

CRIMSON & BLACK

Central
Washington
University
Fall 2022





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FALL 2022

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On the Cover: A closeup of the iconic Wildcat statue outside the main entrance of the Student Union and Recreation Center (SURC) on the Ellensburg campus. Photograph: David Dick.

Left: Third-year student Sandra Rojas celebrates a boxing victory at the 2022 Wildfest end-of-year celebration on the CWU campus. The Law and Justice major is a first-generation student, as are many featured in this issue of *Crimson & Black*. Photograph: David Dick.

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Dear Wildcats,

This is an exciting time for Central Washington University, and I have been inspired by the involvement of the entire Wildcat family as we work to develop the framework for a bright, prosperous future. Now that we have a new Vision and Mission in place, we have a tremendous opportunity to shine a light on the important work CWU does every day—and find ways to do it even better.

Vision: *Central Washington University will be a model learning community of equity and belonging*

Mission: *In order to build a community of equity and belonging, Central Washington University nurtures culturally sustaining practices that expand access and success to all students. We are committed to fostering high impact practices, sustainability, and authentic community partnerships that are grounded in meaningful relationships.*

These statements—developed with input from across the institution—describe CWU's commitment to building a seamless and integrated experience for all students during the recruitment process, across every phase of their academic journey, and through their development into high-functioning professionals.

This renewed focus on access and equitability means our support for students from under-represented backgrounds will become even more intentional. First-generation students, in particular, often require more guidance about how higher education works, which means we must increase our efforts to provide them with the resources they need to be successful.

Adopting our new Vision and Mission also will require us to develop mechanisms that engage and support all learners, with a specific focus on first-generation, BIPOC, and neo-traditional students. As we look to create a culture of belonging, we must welcome students from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds and embrace their individual stories as part of our own.

We chose to highlight first-generation students in this edition of *Crimson & Black* because they are vitally important to CWU's past, present, and future success. As an access-oriented institution, we aim to provide people from all walks of life with an opportunity to pursue a college degree, and our experience has shown us that this approach can impact the lives of not just Central students but also their families and communities.

Another reason we want to celebrate first-gen success is that we acknowledge their participation is critical to the economic, political, civic, and social future of our country. Their involvement in our businesses and professional organizations adds a richness of voice and talent, while their engagement in political and civic life has the power to help our nation heal from the deep polarization we are currently experiencing.

By defining new priorities and using them as a driving force for CWU's long-term growth, I have no doubt we can become the most influential higher education institution in the state. I look forward to working with all of you as we pursue these lofty ambitions.

Sincerely,

Jim Wohlpart
President

Central Washington University acknowledges the people who have been on this land since time immemorial. The Ellensburg campus is on lands ceded by the Pshwanapum and other bands and tribes of the Yakama Nation in the Treaty of 1855. The Yakama people remain committed stewards of this land, cherishing it and protecting it, as instructed by elders through generations. We are honored and grateful to be on their traditional lands, and give thanks to the legacy of the original people, their lives, and their descendants.



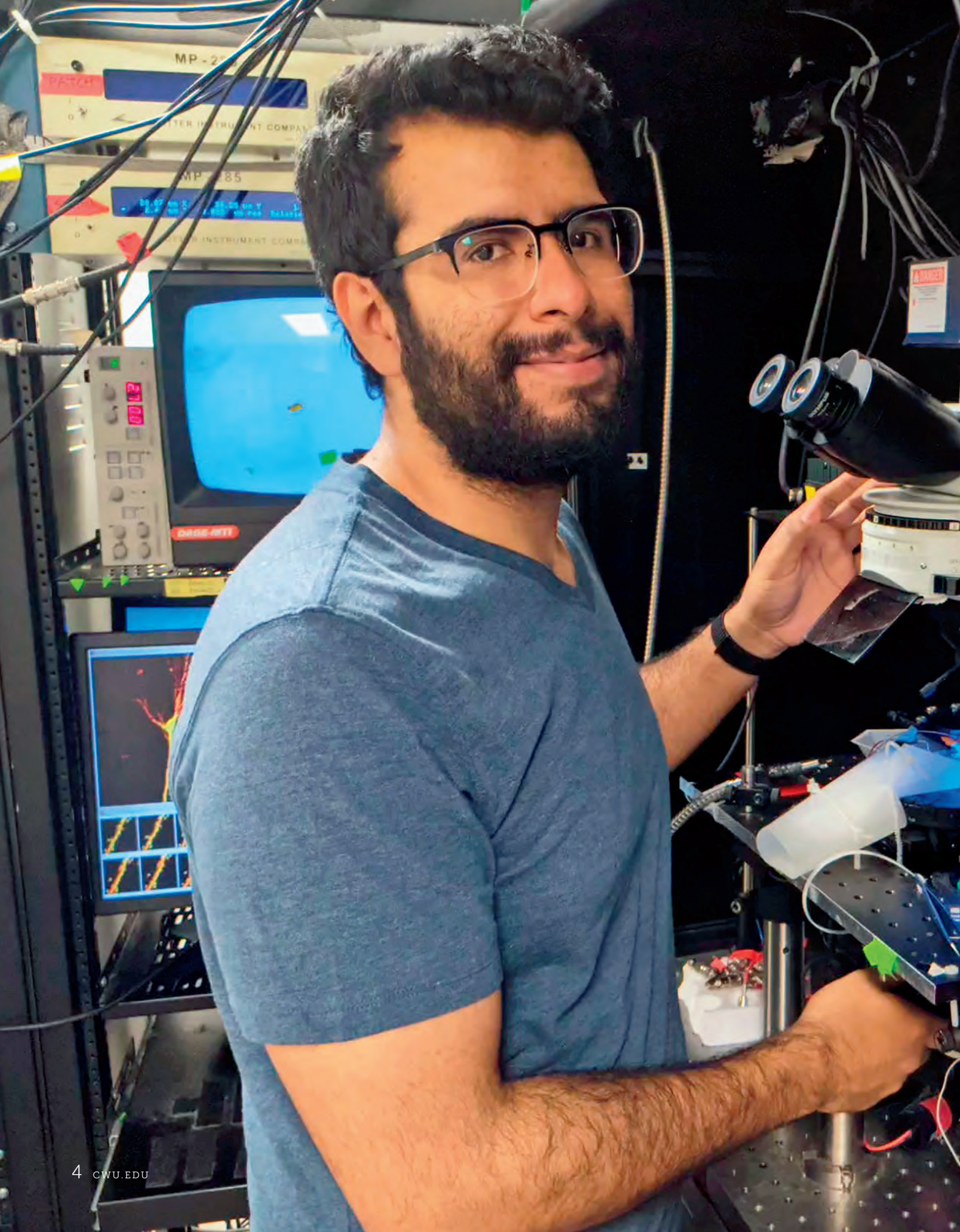
With your help, Central Washington University can continue providing the scholarships students need to complete their education and make meaningful contributions in their fields, communities, and the world.



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COMMUNITIES OF POSSIBILITY

First-gen college students use what they have learned to inspire family and friends back home

By Tara Roberts

Juan Flores' daughter, Sophie, loves to tell her friends her dad is a scientist.

Sophie was born the year Flores ('17) started college, at the beginning of a journey that led him to earn degrees in chemistry and biology from CWU and work toward his doctorate in molecular, cellular, and integrative physiology at the University of California, Davis.

