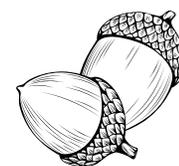




# The Squirrel Squire



Official Press of the Westfield State  
University Honors Program



Volume 16, Issue 1



Fall 2024

## Commonwealth Honors Program New Student Orientation



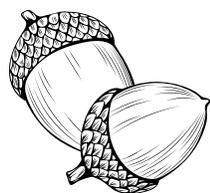
Westfield State Honors students gather outside of University Hall

New Honors Program students, Honors Program student leaders, and the Honors Program Administrative team prepare for the fall semester. Students had a fulfilling weekend learning about the Honors pillars, volunteering in the community, and getting a tour of the hottest spots in downtown Westfield. Students also became acquainted with each other through activities at a picnic at Stanley Park where they enjoyed a cookout, played lawn games, and heard about Stanley Park from Victoria Connor, the park's director.

Students also learned important values relating to community, cooperation, and commitment, and had an opportunity to make an impact on the campus and city.

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### The Squirrel Squire Student Intern:

Kirsten Burek

### Student and Alumni Contributors:

Makenna Albee, Mekhi Bowen, Dan Currier, Autumn Jones, Austin Sullivan, and Gabrielle Zive  
Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz and Jean Ganek

### Faculty and Staff Contributors:

Dr. Adeyinka Banwo, Dr. Brian Chen, Dr. Vanessa Diana, Gretchen Konrad,  
Dr. Sonya Lawson, Dr. Juliet Lee, and Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor

*The Honors Program would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Fall 2024 edition of The Squirrel Squire newsletter. The edition highlights Honors Program accomplishments and some of the amazing things Honors students are doing to build a tight community at Westfield State University.*

### Follow us on Social Media





# New Student Orientation

Continued from p. 1

***New Honors students attended a weekend-long orientation to learn more about the Honors Program, including its requirements and values.***



Throughout orientation weekend, students prepared for their journey through the Honors Program. They bonded over breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They also received Honors Program t-shirts with the new motto *Leaders, Learners, and Changemakers*. The smiling faces and laughter made new students and returning upper-class mentors alike excited to be on campus and eager for the Fall 2024 semester to begin.



To kickstart the weekend events, students made crafts while building relationships. Through friendship and cooperation, students were able to successfully collaborate to accomplish tasks that were required of them during orientation. New friendships and friend groups were formed and students felt ready to begin their college journey as members of the Honors Program and of the larger Westfield State community.

Upper-class student leaders and the Honors Program administrative team organized and facilitated the weekend-long event. Community members also welcomed our new students through community service opportunities, which included volunteering at an animal sanctuary, a community garden, a whip museum, and a food pantry. To wrap up the orientation, students wrote on posters stating what the program means to them and how they are plan to achieve their goals relating to the Honors pillars.



# The Squirrel Squire



## Dedication

**Professor Vanessa Diana**



Dr. Diana and Honors students enjoy their afternoon together at CURCA.

Thank you very much for recognizing my teaching and mentoring impact through this dedication, a true Honor! And to all students in the Program, whether I've met you or not, thank you for the work ethic, curiosity, creativity, and engagement you contribute to WSU. Working with WSU Honors Program students in and out of the classroom has been a highlight of my career, and I know my colleagues who work with you share my appreciation for the rewarding opportunity to be part of your journey at WSU.

Like your other mentors here at WSU, I aim to help you learn about--and encourage you to pursue--opportunities available here on campus and beyond. In the 10+ years that I served in the WSU Honors Program administration, I got to accompany over 200 students to the yearly Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference and the Massachusetts Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference, where they shared their work and proudly represented WSU. I'm writing this appreciation at the end of a week that filled me with Owl pride, having just cheered on so many of you impressive Honors Program students as you shared your work at the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity and at the Honors Program Fall Forum. Congratulations to all on your recent accomplishments.

I've also had the pleasure of getting to know many Honors Program students in my Honors classes over the years, where I am consistently inspired by your love of learning, hard work, and support for your peers. This semester, I looked forward to every Monday and Wednesday afternoon when I got to meet the 16 students in my Honors Indigenous American Stories class for thoughtful and engaging conversations where you led with empathy, creativity, and collaborative spirit.

I have advised hundreds of Honors Program students from all majors as they navigated their academic requirements (often juggling multiple majors and minors), grew into student leaders on campus, chose unique and fascinating topics for Commonwealth Honors Projects, had adventures studying abroad, found impactful internships, got into graduate programs, and landed great jobs. Of course advising, is also about supporting you during the hard times: I have passed out countless tissues to students shedding tears brought on by the struggles and stresses that the undergraduate journey can include.

When I reflect back on celebrating countless successes with Honors Program students over the years, I am grateful that the WSU Honors Program offers a community for you to work alongside peers who share your engagement with learning and who, like you, want to make the most out of the fleeting years of your undergraduate career. I am proud to be a member of this Honors community as we continue to encourage you when challenges arise and celebrate your many successes.





