes, meet for a coffee, or jump on a virtual call after work.

My goal is simple; let's create a meaningful connection. Hearing how honors has shaped the lives of our alumni makes me proud of our history and passionate about what we represent.

This year has been incredible. We have provided life-changing opportunities and experiences to remarkable students. None of this would be possible without the generous support of our alumni and friends.

We at the Honors College are truly grateful for your commitment to our students and your belief in developing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and people who will make a difference in the world. So, if you ever want to visit while you are in Pullman, connect, even just say "hi," let's meet!



Alumni Impact



Michelle Maley
Political Science and Finance ('12)

In the fall of 2008, I began my first days in the Honors College—with much trepidation. Up to that point, I spent my entire academic career in the same tiny farm town that had been my home my whole life. The Honors College by comparison felt, in the beginning, insurmountable. I soon learned that it wasn't something to be conquered but instead a life-changing resource and support system. The small class sizes, emphasis on group discussion and critical thinking, and faculty, in particular, equipped me to pursue my loftiest professional goals, first at Harvard Law School and now as a practicing attorney.



Jessica (Caldwell) Nazario
Communications ('99)

My experience at the Honors College was one of the most rewarding parts of my education. The smaller class sizes made it easy to connect with professors and classmates, creating a space where I could ask questions, share ideas, and truly engage with the material. Each class felt

more personal and in-depth, allowing me to master subjects on a deeper level rather than just learning the basics. The Honors College encouraged curiosity, open dialogue, and critical thinking, helping me see how everything I studied connected to a bigger picture. I've carried that same learning and communication style into my leadership and professional roles, where I value collaboration, thoughtful discussion, and continuous growth.



Cindy Leach
Horticulture ('88)

Being part of the Honors Program was one of the most rewarding experiences of my education. The class sizes made it easy to build meaningful relationships with professors and classmates. It created a sense of community and fostered open dialogue. I loved the emphasis on group discussions, which helped

me to think critically and learn from diverse perspectives. Instead of memorizing answers for multiple-choice tests, I was challenged to express ideas through essays and projects, which greatly improved my writing and analytical skills. The subjects were interesting and encouraged me to explore beyond my major. The program helped me grow as a thinker, communicator, and lifelong learner. I was able to apply the skills I learned as I went forward in my life and career.

HSAC Corner

HSAC's focus this fall has been on community, health, and wellness. In September, WSU Global Campus exercise physiologist, **Shane McFarland** presented HSAC's "Tea with the Professor." Shane discussed his time in the Peace Corp in Lesotho, an endeavor he undertook before beginning his human development academic career. His career expanded to include martial arts instruction (he's taught Brazilian jiu-jitsu for over a decade), exercise and wellness physiology, and business strategy research. Shane serves his local community as a member of the Pullman Regional Hospital board of directors. From the student perspective, it was quite inspiring to hear Shane speak about the unique path he's taken in academia—his experience certainly enhances my Cougar pride!

Continuing the wellness theme, HSAC activities coordinator **Taylor Jackson** arranged for HSAC and honors faculty members to take part in the UREC ropes course on a chilly October day. Activities culminated with the group belayed together to take a 30-foot leap from the Cougar Perch, a feat of trust and physicality. "The challenge course not only strengthened our community but also pushed us to conquer fears and step outside our comfort zones," Jackson said. Overall, HSAC continues to provide enjoyable extracurricular experiences for honors students, connecting with our peers and mentors and creating community within the Honors College. —**Miles Boudinot, HSAC President**



Success at a Glance



Hailey Patchett (Microbiology/Spanish minor) was one of six students nationwide to receive a 2025 NCHC Portz Interdisciplinary Fellowship award for her project “A new human-dog co-evolutionary paradigm via social media positive feedback loops.” Honors faculty mentor **Joanna Schultz**, an evolutionary biologist with a penchant for dogs, guided her project. Patchett took two courses with Schultz, HONORS 290 (Dog Tails) and HONORS 390 (Climate Change and the Sixth Extinction).

“Hailey was one of the best students from the summer cohorts, so I approached her on a hypothesis I had been considering regarding a new co-evolutionary paradigm in human-domestic dog co-evolution,” Schultz said.

The NCHC grant provides Patchett \$5,000 to conduct cross-disciplinary research to determine if indirect contact with dogs through social media exposure leads to increased levels of oxytocin, a “feel-good” hormone in humans. In the study, participants’ baseline oxytocin levels are taken prior to viewing curated dog videos from various media channels. Post viewing, oxytocin levels are retested, prior to participants completing a survey assessing their general attitudes towards dogs and social media. Pre and post oxytocin levels are measured and statistical analyses conducted to determine if significant differences exist between oxytocin sample levels and among survey responses. Patchett hypothesizes that online dog content viewing will lead to oxytocin increases. “We hope to discover how this ancient, interspecies bond may be evolving in the digital age,” she said.