As a first-generation college student, Flores knows how much his education means to his daughter. He doesn't know whether Sophie will follow in his scientific footsteps or if she will go in a completely different direction. Whatever path she chooses, he knows he's helped point the way.

"Having seen me going through all of this, it's going to make it seem for her like college is not something out of the expected," Flores said. "It's something that's within reach. It's something she can do if she wants to do so. And I think that's my hope—I'm not going to push her to do something specific, but I want her to know that anything is possible for her."

When a first-generation student like Flores pursues a higher education degree, the experience ripples far beyond their own lives; it impacts their families, their communities back home, the Central community, and the world.

Central alumnus Juan Flores hopes to use his positive college experiences to inspire his daughter to pursue a degree someday.

Photo courtesy of Juan Flores.

Becoming a Role Model

When recruiting a first-generation student, you often have to engage with their whole family, said Manuel Rodriguez ('05), Central's director of Early College Outreach.

As a former recruiter for the CWU College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)—who was himself a first-generation student at Central—Rodriguez understands that the families of prospective students may support their children, but they face economic struggles that can make college seem out of reach. He loves it when he runs into a student's family years later and learns the investment was worthwhile.

"A reward that I've gotten to see a lot of times is the kids of the same families that I've talked with or spoken with, and these students ultimately end up graduating and are doing well," Rodriguez said. "They have jobs, and they're helping themselves and their families."

In fact, first-generation college graduates often become role models for their entire communities. Younger siblings or cousins may want to follow in their older siblings' footsteps—like Rodriguez's younger sister, who also graduated from Central. Sometimes a child pursuing an education can inspire their parents to pursue a GED or college degree, too.

The effects also reach other people in students' hometowns, especially younger kids.

Dr. Pamela Nevar—director of Central's McNair Scholars Program, which helps build a path to graduate school for students who are first-generation and low-income or underrepresented in graduate education—has seen this effect in action. Her program is regularly involved in National TRIO Day events that connect current students and high-schoolers.

"We get to see the effect of having our students who are juniors and seniors in college conducting original research and getting ready to go to graduate school, talking with high school kids in Upward Bound programs who are getting themselves ready to enter college, and saying, 'Hey, there's more for me to do after I finish here,'" Nevar said. "It is important to plant those seeds early about what is possible" and that those opportunities are available to them.

Strong Support Network

Once a first-generation student arrives on campus, Central staff are dedicated to creating an environment and providing them with the resources they need to have the best experience possible. Programs like CAMP and TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) give them a support system—but they also help young people build a community with other first-generation students.

These connections help them realize they are not alone, Rodriguez said.

"I think an advantage of a student who really connects with others here is to find that comfort, that relational connection with others, that ultimately validates, 'OK, what I'm doing is worth the sacrifice,'" he said.

Students also can become mentors for each other, noted Dr. Miriam Bocchetti ('04), CWU's director of grants, who oversees CAMP, SSS, and similar programs. CAMP's mentoring program pairs first-generation upperclassmen with incoming students.

"When a student meets someone from their same community, maybe their same high school, and they're like, 'Hey, I'm going to business school or I have this internship or I'm doing this great thing,' I think that can really help solidify or confirm a student's presence and belonging, and the idea that they are here for a purpose," she said.

First-generation students also share valuable assets with their peers and professors, Bocchetti said. "First-generation" is a broad label, but these students aren't homogenous. Each arrives with their own story and background.

Her doctoral dissertation examined how first-year Latinx migrant students bring a wealth of knowledge with them to college. For example, they may know multiple languages, understand agriculture, or have deep cultural roots.



Juan Flores gave the keynote address for the McNair Scholars program's End of the Year Recognition event last spring.

People who work with first-generation students should acknowledge and celebrate their assets, she believes.

“When they get to college, we use descriptors like ‘vulnerable,’ ‘at-risk,’ ‘marginalized,’ ‘underserved,’ and ‘underrepresented,’” Bocchetti said. “This language implies they are ‘other’ or ‘less than,’ rather than saying, ‘Hey, this student knows their history. They live multi-generationally and know more about where they’re from than we do.’”

Likewise, first-generation students’ cultural knowledge can benefit the larger community. Student-led events like Día de los Muertos, the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, and Cesar Chavez Week reach students from different backgrounds, along with people in the surrounding area.

“Our amazing students really are the ones doing this programming,” Rodriguez said. “It enriches the offerings that we have here on campus. It brings our campus and our students together. It unites us. And it educates us to learn more about diversity, being more inclusive, and just having an open mind about things we don’t know, but are willing to see them and learn from them.”

Spreading the Benefits

In May, Flores returned to Central to give the keynote address for the McNair program’s annual End of the Year Recognition event. He enjoyed meeting McNair Scholars who were in the same position he was a few years ago, sharing advice and learning about their plans for graduate school.

He also visited Dr. Alison Scoville, an associate professor of biology and one of the mentors at Central who encouraged him to pursue additional education. Going to graduate school and becoming a professor himself wasn’t even on his radar until Scoville encouraged him to check out the McNair program.

“My mentors opened up this career path that I didn’t even know was possible as a first-generation student,” said Flores, who plans to complete his PhD in 2023.

Once he finishes his advanced degree program, he will begin postgraduate work, funded by a National Institutes of Health fellowship that supports underrepresented students as they build scientific careers.

He hopes to find a tenured position at a research university, start his own lab, and teach neuroscience. With any luck, there will be first-generation students in his classes, allowing him to continue the ripple effect in a new community and new generation.

“I want to be that person for someone else,” Flores said. “I want to be someone that helps them out, encourages them, lets them see what’s possible, and just give back what I got from Central.” ■

Cultural events like Día de los Muertos give CWU an opportunity to celebrate students from a variety of different backgrounds.



CONNECTIONS KICKSTART HIGHER ED JOURNEY

Students feel more at home when they can work alongside others just like them

By Savannah Tranchell

As the oldest of five, Veronica Guadarrama knew her parents expected her to lead the way after graduating from high school. Her parents wanted their children to achieve what they hadn't: a college education.

"My dad understood it was key to better jobs, to more stability. There's a lot that you can learn when you go to college," she said. "He'd always tell us, 'Knowledge is one of those things that can never be taken away from you.'"

Guadarrama graduated from CWU in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics (secondary teaching) and a minor in sociology. Today, she's helping other first-generation students in Washington find their path toward success as the director of TRIO Student Support Services at Big Bend Community

College in Moses Lake. She's also president of the Washington State TRIO Association.

It's a story that repeats itself time and again among those who serve first-generation students.

Central's director of Latino and Latin American Studies, Dr. Christina Torres García, is a prime example. She is the daughter of Mexican migrant workers and immigrated to the U.S. as a child. Growing up in the 1990s, she had to advocate for her own education and convince teachers that her lack of English-language skills was not a disability.

She recognized that she had to take charge of her own higher education journey, and today she is mentoring a new generation of young people.

Veronica Guadarrama uses her own experiences as a first-generation student at CWU to help current students at Big Bend Community College.



"I'm definitely a walking testimonial for the work that the TRIO programs do," said Torres García, who like Guadarrama was a McNair Scholar.

These educators and others like them have a passion for helping first-generation students and helping them connect with the networks they need to be successful.

NUMBERS AT CWU

In 2020, TRIO programs in Washington served just over 16,000 participants, the majority of whom come from families whose parents don't have four-year degrees. According to the most recent data, CWU's programs worked with 1,252 students in 2020. Those numbers have been relatively steady in recent years and are just one way that educators across the state can track trends with the first-gen population.