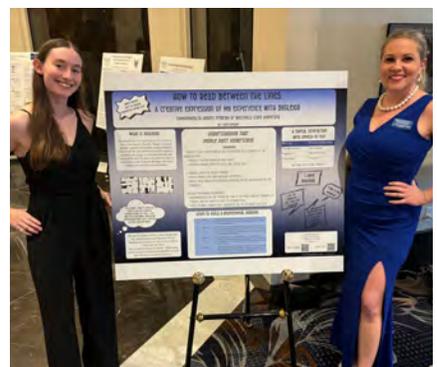
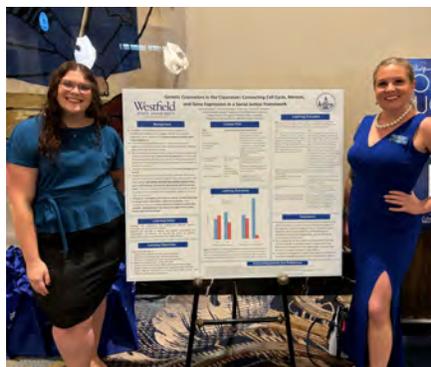
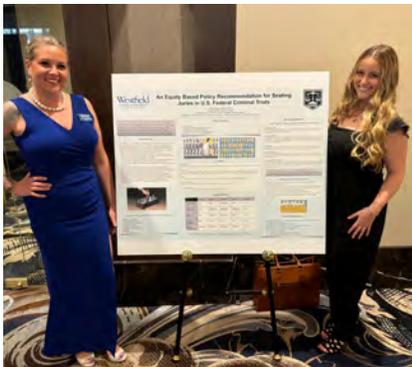
# Blue Diamond Ball



Honors students present their research projects at the Blue Diamond Ball. The event, held on Friday, October 18, 2024 at the MGM Hotel in Springfield, MA, commemorated Westfield State University's 185th anniversary.



Honors students Mekhi Bowen, Lily Dufresne, Kaitlyn Egan, Jessica Isbell, Nathaniel Lawlor, Amber Lyons, Mariza Monteiro, Jessica Peitzsch, Cady Spelman, and Austin Sullivan present their research to attendees of the Blue Diamond Ball.



Honors Program Director, Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor was in attendance to support Honor students as they shared their research.





# Alumni Spotlight



## Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz



Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz, Class of 2023 WSU Alumnae and Commonwealth Honors Scholar, is a Puerto Rican artist from the small town of Juncos, Puerto Rico. Burgos Cruz moved to Springfield, MA at the age of 12. Her artwork was exhibited at the *Two Lenses: One Culture, Puerto Rican Exhibition* at the Holyoke Public Library. The exhibition was held from October 5 - November 1, 2024. Burgos Cruz shared her experiences as a Puerto Rican artist and how her heritage influences her artwork.

Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz is a visual artist who primarily works in painting and drawing. Her themes are consistent with her childhood and heritage. She aims to portray the nostalgic memories she has of growing up. "I use varying aesthetics, particularly eclectic maximalism, an aesthetic that relies on cramming as much as possible while having all the separate parts be derived from different styles. With this I aim to create art that feels fun and timely." Burgos Cruz states.

While at Burgos Cruz' exhibit at the Holyoke Public Library, I spoke with a security guard who expressed how impressed he was by Burgos Cruz' efforts and that the library is proud to be hosting the exhibition. The guard stated that Burgos Cruz is representing a larger group of LatinX artists and that he was astonished by her creativity and the stories her artwork tells.

Burgos Cruz expressed that she will use google images as a start and will draw inspiration from other artists. She also goes on to state that her artwork can take a lengthy amount of time to complete, one detail can take as long as a day to perfect. Burgos Cruz likes to use water colors and color pencils for her artwork. On the next page see some of her pieces that were showcased in the exhibit.

