

# WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

## HONORS COLLEGE NEWS



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### ***Celebrating fifty years of Honors at William Paterson***

This year marks 50 years since the first students enrolled in Honors courses at William Paterson University! We are incredibly excited to celebrate half a century of leadership, scholarship, and service—the basis of our mission here in the Honors College.

Over the past five decades, generations of dedicated students, faculty, and alumni have helped build the vibrant Honors community we know today. Their curiosity, creativity, and commitment have defined what it means to be part of the Honors College, and we are incredibly proud of all they have accomplished. We are looking forward to reuniting with our students and faculty, both past and present, and honoring all of them at a celebration that is being planned for September 18. Please watch for more details about this exciting event!

Throughout the year, we will be highlighting Honors alumni, former faculty members, and the rich history of Honors at William Paterson. Turn to page 4 to hear from a few alumni about what they loved most about their time in the Honors College.

### ***Honors alums return to campus for panel discussion***



The Honors College co-sponsored an Honors Alumni Educator Panel with the College of Education on Thursday, 2/5 in the Library Auditorium.

The event was organized by Honors College Fellow, Dr. Elizabeth Harkins, and served as an opportunity for students to hear about how the Honors experience has shaped their careers and helped them gain valuable advice for their own professional journeys.

When planning the event,

Dr. Harkins, an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education, Professional Studies, and Disability Studies, wanted to focus on creating a bridge between current students and the diverse career paths that are available to them, while also highlighting the value of an honors-level education.

Dr. Harkins was pleased with the outcome, noting that “the alumni provided invaluable evidence of how our collaborative academic community translates into real-world impact.”

Pictured above are (from left) Keira White, '20; Michelle Ginart Morrison, '16; Kelly Ginart Urbanski, '16; Dr. Barbara Andrew, Dean of the Honors College; Dr. Amy Ginsberg, Dean of the College of Education; Jan Pinkston, Associate Director of the Honors College; and Abryanna Hernandez, '21.

### ***A Message from Dean Andrew***



*Dr. Barbara Andrew*

I am truly looking forward to the Honors 50th reunion which will take place on September 18, 2026. This is a great moment for us to celebrate our past while we look forward to the future of Honors education at

William Paterson. Honors has always been at the forefront of undergraduate student research, creative expression and leadership training. In fact, one could argue that the entire point of an undergraduate degree is to learn how to find knowledge and information – which are exactly the skills that students acquire through their senior Honors projects.

We love it when alums return to campus! We were lucky to have three recent events led by our distinguished alums. In December, Honors alums Abigail Debel Morris and Lily Fritsch Humphreys returned to campus to talk about the importance of civic engagement and leadership roles on campus for professional success.

In February, a panel of alums, including Abryanna Hernandez, Michelle Ginart Morrison, Kelly Ginart Urbanski, and Keira White, shared their experiences as educators.

Earlier this month, recent Honors graduates, Isabel Nemeth, Alexandra Quintero, and Didar Yahia joined us for a panel and offered current students tips and advice about applying to graduate school. We are so fortunate to have the opportunity to meet with these great alums.

I hope you enjoy this issue and help us celebrate student, faculty and alumni achievements, continuing the vibrant legacy of Honors at William Paterson.

**Spring Museum Trip**



On Saturday, February 7, the Honors College hosted a museum trip to New York City to the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Historical Society. Activities like these support the Honors goal of allowing students to continually seek new experiences and perspectives outside the classroom. Thank you to Dr. Molly O'Donnell, Director of the Humanities Honors Track, Dr. David Gilley, Interim Director of the Biology Honors Track, and faculty member, Dr. Tj Gundling for accompanying students on this trip!

**Dean awarded national grant from the National Collegiate Honors Council**

We are pleased to announce that Dean Barbara Andrew has been awarded a NCHC Portz Grant from the National Collegiate Honors Council for this academic year. Dean Andrew's proposal "Creating Transformative Experiences through Cultural Immersion" was selected in a national competition and awarded \$1,050 to assist the Honors College in providing experiences for students.

During the grant, faculty will jointly lead student groups on experiential learning day trips to regional cities, such as New York City, Paterson, NJ and Newark, NJ, using techniques to develop students' understanding of social problems and community engagement. The experiences further cross disciplinary learning resulting in deeper, more impactful

intellectual connections and more fertile ground for academic growth.

So far this year, faculty members have designed and led two trips with a plan for a third. The first was a museum trip to the Tenement Museum in New York City led by faculty members in History and Anthropology. Thanks to Dr. Molly O'Donnell and Dr. Tj Gundling for organizing the trip. The second is highlighted in this newsletter and was led by Anthropology, Biology, and History faculty members. The group visited the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Historical Society. A third trip is planned for later this semester and will be led by faculty members from English and Psychology.

**Honors Fellow Partners with Students**



**Dr. Harkins (left) and members of the student leadership team engage in planning for the May 1, 2026 event.**

We are thrilled to introduce the "Cultivating Community: Honors Leaders in Action" project! This initiative, led by Honors College Faculty Fellow, Dr. Elizabeth Harkins, empowers a select group of Honors College student leaders to design and lead a major campus-wide event centered on the power of engaging across differences. Planning is underway for the May 1, 2026 civic engagement event, and details will be announced soon.

Through this project, the student leaders will work to bridge diverse perspectives and strengthen our campus community. The experience will culminate in presenting scholarly findings and project reflections at a professional conference.

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all 16 students who applied to participate in this initiative. The selection committee was incredibly impressed by the high caliber of passion and commitment to civic engagement demonstrated across all submissions.