In the fall of 2021, for example, approximately 45% of first-year students at Central were first-generation—one of the highest among the state's public four-year institutions. For the same period, Washington State University reported 34.3% of its undergrads were first-generation; University of Washington, 30%; Western Washington University, 27.1%; and Eastern Washington University slightly higher at 36%.

Central's numbers are even higher for transfer students—a full 51% of them were first-generation, according to the 10-day census numbers in 2021.

While still high, first-generation enrollment is trending downward statewide, according to Joel Klucking, the chief financial officer at CWU who also oversees enrollment management.

In 2015, the number of first-generation students at Central was closer to 50%, he said. Heading into the 2022-23 academic year, he anticipated that number to be around 43%, adding that other colleges in the state are seeing similar trends. Some of the drop-off can be attributed to fallout from the pandemic.

"There's a strong job market right now, so people who are on the bubble about going to college or working have more opportunities," Klucking said.

The other factor is the population of first-generation students is shrinking.

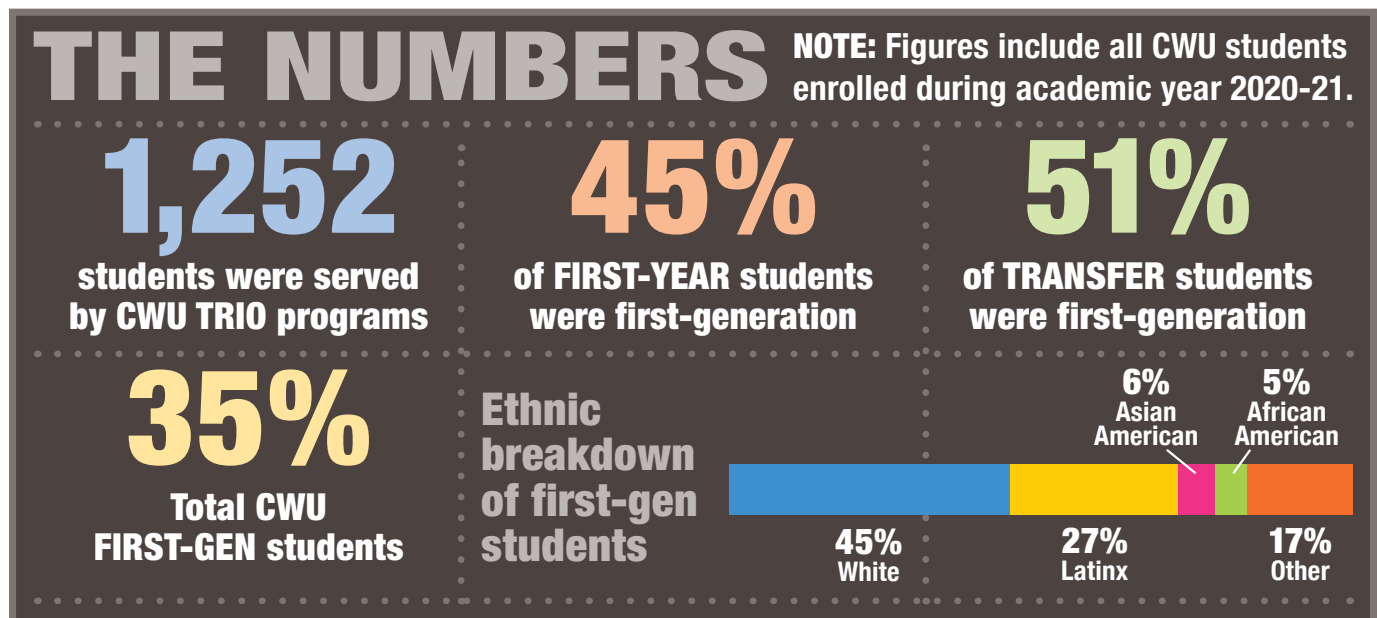
"If half of our population has been first-generation students, eventually, you're going to run out of people who are first-gen," Klucking said. "If they stay in Washington and have kids, those kids aren't going to be first-generation. So, there's less potential for first-generation students for all the state schools to draw from."

While Washington state residents rank near the top for overall education level, the number of in-state students who go on to college after graduation is among the lowest in the nation. In 2018, only 53% enrolled in some form of continuing education after high school, according to the National Center for Higher Education Management. That's lower than the national average, and the fifth worst in the country.

"We historically have not had a super strong college-going population in this state," Klucking said.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Convincing students that college offers a better path forward is difficult in normal times, but the pandemic economy has made it even more of a challenge. The enrollment team at Central works



to bring students to campus so they can meet staff, faculty, and other students. Those programs also allow them to picture themselves in that environment.

"They have to compare the feeling they get from visiting Central and the potential they see to improve their future, with the idea that they could stay home and get \$18 an hour working at McDonald's," Klucking said. "That's hard to do when you're 18."

Parental support—like what Guadarrama had—can make a huge difference, but TRIO programs also play an instrumental role. The collection of federally funded outreach programs is designed to serve students from underrepresented backgrounds, such as low-income, first-generation students and those with disabilities.

TRIO has several branches: Upward Bound and Talent Search for pre-college students; Student Support Services for undergraduates; Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) to work with adult students; and the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, aka McNair Scholars, which focuses on placing students in graduate school. Those programs, and others like them, can help young people find their community and feel like they belong on campus.

"When students are looking at transferring from Big Bend, they get nervous. They wonder 'How do I find my place? How do I find my niche on such a big campus?'" Guadarrama said, adding that she tells students that she's from a similar background and shares the things she wishes she'd known as an undergraduate.

MEETING THEIR NEEDS

A university's work doesn't stop once the student is enrolled; they have to stay enrolled and graduate.

"The worst-case scenario is you come to college for a quarter or two or three, and you drop out," Klucking said. "You aren't going to get a better job because of it. You have debt. You have negative feelings about your ability to be successful. That's a terrible situation to be in."

The support offered by peer groups, faculty, and programs like TRIO—including assistance with applications for scholarships and financial aid—can make a huge difference.

"The best way to lose a first-generation student is to speak to them like a second- or third-generation student," Klucking said. "They don't understand the acronyms. They don't feel like they belong. I'm a third-generation college student; my dad was a professor. I knew what a registrar was, what it meant to live in a residence hall. But if you've never been on a campus before, that's all pretty scary."

Central focuses on early outreach, like the financial aid programs offered by the EOCs and partnerships with community colleges, such as Big Bend. They look for opportunities to bring high school and junior high students to campus so they can become familiar with the environment.

"We want them to feel like they belong on a college campus," Klucking said. "Sometimes they can sit in on a class and realize that a college English class is really no different than their own English class. They start imagining themselves in college."

Guadarrama sees three big issues for first-generation students: finding community, paying for college, and getting through classes to finish a degree.

Torres García acts as a mentor, and she understands that for first-generation students, that sometimes means checking on their physical and emotional needs along with their academic needs. What is home like for them? Are they taking care of siblings and parents?

"As I am mentoring my students, I'm also having conversations with family members to assist them with the transition to college," she said. "If a particular female first-gen student tells me, 'Hey, my mom is having concerns about XYZ,' then I will ensure that when I see her mom that I bring it up and see what those concerns are. It is about helping these communities understand how to navigate college. Teaching not only the student but also family members."

FUTURE PREDICTIONS

In the coming years, Klucking thinks colleges will continue to see slowly decreasing numbers of first-generation students. Economic recessions and times of growth also typically shift the types of students who are attracted to college versus the workplace.