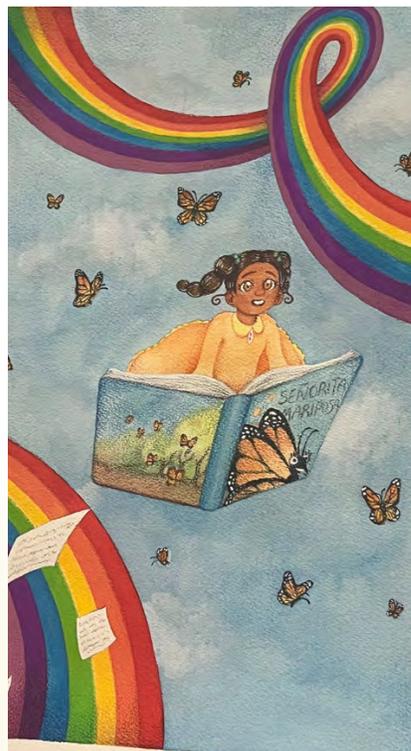
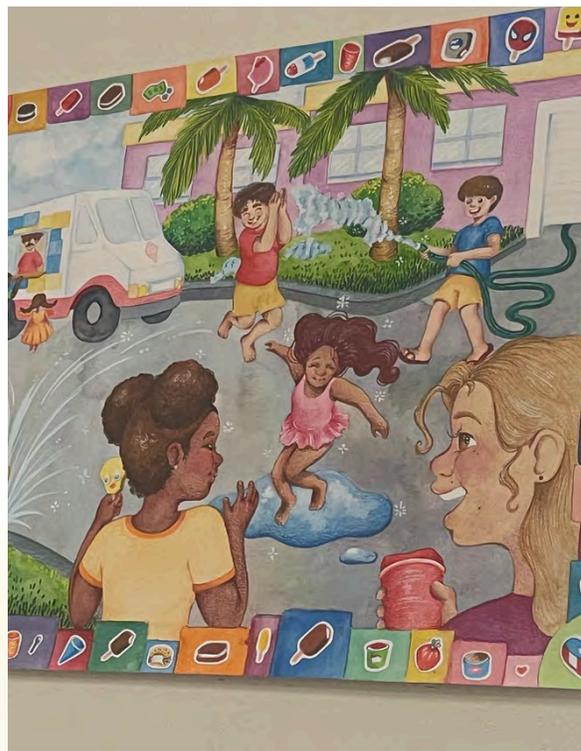
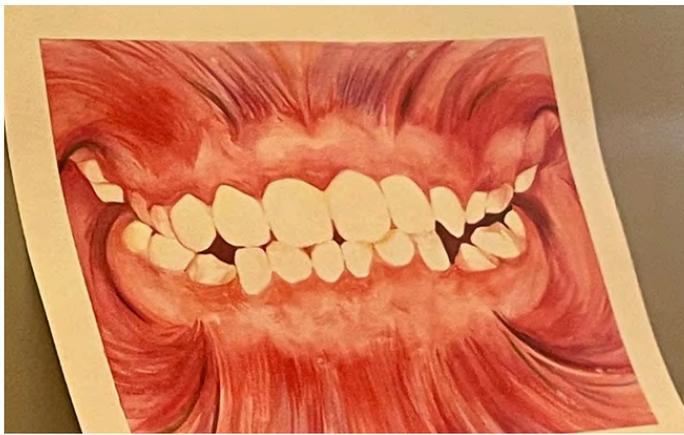
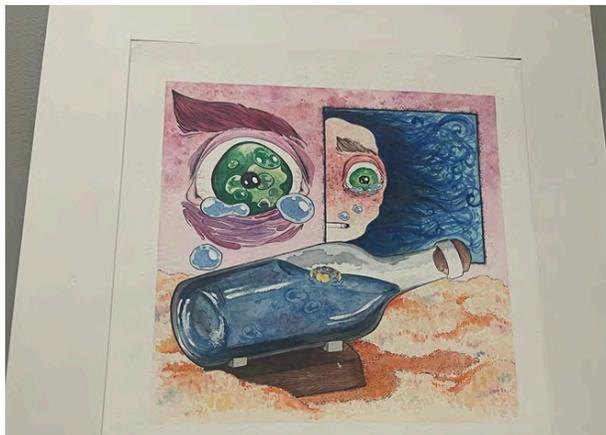


Kirsten Burek, Honors Program newsletter intern, attended Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz' exhibit at the Holyoke Public Library, where she interviewed Burgos Cruz and photographed her artwork for this article.



# Alumni Spotlight

Jankaleishka Burgos Cruz



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# Student Spotlight



## Austin Sullivan



The Spring 2024 issue of *The Squirrel Squire* was awarded third place in the National Collegiate Honors Council's 2024 Faculty/ Administrator/ Student Electronic division. Austin Sullivan, Class of 2026 and a dual major in Psychology and Sociology, served as the student editor intern for the edition. Sullivan traveled to the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Conference in Kansas City, Missouri with Dr. Hillary Sackett Taylor and Dr. Juliet Lee, where he was recognized for his achievements and received the award plaque for the Honors Program.

Reflecting on his experience entering newsletter competitions, Sullivan had this to say, "After attending the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC) Conference in April 2024, I was bummed out that the Fall 2023 edition of *The Squirrel Squire* didn't place among the five submissions. When the Spring 2024 edition was complete, I asked my faculty advisor, Dr. Lee, if we could enter the NCHC publications contest. In June 2024, we submitted the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 editions to the NCHC contest. In early October 2024, I received a text from Dr. Sackett-Taylor - I was scared to open it. I thought I was being fired as a Peer Mentor, but it was that we had placed 3rd among 45 submissions in the 2024 Faculty/Administrator/Student electronic winner category. It meant a lot to me as this was the first award I had ever won. Being the only student editor and spending a whole year on this newsletter was worth it. I spent around 10-12 hours weekly editing and designing the publications. I take a lot of pride in the fact I designed the 15th edition myself. Having the opportunity to attend the NCHC conference in Kansas City is something I'll always be grateful to Honors Program for. I made so many good memories - missing the layover on my first ever flight, presenting at the conference, accepting the award, and going to the Kansas City Zoo & Aquarium. I had so much fun spending time with Dr. Lee and Dr. Sackett-Taylor. It's an amazing accomplishment to be the first WSU Honors student newsletter editor to place nationally with *The Squirrel Squire* newsletter. I am truly thankful for everyone who supported me, and who I was able to accept this accomplishment with."