Congratulations to our 2026 Student Leadership Team: Koushani Gupta, Angie Marcucilli, Janine Nangini, Preston Nieuwenhuis, Jacob Ramirez, and Kasai Sanchez.

Honors students present their research



**Dr. Learmonth with Honors students at the EPA Conference in Boston.**

**Honors Seniors present at EPA Conference**

Congratulations to the entire graduating class of students in the Cognitive Science Honors Track who presented their Honors thesis projects at the Eastern Psychological Association (EPA) Conference in Boston, February 26-28. The Cognitive Science Honors Track is directed by Dr. Amy Learmonth who works closely with students on their research and writing. Congratulations to the following students who participated:

**Jared Rivera**

*How personality shapes game preferences*

**Abigail Hayth**

*The effects of color on advertisements of energy drinks*

**Raunak Khadka**

*Use of AI among WPU students*

**Alisha Pokharel**

*Scam or safe: a study of students' link-clicking behavior*

**Noel Debonta**

*The effects of physical activity on ADHD symptoms*

**Joseph Quimby**

*The impact of physical activity on executive function in elementary students*

**Niraj Tamang**

*A game-based method to study why students fall for online scams*

**Prince Gurung**

*How understanding AI translation tools influence the academic and social experiences of international students*

**Leila Gil**

*The relationship between awareness of hearing loss and listening habits among college headphone users*

**Abhash Niroula**

*Fields or floors? A study of exercise environment and memory performance*

**Honors students to participate in the Northeast Regional Honors Conference**

In late March, five Honors students from William Paterson University will attend the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC) Conference in New Haven, Connecticut. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to network and share their work outside the WP community with Honors students, faculty, and staff from across the region.

The following students will be presenting their Honors research:

**Thays Paiva de Almeida, Senior, Global Public Health Track**

**Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Marianne Sullivan**

*Comparative Analysis of Pediatric Feeding Recommendations Across Countries*

**Sophia Paulino, First Year Student in Honors 1000 (Fall 2025)**

**Professor: Dr. Jacob Felson**

*The Future of the Data Scientist: Human Expertise in the Age of AI*

**Azer Jalahej, Senior, Humanities Honors Track**

**Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Molly O'Donnell**

*Worth the Watch? Exploring whether Watching the News is Still Valuable*

**Owen Walter, Senior, Music Honors Track**

**Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Herbert**

*Documenting a Regional Legacy: Tracing the Collaboration of Hank Marr and Rusty Bryant, 1954-1968*

In addition to the students presenting at the conference, junior **Rory Stansfield** will attend the conference in her role as Student Representative to the NRHC Board. Since being elected to the position last August, Rory has been working with fellow board members to help plan and organize the annual conference. She is excited to see their work come together in March and has greatly enjoyed the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with peers from across the region in pursuit of a shared goal.

The Honors College is proud to have these students representing our the WP community at the NRHC Conference!

**Honors senior to present at national conference**

Senior jazz studies major, **Owen Walter**, will present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) that is being held April 13-15 in Richmond, Virginia. He will present his Honors thesis, *Documenting a Regional Legacy: Tracing the Collaboration of Hank Marr and Rusty Bryant, 1954-1968*. Owen is completing the Honors Music Track directed by Dr. Christopher Herbert.

NCUR is dedicated to promoting undergraduate research, scholarship and creative activity in all fields of study by sponsoring and annual conference for students from across the nation.

Congratulations to Owen on having his research accepted at this highly regarded conference!

## Alumni Reflections: What they Loved about Honors

As we celebrate fifty years of Honors at William Paterson University throughout 2026, we'll be inviting alumni to share what they loved most about their Honors experience. Following are a few of their reflections:

### Kadesha Bryan, '20

**Nursing Major in the Nursing Honors Track**

*My favorite aspect of the Nursing Honors Track was the opportunity to take on a greater academic challenge that truly prepared me for the rigor of graduate school. Being part of one of the most competitive programs on campus while receiving individualized mentorship from Dr. Jill Nocella allowed me to grow both academically and personally. Her guidance fostered a supportive yet intellectually challenging environment that empowered my learning. Completing the Honors Track also strengthened my preparation and competitiveness for Columbia's CRNA program.*

**Kadesha is currently studying to be a certified registered nurse anesthetists at Columbia University.**



### Laura Jo Cramer, '12

**Mathematics & Secondary Education Major in the Cognitive Science Honors Track**

*My experience in Honors gave me the freedom to explore academically without the need to declare another major or minor. As a math-ed dual major, I was initially singularly focused on becoming a math teacher. However, the Cognitive Science Track exposed me to interdisciplinary perspectives from philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. That breadth of learning helped clarify my professional goals, as I discovered that the aspect of teaching I enjoyed most was understanding how students think and develop. This insight led me to a career focused on organizational change and leadership development, where I continue to use Cognitive Science concepts over a decade later."*

**Laura Jo is currently the Manager for Workplace & People Operations at CSC Leasing in Virginia.**

### Emma Gritsch, '20

**Psychology Major in the Social Sciences Honors Track**

*My favorite part of being in the Honors College at WP was the opportunity to build relationships with professors and other students. I loved taking classes in my track and spending months studying topics I was passionate about. The Honors College faculty and staff put a lot of effort and intention into this program, and being in the Honors College was the highlight of my time at WP.*

**Emma is currently a pastor with children and youth in South Jersey where she runs programs that assure young folks of the importance of love, justice, and hope in the world today.**



**Are you an Honors alum who would like to share what you loved most about your Honors experience?**

**We'd love to hear from you—please email us at [honors@wpunj.edu](mailto:honors@wpunj.edu)!**