"I think we'll see a little rebound in the near-term, depending on what happens with the economy," he said. "These are the students who have choices; they aren't convinced that college is the right way to go. If the job market isn't as strong, historically people tend to go to college."

And as schools become better at identifying the needs of first-generation students, Torres García hopes the struggles they face will lessen. But it will take work.

"We know that when higher education was implemented, it was not implemented to be inclusive of this kind of diversity," she said. "Higher ed was created for middle- and upper-class white male individuals. When it comes to modifying or reforming systems that have been in place for centuries, there's a lot of work still to be done."

But changes are underway at CWU and elsewhere, such as the launch of a new financial literacy program next year. The pandemic shined a light on the inequalities for students, from access to wireless internet to home study spaces to the needs of their families.

"I believe COVID-19 shook the foundation of higher education and made us all realize that it must change," Torres García said. "If we want to survive, higher education has to be modified to be inclusive and equitable for all students." ■

LEARNING THAT THEY BELONG

By
Savannah
Tranchell

Imposter syndrome causes many first-gen students to feel out of place, but CWU makes them feel at home

When Ricardo Mercado started his internship at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in June, he wasn't sure he fit in.

The first-generation college student and son of migrant farmworkers questioned whether he deserved his place in the prestigious Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP).

"I struggled with wondering, 'Do I really belong here?'" said Mercado, who grew up in Yakima. "Some of the other interns already had research opportunities in prestigious schools, and I look at them and say, 'Do I fit in? Is this where I belong?'"

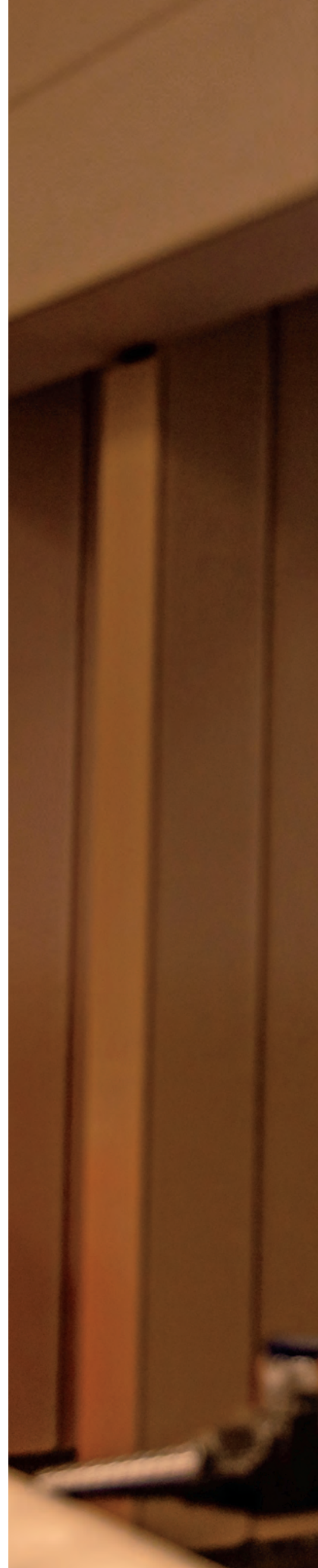
His sense of being an imposter was heightened by the fact that his family, at first, didn't support his pursuit of biology as a career choice. When he told his parents he was planning to major in molecular and cell biology at Central, rather than pursue a more cut-and-dried career in health care or a technical field, they weren't exactly thrilled.

"My dad kind of stormed off and told me I was going to ruin my life," said Mercado, who will graduate in the spring.

Mercado's experience isn't uncommon among the first-gen community, particularly those from underrepresented or low-income families. That sense of insecurity—referred to as "imposter syndrome"—can interrupt academic success and leave students questioning whether they deserve their spot.

While imposter syndrome is not unique to first-generation students, these feelings can often hit them harder. For first-gens in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, that insecurity can be even more pronounced.

Senior biology major Ricardo Mercado has begun to overcome his imposter syndrome through support systems in place at CWU.





Sticking It Out In STEM

First-generation students already face a variety of challenges to college success. If those students are also interested in pursuing STEM degrees, they may face additional hurdles, according to a study in the journal *Social Psychology and Personality Science*.

“The college environment can be really unwelcoming, because it wasn’t designed for first-generation students. It can be overwhelming,” said Dr. Elizabeth Canning, an assistant professor of psychology at Washington State University. “The imposter feelings make you feel like someone is going to discover that

you’re not meant to be there; that you’re not intelligent. The high-pressure classroom environment makes those feelings come to the surface.”

Canning has spent 10 years studying the first-generation student experience, and co-authored the paper, *Feeling like an imposter: The effect of perceived classroom competition on the daily psychological experiences of first-generation college students*. The research was supported by the National Science Foundation.

“We found that when students think their class is competitive, they feel more like an imposter on a day-to-day basis, and this is most problematic for first-generation college students,” she said. “These imposter feelings are associated with less engagement, lower attendance, more thoughts of dropping out, and lower grades. Our results suggest that perceived classroom competition may be one overlooked barrier for first-generation college students in STEM courses.”

“It’s one of those nefarious phenomena that creeps up on people when they least expect it,” said Dr. Pamela Nevar, director of the McNair Scholars program. “It’s like this shadow that recedes and comes back to haunt them every once in a while. Particularly because they come from backgrounds where their family members haven’t earned degrees, so they don’t necessarily feel like they deserve one.”

Bucking Expectations

Nevar is familiar with hesitant or even negative reactions from the parents of first-generation students. Migrant families and others from communal cultures expect children to stay close to home, help pay the bills, and care for siblings and older relatives. Mercado knew his parents expected him to study a discipline that might lead to a more traditional career path.

“They really pushed me more toward health care careers, and I was down that route for a little while,” he said, adding that he started his college journey in the high school-based Running Start program before transferring to Yakima Valley College upon graduation. “I decided to apply for a research opportunity at YVC and I got my first taste of what it’s like to work in a lab.”

Just like that, a passion was born.

At CWU, Mercado applied to the McNair Scholars program, which prepares first-generation students from low-income backgrounds and students underrepresented in graduate education to pursue research experience and advanced degrees. Mercado also earned a spot working in the laboratory under Biological Sciences Professor Dr. Lucinda Carnell.

Despite his academic successes and his family’s growing acceptance, Mercado still wrestles with the question of whether he belongs.

“When I first started working with Dr. Carnell, I had these thoughts of ‘What is so special about me for her to take me into her lab and give me this space to learn?’” he said.

That work helped him land a spot in the SURP at Fred Hutch, a nine-week internship program open to select undergraduates interested in pursuing biomedical research. Mercado’s project last summer involved studying the role of MITF, a protein that has been associated with tumor survival in melanoma.

As his love for research has grown, Mercado’s parents have started to come around on his educational path.

“My parents are able to see that this is something I really enjoy, and they started to be more accepting of it, even though they don’t fully understand what I do,” he said.

Additional Obstacles

Statistics show first-generation students are also more likely to come from underrepresented backgrounds and a lower socioeconomic status, making higher education feel unattainable to them, Nevar noted.

“These students often don’t see people in positions of power, influence, and authority who look like them,” she said. “They know what it’s like to come from a background where no one has a bachelor’s degree. So, to be thinking about a graduate degree is a real change for them psychologically. They step onto a graduate

When other identities are layered on top of being first-generation—such as also being an undocumented student; a woman in a majority male field; or other underrepresented identities—the dynamic can become even more complex.