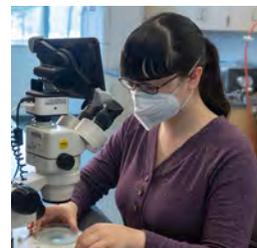


# Alumni Spotlight

## Jean Ganek

Jean Ganek's Commonwealth Honors Project (CHP) gained attention for her extremely impressive study. Professors across her major and Honors faculty commended her for publishing her study. Faculty member Dr. Arne Christensen states, "This is another example of what our great students are up to." Ganek's recognition for her project went even further when the Biology Honors society, Tri-Beta, featured her project in their peer reviewed journal, BIOS.

Ganek's publishing includes statistical analysis, graphs, references, and acknowledgements. Her dedication and extensive research is just one of the many talented academic works that Honors students are capable of. Ganek left her legacy behind with the impressive CHP. Students are encouraged to focus their project on their major; however, creative freewill is what allows students to successfully complete their CHP just like Jean Ganek.



Jean Ganek, Class of 2024 Alumnae and Commonwealth Honors Scholar, majored in Biology. Her inspiration for her Commonwealth Honors Project came directly from her distinguished academic journey at Westfield State.



To access Jean Ganek's publication 'Daphnia magna exhibit a preference for microplasticfibers that are black in the presence of olfactory cues' Visit: '[BIOS.COM](https://www.bios.com)'

# Honors Program Advisory Groups



## Honors Advisory Committee

**Honors Leadership Team:** **Hillary Sackett-Taylor**, Honors Program Director, Economics; **Juliet Lee**, Honors Program Assistant Director, Education; **Gretchen Konrad**, Honors Program Administrative Assistant. **Library:** **Anna Boutin Cooper**, Librarian. **College of Professional Studies:** **Anthony Furnelli**, Management and Marketing; **John Kuhnly**, Nursing - F'24 sabbatical; **Jamie Rivera**, Nursing - F'24; **Brian Selgrade**, Sports Medicine and Human Performance; **Beverly St. Pierre**, Health Sciences; **Alexandra (Ola) Smialek**, Geography, Planning, & Sustainability and WSU Commonwealth Honors Scholar Alum. **College of Arts and Sciences:** **Katie Weglarz**, Biology; **Mao-Lun Weng**, Biology; **Vanessa Diana**, English; **Christina Beaubien**, Sociology, Hispanic, Liberal, & Interdisciplinary Studies; **Erica Kelliher**, History and Philosophy; **Hugh Jo**, Political Science; **Chris Gullen**, Communication; **Administration and Student Support Services:** **Brian Jennings (ex-officio)**, Associate Provost, Academic Affairs; **Celeste Donovan**, TRIO Program; **Matthew Shand**, Banacos Center; **Kayla Schlenz**, Residential Life; **Honors Students:** **Owen Mathieu**, **Mariza Monteiro**, **Nova Smith**, **Ali Sutherland**, and **Abigail Tiburcio**.



## Student Honors Advisory Council



**SHA E-Board:** **Kaileigh Brosnan** and **Cady Spelman**, Co-Presidents; **Brenna Guiliani**, Vice President; **Owen Mathieu**, Treasurer; **Olivia Hartling**, Secretary; **Sicilia Campbell** and **Isabel Medina**, Co-Historians; **Mariza Monteiro**, Publicist/Social Media Intern; **Autumn Jones**, Commuter Rep; **Justine Pickard** and **Nova Smith**, Class of 2026 Reps; **Ally Griswold** and **Abigail Tiburcio**, Class of 2027 Reps; **Benjamin Cole**, **Annalise Lopes**, **Aiden Luciano**, **Celia Rocino**, and **Michelle Trieu**, Class of 2028 Reps.



# Honors Living and Learning Community

## Honors LLC Intern



Khi Bowen

Mekhi (Khi) Bowen, Westfield State Honors student is the Fall 2024 Honors intern for the Honors Living and Learning Community (LLC). In an interview with Khi, he stated, “being the Honors LLC Academic Advisor has been a great experience this fall semester. In my role, I have partnered with Dr. Juliet Lee, Honors Program Assistant Director, and Mark Mankus, Residential Life Area Coordinator of University Hall, to provide a safe space outside of the classroom for members of the Honors community. Being a part of this new addition to the Honors Program was so beneficial; not only because it allowed our students another academic resource on campus, but it did so within the comfort of their residential building. In my daily role as the academic advisor, I support Honors students with course

course registration, applying the Honors Program pillars, and with their personal development. Leadership and community engagement, one of the Honors Program pillars has been demonstrated many ways throughout the semester.” Khi also noted, “events are a crucial part of his role. There is one specific event that encompasses this pillar that stuck out as a personal favorite. This event was the joint course registration pizza party I facilitated with University Hall Honors LLC Residential Assistant Emma Towsley. This event had an amazing turnout and allowed Emma and I the opportunity to assist our peers 1:1 in course registration well in advance before campus-wide advising.