Schultz said Patchett had less than three weeks to put the project together. “She did incredible work under stressful circumstances as a full-time student while conducting undergraduate research, teaching yoga, and writing the proposal.” The positive co-evolution between humans and domestic dogs has been well-documented over thousands of years, Schultz said, but not the role of social media exposure. “Current research demonstrates humans are co-evolving with social media through changes in communication, social interaction, and cognitive habits, and some of these relationships with humans were found to be deleterious,” Schultz said. She hopes this study will further understanding of the human-domestic dog nexus by demonstrating that physical and eye contact is unnecessary for increased oxytocin levels in humans.

“We hypothesize watching happy, joyful, fun dog videos will further the link to feelings of well-being and bonding, decrease stress, and lower human stress hormone cortisol, creating positive oxytocin feedback loops.”



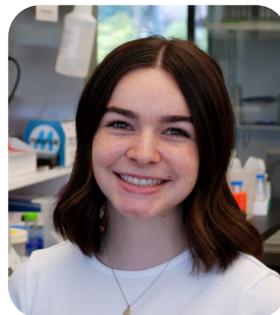
Honors instructor and associate director of engaged learning at WSU’s Center for Civic Engagement **Jessica Perone** was honored with the 2025 Community Engaged Professional award from Western Region Continuums of Service Consortium (WRCOS). The award recognizes her 25 years of leadership connecting academic learning to programs that strengthen communities and empower individuals.

Perone said the WRCOS award was an honor, especially as it affirms the value of community engagement in higher education. “The work I get to do is incredibly rewarding—supporting students’ personal, professional, and academic growth while meeting community-identified needs.”

Jessica teaches HONORS 211 (Compassion in Action: Introduction to Community Engagement) and HONORS 212 (Active and Immersive Community Engagement), which offers students 45 service hours with a community partner. Her courses help students to broaden their worldviews, strengthen their critical thinking skills, and practice perspective-taking in the community.

“Being active community members while in college and connecting with social justice topics that are meaningful to them helps students develop a sense of civic responsibility that will carry into their future careers and lives.”

Since moving to Pullman in 2016, Perone has served multiple community organizations. In addition to the WRCOS award she received the 2025 WSU Woman of Distinction award.



When federal funding for the NIH Summer Internship program was cut, honors student and third-year biochemistry major **Taylor Page** received support from the Honors College Summer Fellowship to fund her research project. This allowed her to work full-time without juggling other priorities.

“She progressed so much,” advisor Kanako Hayashi said in an August 2025 *WSU Insider* article. (<https://news.wsu.edu/news/2025/08/13/honors-college-funding-supports-student-studying-reproductive-disease/>)

The Hayashi Lab works to discover how environmental toxicants and recreational drugs affect the cellular, molecular, and epigenetic mechanisms of gynecological diseases and reproductive functions, as well as toward improving current therapeutic strategies.

Page grew up surrounded by women affected by reproductive diseases, which led her to study biochemistry. She began assisting the Hayashi Lab in her first semester, working with graduate students on their projects. Last summer she conducted her own project, investigating how a specific gene affects fertility and pregnancy in mice, research that may inform the gene’s role in human infertility.

Taylor said the project has helped her to grow as a scientist.

“It’s been really cool to take on more responsibility. I’ve learned a lot — lab techniques and how to manage my time and how to manage a project.” She hopes to begin an MD/PhD when she graduates.

Celebrating Excellence

Thank You to our Commencement Speakers!



Phil Gruen
(Professor, School of
Design & Construction)



Cassa Hanon
(’83 Computer Science)

Distinguished Scholarships

Fulbright Fellowship

- Hollen Foster-Grahler

Gilman Scholarship

- Aarya Bajaj
- Natalie Bjerke

Goldwater Scholarship

- Jo Castaneda Gonzalez
- Eva Rickard

National Collegiate Honors Council Portz Award

- Hailey Patchett

NSF Graduate Research Fellowship

- John Bussey
- Suzanne Gelston
- Hannah Peha (’24)
- Clara Enhinger

Schwarzman Scholarship

- Nam Nguyen (’20)

Save the Date

Spring Commencement Ceremony – Friday, May 8

Fall Commencement Ceremony – Friday, December 11

Family Weekend – Friday-Sunday, April 17 - 19

#CougsGive ’26 – Wednesday, April 15

Give Today!



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Go Cougs!