So, how can students overcome these challenges? It takes a combination of student effort and changes in the higher ed system:

1. **SEEK HELP:** Students who ask for help find more success than those who do not, Canning said. But there are stigmas attached to asking for help that can create an additional barrier. Being active in campus life is one way to learn the “hidden curriculum” of navigation a college environment. Join clubs, attend college-sponsored activities, and learn from your peers. “There are a number of opportunities to receive this navigating information that might be hidden, and it’s easier to get through if you have people on your team,” Canning said.

2. CREATE A MORE WELCOMING

ENVIRONMENT: Universities can be proactive in creating an environment that welcomes first-generation students. A growing number offer programs or even classes for new students that teach them the ins-and-outs and academia.

3. **FOSTER COLLABORATION:** Canning’s research shows that first-generation students struggle more when they have to compete against their peers. They’re more likely to disengage, ditch class, or drop out of school all together. But instructors who bypass the grading curve and focus on cooperative learning, where students collaborate rather than go it alone, can make a real difference. “Instructors can say things that dispel the myth of competition, and make it more welcoming,” Canning said. “That can really benefit first-gen students.” ■

campus and it feels like “This isn’t real. I don’t fit in. I don’t come from this background.”

The McNair program is designed to help the students overcome that feeling and own their place in academia. McNair Scholars are high-achieving juniors and seniors, and the program preps them on what to expect in graduate school, how to navigate applications and funding, and arrange campus visits. They meet with graduate students and faculty and get to practice presenting research at conferences like the Symposium of University Research and Creative Expression (SOURCE).

“We want them to see that there are many people who are out there doing this type of work, so they realize, ‘I can do this, too.’ It helps them to see graduate school as not so strange and foreboding,” Nevar said.

Building a Network

Nevar sees many first-generation students like Mercado who are pursuing education despite family objections and cultural norms. Some try to do both—taking care of siblings and parents, working to provide for their family, and even raising their own children—while pursuing a degree.

“They have financial challenges, family challenges. They’re often thinking to themselves, ‘I have so much else to take care of, why am I even looking at graduate school? I should be getting a job,’” she said. “We try to get them to shift that mindset and realize that grad school is a job. It’s a good job—one that can help them become changemakers in their communities and for their families.”

Essential to their success is a strong support network that includes McNair and the other TRIO programs, Upward Bound and Student Support Services.

“The TRIO programs are designed as a very natural flow,” Nevar said. “Upward Bound works with high-schoolers to bring them into college, SSS works with them as undergraduates, then McNair prepares them for graduate school.”

A supportive network of faculty and staff proved to be crucial for Mercado when his family questioned his path.

“I had amazing instructors at YVC who supported me,” he said. “Even when I didn’t have my parents (behind me), I had the support of my instructors. My advisors helped me and pushed me along. They helped me with more than just academics; they were a family.”

On days when Mercado feels like he doesn’t fit in to his new world, that network becomes a source of strength for him.

“I feel like I owe something to my instructors who believed in me even before I believed in myself. They saw something special in me,” he said. “Even though I may feel like I don’t belong, deep down other people think I do. I have these people sitting in my corner, cheering me on.”

And he’ll never forget that support. On his first day at his Fred Hutch internship, Mercado wore the face mask he was given during his very first research experience at YVC.

When his principal investigator asked him why he was wearing it, his answer was simple: “It’s just to remind me of where I came from.” ■



DISCOVERING A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

CWU faculty, staff, and alumni help students develop the confidence they need to succeed

By Jodie Nicotra

Professors in Karla Maravilla's writing classes would tell her how good her writing was. And she'd think, "Lies."

Like many first-generation college students, Maravilla had a serious case of impostor syndrome, the feeling that she'd be found out by her professors and peers as a fraud who didn't belong in college.

Most people are subject to occasional bouts with impostor syndrome, but first-gen students are especially prone. As the first people in their family to attend college, they may have a mix of complex emotions: guilt for what their families sacrificed so they could go to college, self- or family-imposed pressure to do well, anxiety about finances, and even identity crises about what it means for them to be the college-educated members of their family. All this can lead to a lot of anxiety and self-doubt.

"It was hard for me to believe any positive feedback," Maravilla says. "Even now, it's hard for me to believe anything positive related to me."

FIRST-GEN CHALLENGES

Without the built-in support system of family members who know from experience what they're going through, first-generation students often must figure out the complexities of college on their own. Even fundamental offices like financial aid and career services can seem overwhelming without guidance.

Since first-gens tend to come from lower-income backgrounds than their continuing-generation peers, many also deal with financial pressures. They may be working full-time while trying to attend classes, an arrangement that can be both exhausting and detrimental to their studies.

CWU senior Tanisha Roman had been working full-time in accounting and trying to attend classes when she finally realized the toll her schedule was taking.

"It wasn't sustainable for me to have all of life's challenges as a Black female, and work full-time, and go to school full-time," she says. "They very much promote the idea that you can do this and have it all—but it's just not true. It was really difficult."

CWU Director of Alumni and Constituent Relations Casey Ross, left, helps build connections between alumni and students because he knows from experience just how important those relationships are. At right is 1986 Public Relations alumnus Ken Cadieux, another first-generation success story.



Casey Ross is a first-generation college graduate who spent 20 years in the nonprofit world before returning to CWU in 2018. He currently works in University Advancement.

THE POWER OF ATTENTION

It often takes just one caring faculty or staff member to connect first-gen students with resources and opportunities. In Maravilla's case, her imposter syndrome caused her to keep to herself. But one of her professors, Xavier Cavazos, saw potential in her writing skills and reached out—multiple times. Among other things, Cavazos encouraged Maravilla to apply to the McNair Scholars, a prestigious program that prepares students for graduate research and provides a healthy summer stipend.

With help from Cavazos, Maravilla applied and was accepted to the McNair program. After that, she gained the confidence to present her research at an academic conference and submit a poetry manuscript to a contest, where she became a semifinalist. Only then did Maravilla start to believe (sometimes) that her work was good.

Likewise, though recent CWU graduate Julianna Kropla had always loved school, it took a professor's interest in her work to bring her into the fold. Making one connection led Kropla to Professor Maya Zeller, who became her primary mentor for the rest of her college career.

"She was a real driving force behind a lot of the opportunities I had, because I didn't know they were there," Kropla says of Zeller.

With Zeller's support, Kropla became a McNair Scholar and was hired by the CWU Writing Center. Zeller also helped Kropla with her graduate school applications, editing her personal statement and writing a recommendation that helped her get accepted to a master's program at the University of Massachusetts-Boston this fall.

But professors aren't the only ones who help students new to the college experience. Roman, who has been fascinated with libraries since she was a little girl, transferred from Edmonds

College when she learned that CWU offered a certificate and an associate's degree in Library Science. The librarians at CWU helped her make the transition from a two-year college to a four-year university. One, Elizabeth Brown, has been Roman's mentor from the beginning.

"It took me a minute to get the hang of how classes were taught and the expectations here," Roman says. "In the beginning I went to [Brown] a lot, because I didn't know what they were asking, or looking for. I definitely didn't feel confident in my skills. She was always my cheerleader, and I'm so grateful to have her."