When I am not organizing registration parties or coordinating with Dr. Lee and Mark, I am holding routine study hours. A typical day in this role consists of providing a safe space in an assigned study room for students to learn, study, enjoy healthy snacks, and relax to soothing music. Overall, my experience this semester has been one full of partnerships, peer development, and amazing opportunities. I am very thankful to have worked alongside diligent and resilient members of the Commonwealth Honors Program and the Department of Residential Life”.

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## Faculty and Staff Support

The partnership between the Honors Program and the Office of Residential Life has been exciting this semester, as the leadership of both entities have been collaborating to deepen students’ experiences when it comes to living and learning together in the Honors Living and Learning Community (LLC). Over the summer, incoming students were invited to the Open House to preview their room and suite, meet with Honors Program and Residential Life leadership, and meet with their roommates. Before the Fall semester began, LLC residents moved in early and participated in Honors Orientation, including a full tour of University Hall,

learning about Honors Program requirements, and participating in community service projects. Over the school year, the LLC has hosted study hours, an advising and registration party, community building events like Pumpkin Paint ‘n Sip and mindfulness tips, as well as life skills workshops.

Dr. Juliet Lee serves as the Honors LLC Academic Advisor Intern Supervisor. She meets weekly with Khi, where she offers her support on LLC academic programs and events. Mark Mankus, Area Coordinator/Manager of University Hall and a Westfield State alumnus, directly supervises the Fall 2024 Resident Assistants, Emma Towsley and Molly O’Shea, within the Honors LLC. The LLC, located on the top floor of beautiful University Hall, provides the opportunity for students in the first-year cohort to live in the hall with both first-year and upper-class members of the Honors Program.



Honors student leaders gather with Dr. Sackett-Taylor in University Hall.





# Fun in the Community



## Friendsgiving



## Halloween



## Holidays





# Special Events



## On and Off Campus

Thursday, 11/21/2024  
Students and faculty  
volunteered at the  
Western MA Food Bank.



Monday, 12/01/2024  
A second group of students  
volunteered at the  
Western MA Food Bank.



Sunday, 10/6/2024  
Students volunteered at  
the Run Stanley event in  
Westfield MA.



August 2024  
Upper-class mentors  
volunteered for the first-year  
Honors Program Orientation.



November 2024  
Honors students in Dr. Banwo's Early World History  
course visited the Islamic Center of Western MA.  
While there, they listened to a seminar on Islam  
presented by Sheik Yawar.



Honors Program students embody the program pillars inside and outside of the classroom. Through curricular and co-curricular programs and events, students develop their social, cultural, and academic knowledge, and leave an impact in their local communities.



# The Importance of Student Voices

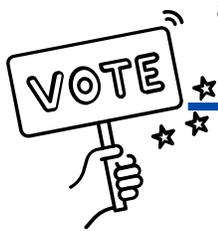
## Community Economics Forum for 2024 Presidential Election

The night before the 2024 elections, Professor Sackett-Taylor and the students in her Honors Principals of Macroeconomics class discussed politically relevant economic issues. The issues were important points that voters and politicians raise. All of the issues that students discussed were data driven and researched backed. The discussion was set up in a panel, and allowed students and audience members to be actively engaged.



Student panel participants.

The first presentation, titled, *"Inflation Gate"* discussed inflation. Presenters stated the direct contributions to inflation and also pointed out misconceptions on the topic. Some of the key points include (public/private) loan increases and decreases, impact on demographics, housing market, price gouging, and interest rates. The second presentation discussed unemployment, the social contributions to unemployment, and pointed out misconceptions on the topic. Some of the key points of unemployment include after tax income, recessions, cost of employees, foreclosures, and experience. Other topics include job creation increase, debt reduction, and implementing corporate policies that mutually benefit the company and employees. Participants left the event more informed and prepared to cast their vote.



## Student Government Association and Honors Student Involvement



Dan Currier

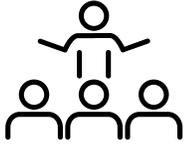
Dan Currier, WSU Class of 2025 and Commonwealth Honors Scholar, was elected to serve as Student Trustee during the Spring 2023 Student Government Association (SGA) elections and was re-elected this past spring. As Student Trustee, he is a member of the Executive Council of the SGA and the Student Representative on the University's Board of Trustees.