In her first quarter, Roman found the Transfer Center and began regularly attending the Friday Coffee Chats to learn about the resources available to her. Through those connections, Roman found out about McNair Scholars, eventually being accepted as the program's first satellite student.

Roman also has worked with the TRIO office, which provides financial support, plus advising and workshops on writing, study habits, and careers. The CWU Advocacy office has helped her navigate a number of other challenges.

"Help is really customized to whatever the student might need," Roman says.

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT

Many CWU faculty and staff are aware of the pressures and needs of first-gens because they've been there themselves. Andres Moreno, the associate director of Admissions, moved with his mother and sister from Mexico when he was young to be with his father, who worked as an agricultural laborer in the Yakima Valley. The oldest of six, his parents expected him to set an example by attending college. After some stops and starts, Moreno made it, as did all of his siblings.

Thanks to a volunteer opportunity that later became a paid job giving tours at CWU for prospective students, Moreno eventually was hired by the Office of Admissions, first as a recruiter for Latinx students. Right away, he saw the potential for helping first-generation students and their families.

“One of the pivotal things was that my family admired and was proud of the fact that I had a job that wasn’t in the fields or the orchards,” Moreno says. “I thought ‘This seems like a great opportunity to give back to Central and serve others, an opportunity to connect with families, including those who don’t look like me.’”

One of Moreno’s focus areas is creating pathways for traditionally underrepresented students, many of whom are first-generation. He and his team provide ways for students and their families to visit and access CWU, including offering Spanish language programming and preview days that allow parents to visit on the weekends. They also work with local high schools and community-based organizations that serve underrepresented students.

On the other end of the college journey, the CWU Alumni Office works to support first-gens in different ways. Casey Ross (’02), director of Alumni and Constituent Relations and a first-gen alumnus, knows the value of CWU connections first-hand. Having worked in the nonprofit sector for almost 20 years, he wanted a change of pace and reached out to former contacts at Central. He worked in a few different offices before landing his

current position. Now, he wants today’s students to understand the value of alumni connections, too.

“My dream is that the alumni association will be the first place both current students and alumni turn to for career support and that our Wildcat Alumni will not only answer that call, but exceed expectations,” Ross says. “We are working to build an alumni culture where ‘Wildcats help Wildcats’ is commonplace.”

The main way Ross plans to enact this goal is through alumni mentorships. These relationships can range from short-term “flash mentorships”—one-time, one-hour connections to explore a career option—to more formal mentorships, which might involve three to five meetings where students can set career goals, learn about professional development, and work on finding a career that suits them.

Such mentoring opportunities are critical for first-gens, who may be unclear what career possibilities are available after college, or how to achieve their professional goals.

With that in mind, Ross has a message for his fellow Wildcat alums.

“First-gen students, like all students, need support in different ways,” he says. “We want our alumni to know that volunteering their time, talent, and insights can literally change a student’s life; the ripple effect of those relationships not only strengthens our Wildcat Nation but also our world. My goal is to have every student have an alumni mentor in some capacity, or at least to know that mentors are available.” ■

Associate Director of Admissions Andres Moreno, right, builds relationships around the state to help create opportunities for CWU students.





building bridges for first-gen students



bridges
success

University Centers and Transfer Center help create opportunities for neo-traditional students

By Jodie Nicotra

The year 2025 is just around the corner, and many colleges and universities across the country are sweating. Three years from now marks the long-predicted “demographic cliff,” where the sharp decline in birth rate that began with the 2008 recession will make itself felt in the shrinking first-year college student class.

But Central is staying cool. For decades, the university has been working toward its goal of becoming the number-one transfer-friendly institution in Washington state. With a population of close to 40% transfer students, it has nearly succeeded. CWU now boasts a healthy mix of traditional and “neo-traditional” students, defined as students who may be first-generation, transfers, Pell Grant-eligible, parents, caregivers, or veterans.

To help with this goal, CWU has some not-so-secret weapons: eight university centers and instructional sites, and the recently established Transfer Center. The faculty, staff, and administrators of these educational partners believe passionately that their job is to remove barriers and build bridges to help neo-traditional students complete their college degrees.

The result has been a partnership that has strengthened communities around the state by helping students achieve their goals.

“We’re lucky to be here in Washington state, where there’s been a 50-year collaboration between the two-year and the four-year schools,” says Megan McConnell, director of the CWU Transfer Center. “We have a lot of good things going for us.”

Transfer Center Director Megan McConnell understands the needs of first-generation students because she is one.

Barriers for Neo-Traditional Learners

Many neo-traditional students at Central come from historically underserved communities, for which traditional college education has often been out of reach, both financially and practically. Time- and place-bound, neo-traditional students typically have families, careers, or other obligations that create challenges to being on campus several times a week.

Since neo-traditional students are often first-generation, many have to figure out on their own how to navigate college. They may understand the requirements for graduating from a two-year college, but not how those requirements align with their intended four-year major. They also may not know how to pay for college, or how to take advantage of services like financial aid or career advising.

Institutions also can create some of these barriers inadvertently through the use of institutional jargon, for example. This dynamic can contribute to the sense of “imposter syndrome” felt by many neo-traditional students—the sense that they don’t really belong.

CWU has worked for decades to remove such barriers and to foster a sense of belonging for neo-traditional students.

“That’s a really important underpinning to everything we do,” McConnell says. “We want to convey to students, ‘Well, of course you belong here. You should be here. Your unique attributes and sets of skills and interests are something that is beneficial to our community, and we’re glad you’re here.’”



Snoqualmie Hall at Edmonds College houses the CWU-Lynnwood University Center.

The new Transfer Lounge in Bouillon Hall offers students a chance to connect with each other and the campus services available to them.



Centers Have Become Community Partners

CWU responded to the needs of the neo-traditional student population very early on—even before it was known as “neo-traditional”—through its eight university centers and sites around the state. The first satellite campus was a teacher education school, founded in 1918 on Whidbey Island.

Since then, the centers and sites have expanded to the communities of Des Moines, Lynnwood, Pierce County, Sammamish, Yakima, Wenatchee, and Moses Lake. No matter where in Washington they’re located, the centers aim to support communities, fuel the local workforce, and help members of those communities pursue a college degree.

Their location allows the centers to engage with local government, the K-12 school system, alumni, and business and industry. Staff at the centers know which resources are available and how to help students access those resources. And they can respond to the community’s immediate and long-term needs in a way that is difficult on a residential campus.

One important need is supplying the local workforce with trained professionals who can help them right away. The centers aim to help students advance in their careers, switch careers, or even land their first job. With a gender ratio of about 70:30 women to men (the ratio on traditional residential campuses is more like 55:45), the centers are especially helping women reengage and advance in the workforce.

“It is no secret that higher education campuses are changing and continue to become more diverse, just like the workforce,” said Monica Medrano (’05), regional director of the CWU-Wenatchee and Moses Lake centers. “When factoring in the unique challenges of our intersectional neo-traditional students, such as motherhood, CWU has had to learn about and redefine our services to support our students’ career goals while considering their intersectional lived experiences.”

Degree Pathways That Meet Student Needs

Practically speaking, the university centers' distribution around the state means that neo-traditional students can attend CWU, even if they can't make it to Ellensburg.

Six of the CWU centers are co-located on the campus of two-year colleges, where students typically complete an associate's degree and finish their general education requirements and prerequisites. However, without some bridge-building in place, students can be easily derailed when exploring their futures.

The Early Transfer Admissions Plus program—ETA+ for short—aims to set students on the right path as soon as they start their two-year degree track. Transfer students can apply and be admitted to CWU as soon as they arrive at one of the host colleges. Students can attend campus events and get connected to advising, tutoring, and services at Central.

Most importantly, ETA+ puts students into a communication system that's strategically aware and proactive about some of the obstacles they face. This includes the potential time and money wasted by taking unnecessary courses.

"The evolution of neo-traditional students has called upon the university to examine what affordability means and how it relates to student success," Medrano said. "Across the nation, the 'traditional' student experience has inspired a 'traditional' campus infrastructure—one that does not meet the unique needs of our neo-traditional student population. The goal is to meet students where they are based on their needs."

Likewise, the Transfer Center aims to create a sense of community and belonging for students who transfer to the main

CWU campus. Part of this involves connecting students with the physical location of the Transfer Center. Aside from making the Transfer Lounge an inviting place for students to check in and interact with one another, McConnell also conducted the transfer-specific portions of last summer's orientation sessions in the lounge to connect the new recruits to a campus "home base."

To help meet student needs, CWU also offers a variety of class formats, allowing those who need flexibility to take online or hybrid classes. Having an opportunity to build community and social capital with peers and faculty is critical to first-generation student success.

The faculty who teach at the centers and online know the barriers their students face. Professors recognize that, along with teaching the curriculum, they must create support for students who are often struggling to keep their heads above water.

Part of this is just being human: opening up to students and showing empathy.

"I've taught for many years, and I see my job partly as a process of relationship building," says Erica Holley, who teaches management and organizational behavior at CWU-Lynnwood. "Showing vulnerability and reciprocity helps students open up and feel more connected to the class and the material."

In removing barriers and creating access for neo-traditional students, Central embraces its responsibility to the state and the communities it serves.

"Through the University Centers, CWU has an opportunity to sit closer to the communities we serve and build relationships based on mutual understandings and needs for each other and the shared student populations," Medrano said. "Partnerships with the state's community and technical colleges, and our industry partners, builds a reciprocal ecosystem aimed at access and success." ■



Transfer students gather during a summer orientation session in the Transfer Lounge, located on the second floor of Bouillon Hall.



Equal Access Is the Goal



Director of Grants Miriam Bocchetti oversees a variety of CWU programs designed to improve higher education access for people from underserved backgrounds. Bocchetti is a first-generation college graduate herself who benefited from the same support services when she was a CWU student.

Central's outreach and assistance programs provide opportunities for students from all walks of life

By David Leder

One of the hardest things about being a first-generation college student is you don't know what you don't know.

How to fill out an application, where to learn about financial aid, what to expect when you arrive on campus—plus dozens of other questions that traditional students can discern by talking to their parents or siblings.

CWU understands the struggles first-gen students must endure when seeking information about college, and it has taken the lead among the state's higher education institutions in providing everyone with equal access and opportunity.

"First-generation students tend to feel uncertain and question if they belong at a university," said Melanie Palm ('07), regional director at CWU-Yakima, one of eight university centers and instructional sites around the state.

"CWU excels at working with these students to build confidence in their sense of belonging to the university community because we show them that they are welcome and that they can succeed. We have built a reputation across the state for helping students feel connected, supported, and successful in the communities we serve."

When you ask the faculty and staff of CWU what gives them purpose, many will say that it's the ability to have a direct, positive impact on the lives of young people and outfit them with the knowledge they need to maximize their potential.

Director of Grants Miriam Bocchetti ('04) has spent her entire 18-year career at Central advocating for people just like her. She grew up working in the fields with her family before she joined the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) during her freshman year at CWU—a program she went on to lead for eight years.

Bocchetti now oversees CAMP, the High School Equivalency Program (HEP), two Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), Student Support Services (SSS), and Passport to College. She puts her heart and soul into her work, and she remembers others doing the same for her when she was an undergrad.

All she needed was someone to show her the ropes. Today, Bocchetti and her colleagues spend every day advocating for students from underserved backgrounds and helping them discover their strengths so they can thrive.

"The most important element of these programs is that they provide equal access to education for people who don't have the same resources as traditional college students," said Bocchetti, who went on to complete her doctorate in 2021. "They're no different than other students; they just haven't been given the guidance and pathways they need to be successful. Most of them don't even know where to start, and that's what we are here for."



CWU High School Equivalency Program (HEP) graduates received their GEDs last spring.

Straight to the Source

Each of the programs Bocchetti manages falls under Central's overarching mission of providing access and opportunity to people from underrepresented communities. She and her staff spend countless hours conducting outreach activities around the state, recruiting prospective students, and encouraging their parents to send them to college.

Collectively, these outreach and student support programs contribute to CWU's goal of being the most diverse higher education institution in the state.

"Community-based outreach is how we find most of our students," Bocchetti said. "We go wherever we need to be, doing presentations in school cafeterias, handing out flyers at the grocery store, going to the fields and telling farmworkers about what programs are available to them—you name it."

Over the years, CWU has developed relationships with high school teachers and administrators across the state—many who are alumni—which helps attract students who are unsure what they want to do post-high school. Deploying representatives who speak the same language as the students they are recruiting—predominantly Spanish—is another critical component of Central's strategy of connecting with families from diverse backgrounds.

"Our outreach programs serve over 4,000 students a year, so if even one percent of those students ends up coming to Central,

that's a victory," Bocchetti said. "We believe early outreach is the key to diversifying Central."

Patricia Loera ('89) is one example of a first-gen CWU student who didn't know college was attainable until a Spanish-speaking recruiter came to her home and met her family. Like Bocchetti, she grew up working in the fields and was unaware of the many support programs available to her. Loera learned about CAMP through her older sister, Rocio, who was accepted into the program at Central. After enjoying a successful 30-plus-year career, she remains grateful for all the encouragement and support she received from the staff and faculty in Ellensburg.

"The one-on-one support I received from CAMP and my academic advisors taught me so much," said Loera, a native of Sunnyside who went on to earn a law degree and now serves as the associate vice president for college access at the University of Washington. "All of the resources CWU provided—orientations, an advisor, a student mentor—really helped me acclimate to college life, and I am very thankful for everything they did for me as a first-generation student."

After completing law school, Loera worked for the Washington Attorney General's Office, served as a civil rights lobbyist in Washington, D.C., and spent 12 years at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as a senior program officer. She joined the UW Minority Affairs and Diversity department in 2015 and now helps 25,000 students in 85 school districts discover their paths in life.



Meeting Them Where They Are

CWU offers a range of programs geared toward helping first-generation students and those from underserved backgrounds gain access to higher education.

- College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)
- High School Equivalency Program (HEP)
- Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC)
- Student Support Services (SSS)
- McNair Scholars
- Passport to College

Being able to use her own life experiences to inspire a new generation of students gives Loera tremendous pride. And it all started at Central.

“I wanted to find a job that I loved, which is why I always dreamed of going to college,” she said. “Even though I wasn’t a very good student in high school, I knew I had to take control of my future. The only way I was going to get there was by pursuing an education, and now I get to share that message with young people across the state so they can create their own successful futures.”

Pathways to Success

Early outreach and relationship-building are essential for Central as it seeks to build higher-ed pathways for first-gen students. However, the university understands that it’s just as important to meet students where they are in life, whether they are working full time, raising a family, or considering a new direction.

The university centers and instructional sites provide a crucial bridge for neo-traditional students, and CWU recognizes that these community-based hubs are often the difference between pursuing a degree and standing pat.