Dan had the following to say about his time with SGA, "I have been involved in SGA since I arrived on-campus during the Fall 2021 semester. After a year serving as an at-large representative, I was elected to serve as Vice President of Finance. In this position, I worked to revise our SGA finance bylaws to align with fiscal realities and be clearer. This was a difficult process, as I needed to balance limited financial resources with the increasing needs of our registered student organizations. Finally, as the Vice President of Finance, I was the Student Representative on the WSU Foundation Board of Directors where I worked with the Fundraising Committee to raise funds for a new finance and data analytics lab on-campus, which will be opening in just a few weeks!"

As Student Trustee, Currier has worked to make student processes on-campus easier for students. For example, he worked with the Career Center, Human Resources, and Financial Aid to centralize the posting of all on-campus student jobs on Handshake. Additionally, he is working to address deferred maintenance on our campus - an issue that is also seen at other campuses across the state.

Currier is working with General Counsel & Vice President of Community & Government Relations Melinda Phelps on developing a framework for a Legislative Breakfast on our campus where he will invite legislators to learn more about our deferred maintenance challenges. His hope is that this effort (and others) will lead the state to address this crisis and properly fund renovations to our facilities.

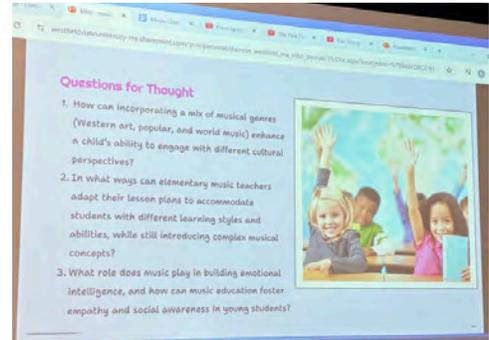




# Seminar Series



## Honors Seminar: Music as a Social Experience

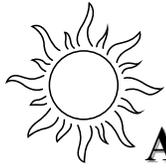


In the words of course professor, Dr. Sonya Lawson, "The best parts of the Fall 2024 Honors Upper-level Interdisciplinary Seminar: Music as a Social Experience were the presentations students did at two points during the term. The mid-semester Music and Gender presentations were thought provoking, wide ranging, and exposed all of us to music we were unfamiliar with. The capstone presentations, where everyone wrote a chapter for the textbook on a theme that they thought had been overlooked, were inspiring and thought provoking - running the gamut from the health sciences to education to social media and spirituality."

## Honors Seminar: Chinatown



Throughout the Fall semester of 2024, the Honors scholars in the Chinatown Seminar explored a broad range of topics and issues related to Chinatowns as ethnic enclaves in America, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the course. In the end, they presented research projects in which they applied their knowledge to specific communities of their choice. Their efforts provided valuable insights, helping the class gain a deeper understanding of the history, challenges, and sustainability of various ethnic communities both domestically and globally.



# Program Innovations



## Alternative Spring Break - Western Massachusetts

In Spring 2025, Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Director of the Commonwealth Honors Program at Westfield State University, will be offering a 3-credit course titled, *HNRS0390: Honors Alternative Spring Break in Western MA*. In partnership with Student Activities at Westfield State University, this unique learning experience will combine community service and off-campus field trips for an unforgettable Spring Break week.

Engaging in service-oriented projects can also enhance your resume. Employers value individuals who demonstrate social responsibility, teamwork, communication, and adaptability. Alternative Spring Break can help participants develop new skills, gain a deeper perspective on social issues, and enhance problem solving abilities. Course content will be delivered online in Session B of the Spring semester for those enrolled in this 3-credit Honors class. Topics covered in the online course content include: an introduction to the civic engagement learning model (knowledge, skills, and values), history and politics of the service organization, cultural awareness and openness to new perspectives, personal reflection on position, purpose, and impact, as well as travel logistics and preparation.

Students will work in small teams on a research project inspired by their service projects. Students will present their research at either the Spring CURCA Celebration or the Honors Spring Symposium.

### Community Engagement



During new student Orientation at the end of August, Honors students volunteered to work at the Second Congregational of Westfield. Karen Beals, outreach trustee for the church, shared, "The work the students did for us was absolutely amazing and they were such a joy to work and engage with. Thank you all so very much."

## Commuter Commitment

### Commuters Stay Involved and Active in the Honors Program



Autumn Jones

Here's what Autumn Jones, SHA Commuter Rep, had to say about being a commuter in the Honors Program. As a commuting student, finding a welcoming place for involvement is often hard. In the Honors Program, I have found much success in both leadership roles and belonging! The Honors Center has quickly become a quiet space on campus, where you often can find me hanging out during class breaks. I currently serve as a Peer Mentor in the Honors Program, building connections and guiding first year students through the transition into college. Through this role, I've not only developed leadership skills but also formed lasting friendships with both peers and faculty, making my college experience more fulfilling. Additionally, the Honors community has allowed me to tackle new challenges, both academically and personally, with so much support!



# Honors Course Enhancement

## Honors World History to the 16th Century Class Visit to the Islamic Society of Western Mass



Honors students Gabriella Zive, Class of 2026, Elementary Education major, and Makenna Albee, Class of 2025, Biology and Environmental Science dual major, co-wrote the article below about their Honors World History to the 16th Century class trip to the Islamic Society of Western Massachusetts. The trip was led by course professor, Dr. Adeyinka Banwo, of the History and Philosophy Department. Upon arrival, we were greeted by a member of the Mosque and directed to remove our shoes upon entering. Our group then met the Sheik-in-Charge, Mirza Yawar Baig, who took us around the Mosque, explaining some of the Islamic features and symbols, and responding to inquiries from the students about Islam. We were taken through the men's prayer hall, where we sat, and learned about the different rules of the prayer halls. Men and women are separated during prayer. This separation of men and women during prayer is seen as a sign of respect. A member of the mosque told us that women pray with other women to provide a sense of safety rather than suggesting women are subservient to men. There is no art allowed depicting anything living in the prayer halls; however, geometric work is allowed as well as verses from the Quran. There is also a mihrab, a niche in the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca, that people praying face.

At the time of our trip to the Mosque, we were learning about the world religions of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism. While visiting the Mosque, Sheik Yawar also gave us a lecture on Islam, explaining the origin, belief system, and practices in Islam and the impact on our contemporary world. Something that stuck out to Gabriella on our visit was how welcoming the people at the Mosque were to her as a Jewish woman. The first question asked when we got to the Mosque was "Is anyone here Jewish?" Gabriella raised her hand proudly and nervously, and was greeted with the Hebrew greeting of "Shalom Aleichem" as a way to connect the Muslim greeting of "Assalamu Alaikum."

At the end of the visit each of student was given a copy of the Holy Qur'an. The trip to the Mosque allowed us to learn more about the religion of Islam while also experiencing some of the culture first-hand. Through course enhancements, such as this trip to the Mosque, the Honors Program affords students with first-hand experiences which foster a deeper connection to what we are studying in class.

# Northeast Regional Honors Council

## Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor Elected NRHC Vice President 2025 NRHC Conference in Harrisburg, PA

Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Westfield State Honors Program Director, was elected as the 2024 Vice President of the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC). In 2026, she will be transitioning into the president-elect position. During our conversation, Professor Sackett-Taylor seemed very excited about and hopeful for the future of the NRHC Conference. The theme for the 2025 conference is Civic Engagement at the Crossroads. The conference will take place in Harrisburg, PA the last weekend in March 2025.



The official website for NRHC ([nrhchonors.com](http://nrhchonors.com)) states that at one end of the Pennsylvania State Capitol grounds in Harrisburg, our host city for this year's conference, resides a statue dedicated in 2020. 2020 was not only a pivotal year in American history because of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and a hotly contested presidential election, it also marked the 150th anniversary of the passage of the 15th Amendment, which granted Black men the right to vote, and the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which enfranchised women. Featuring four African American activists discussing the legislation that would change the nation's trajectory, this statue, aptly titled "A Gathering at the Crossroads," was designed to commemorate these pivotal amendments and the people who worked tirelessly to bring them to fruition. It also, however, is situated on the site of Harrisburg's old Eighth Ward, serving as a memorial to the diverse neighborhood that was demolished in the early twentieth century to construct Capitol Park. Commissioned as an anchor piece for the Commonwealth Monument Project, a movement dedicated to reimagining what Pennsylvania's historical monuments should look like moving forward, "A Gathering at the Crossroads" is itself a crossroads piece, speaking to the challenges of our time and of eras long past.

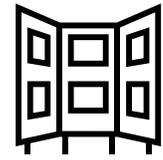
The 2025 conference provides research inspiration for students and encourages them to be aware of the past to foster a better future. As this last point suggests, it should be remembered that crossroads, for as much as they are marked as places of divergence and strife can also be viewed as places of convergence, where many voices and visions can come together and create conversation, change, and new ways forward. At this moment, we find ourselves in just such a place, with the opportunity to positively impact the world around us. As engaged citizens, we find ourselves at a crossroads every single day, where the choices we make about what we study, what we write about, what we discuss, and what we do have consequences and impact. [nrhchonors.com](http://nrhchonors.com)

Eighteen Honors students from the Westfield State University Honors Program are looking forward to be presenting their research and to exploring Harrisburg in March 2025.

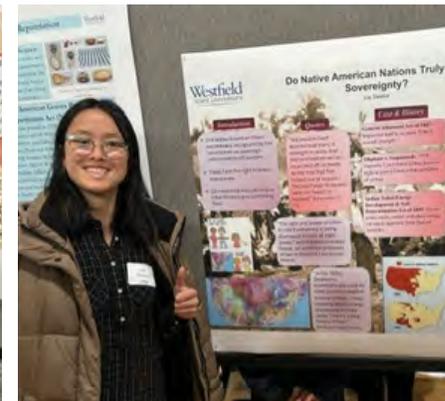
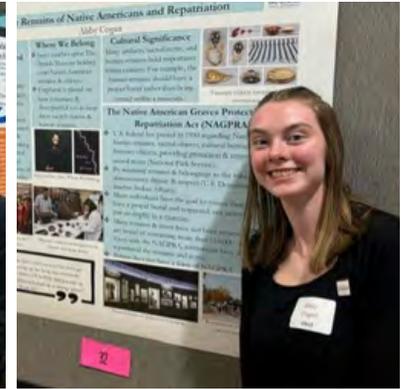




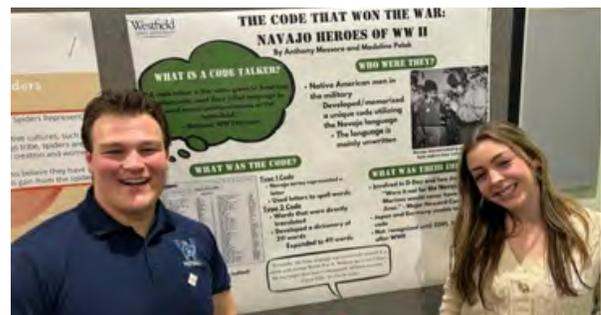
# CURCA Celebration



## Honors Students Present their Research Projects at the Celebration



Honors student presenters from Dr. Vanessa Diana's Honors: Native American Literature course pictured above and right (left to right, top to bottom) are: Isaiah Colon, Aaron Smart, Abby Cogan, Naomi Brito, Lia Steskla, Sophia Rebenciuc, Katelyn Fillion, Deisy Escobar, Sicilia Campbell, Anthony Messore, and Maddie Pelak.





# Honors Fall Forum



## Commonwealth Honors Project Presentations

The Honors Fall Forum, a day-long conference to celebrate Honors student research and creativity and to recognize students for their commitment to upholding the Honors Program Value Pillars, took place on Saturday, December 7, 2024 in University Hall. Seven students presented their Commonwealth Honors Projects to an attentive, enthusiastic and inquisitive audience. The student presenters were: Tara Beloli (Psychology), Jamie Czikowsky (Psychology), Samantha Martinez Ardon (Elementary Education), Chelsey Mathews (Elementary Education), Jessica Peitzsch (Biology), Madison Smith (Psychology), and Emma Towsley (Elementary Education).

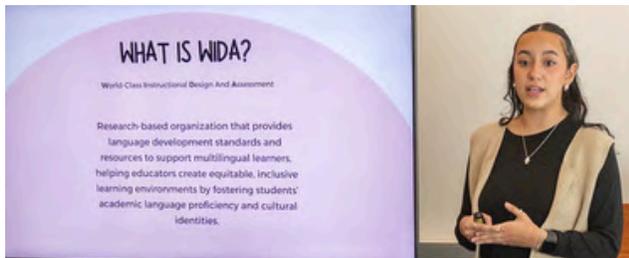
### Keynote Speaker



Jankelishka Burgos Cruz, Westfield State University Commonwealth Honors Scholar, Class of 2023, was the Keynote Speaker at the forum. She reflects on her time in the Honors Program and how her Commonwealth Honors Project connected her with her cultural roots.



Jankelishka shares a slide of some of her CHP artwork with the audience.



Samantha Martinez Ardon talks about World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment.



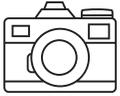
Madison Smith discusses her research on Psychometric Test of the Child and Adolescent Competitive Disadvantage Scale.

### HONORS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

The following people are being recognized for their outstanding achievements and commitment to upholding the Honors Program Value Pillars.

<b>SENIOR AWARDS</b>	<b>JUNIOR AWARDS</b>
Daniel Currier	Abigail Tiburcio
Samantha Martinez Ardon	Autumn Jones
Gabriella Zive	Ally Griswold
<b>SOPHOMORE AWARDS</b>	<b>FIRST YEAR AWARDS</b>
Nova Smith	Sophia Rebenciuc
Owen Mathieu	Sicilia Campbell
Cady Spelman	Julia Cincotta
<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUPERSTARS</b>	
Mekhi Bowen	
Mariza Monteiro	
Ali Sutherland	
Michelle Trieu	
<b>FACULTY/STAFF/LIBRARIAN AWARDS</b>	
Anna Boutin-Cooper, Library	
Vanessa Diana, Professor of English	
Matthew Shand, Banacos Center	





# Photo Forum



A Collection of Pictures (and Memories) from Fall 2024 Honors Events



Orientation '24



STA '24



Leadership Lesson '24



Chinatown '24



Pumpkin Carving '24



Cookie Decorating '24



Holiday Celebration '24



Homecoming '24



Pumpkin Patch '24



Presentations '24



Autumn Harvest '24



STA Meeting '24