Palm, the regional director at CWU-Yakima, noted that nearly 50% of CWU’s transfer students are first-generation, and one of the main reasons for such a high participation rate is accessibility of the eight satellite campuses. Being able to get local support in the application process, and having the ability

to attend classes in their own communities or online—at convenient times and locations—provides a significant incentive for those with family responsibilities, day jobs, or place-bound commitments.

“We are a major access point for many people who wouldn’t otherwise have an opportunity to take college classes,” Palm said. “We provide students with access to an affordable four-year university education in their own communities, which allows them to stay where they are and grow with their local workforce. By meeting our students where they are, we are able to deliver degree options to a more diverse and traditionally underserved population.”

Central also has enhanced its online and hybrid-learning presence in recent years through the Multimodal Learning department, adding to the variety of online degree offerings. These programs provide more schedule flexibility and are designed to accelerate the time it takes to complete a degree.

Time- and place-bound students often find these non-traditional course modalities are too good to pass up as they look to build a better life for themselves and their families.

“Many of our students have different needs from those at a residential campus, whether it is a job, childcare, senior care, or other social services,” Palm said, adding that nearly 70% of CWU’s online students live within 35 miles of a center or site. “Our goal is to be a hub of local community resources to support all students in our region. When current or prospective students come into CWU-Yakima, they are coming to talk to CWU, not just a center.” ■



Flipping Lifelines

Kahmina Ford overcame the challenges of her childhood to earn a biophysics degree at CWU and a National Science Foundation research grant before gaining acceptance into an elite PhD program.



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CWU
biophysics
alumna
conquers
challenges
to find
her calling

By David Leder
Photos by Stefan Alexander

Script
2010

Every first-generation college student has a story to tell about overcoming life's challenges. Some, like Kahmina Ford, could write a book about their experiences.

Ford grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in Tacoma, surrounded by drugs, alcohol, and abuse. Raised by a single mom and faced with a variety of socioeconomic challenges, including a brief bout with homelessness, she could easily have succumbed to the negative influences of her childhood.

But Ford had bigger plans for herself after graduating from high school in 2012. And while it took her a few years to figure out her long-term direction, the 2021 CWU graduate always saw herself doing more than merely getting by.

It has been a long road, to be sure, but the 28-year-old biophysicist is now working as a graduate researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, studying brain cancer cell invasion alongside an elite research team.

"I feel like I'm the one who got out, which can be a hard thing to feel," said Ford, who left her job as a police dispatcher at the Washington State Patrol in 2019 to pursue a degree at Central. "I often have to remind myself that I had to work really hard to get to this point. I have earned this."

Considering all that Ford has accomplished over the past five years, the end result has become much more than simply escaping her past. The PhD work she has immersed herself in at UC Berkeley will inevitably change her career trajectory, and with any luck, her experiences will create an even brighter future for her and her 9-year-old son, Mosea.

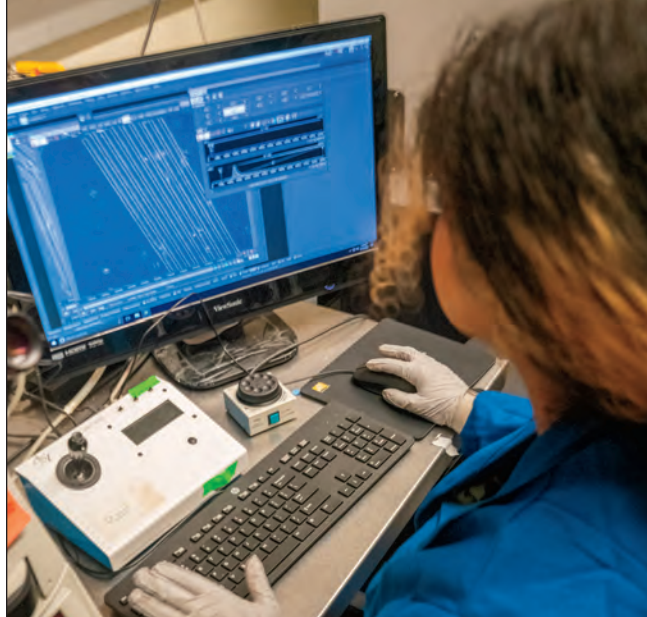
"When I decided to go to Central, I didn't even know graduate school was a possibility for me," she said. "I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do; I just wanted to find a better-paying job to support my son. I had no idea I would be competitive when applying to schools like Berkeley, but it has all worked out very well for me and my son. We really love it here."

Ford is now in the second year of her six-year PhD program, using her computer modeling expertise to study how glioblastoma (brain cancer) cells migrate in confined environments. The research she and her team are doing is entirely new to her, but the lab experience she gained in Ellensburg in 2020-21 has proven to be invaluable.

"There's a lot of cross-over with the computer modeling work I did at CWU, so that experience has been a huge help," she said. "Now, I'm just applying my experience to study cancer cells instead of neurons."

Ford noted that her current work does not involve live subjects; the cancer cells she studies are developed through cell cultures. Cancer cell research requires a lot of teamwork and patience, and fortunately, she has found the ideal environment for her—both as a scientist and as a person of color.

"I chose this lab because the vast majority of my peers are from diverse backgrounds, and the PI (principal investigator) places a lot of importance on equity and inclusion," she said, adding that



CWU alumna Kahmina Ford is in the second year of her PhD program at the University of California, Berkeley.

she also serves on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee for the program. "As a person of color, this kind of work is very important to me and the other team members. We all agree that everyone should have a voice, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender."

Building a Foundation

Thanks to the personal, financial, and academic support Ford has received at Berkeley over the past year, her long-term potential appears to be limitless. However, just a few short years ago, that success was not a foregone conclusion.

Raising a son by herself while working 50 to 60 hours a week didn't leave much free time to pursue a higher-ed degree. She realized that changing her path in life was going to require an even greater commitment, so she started taking classes at Pierce College.

"At first, I was really afraid of failing, especially since no one in my immediate family has completed a college degree," Ford said. "But I just had to believe in myself and trust the process."

She finished her associate's degree with a 3.92 GPA and earned the Washington Women in Need Scholarship, which gave her an opportunity to complete a bachelor's degree at CWU without having to work full time.

"The Women In Need scholarship is what made it possible for me to go to Central," said Ford, adding that when she arrived in Ellensburg in the fall of 2019, she had no idea that she would become a PhD student less than two years later.

Her passion for mathematics caught the attention of physics advisor Deanna Marshall, who steered her toward the biophysics specialization. After excelling in her first semester in the department, Ford joined the McNair Scholars program in the winter of 2020, getting involved in a computer modeling research project that centered around neuron migration.

That hands-on experience with Dr. Erin Craig prepared her to become the first-ever CWU undergraduate to receive the National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Fellowship Grant in the spring of 2021—an honor bestowed upon only 10% of applicants nationwide.

“Winning the NSF award was such a huge surprise, and that really opened some new doors for me,” said Ford, who served as the president of the CWU Biophysics Club. “Getting accepted to Berkeley was also a huge honor, but neither of those things would have happened if it weren’t for McNair. That experience completely changed the trajectory of my life.”

Future Opportunities

Since graduating from CWU a year and a half ago, Ford’s passion has continued to blossom at UC Berkeley. While her graduate school journey is just beginning, she’s beginning to think about what may come next. Once she completes her PhD program, she may go into higher ed teaching, or possibly look for an industry job and serve as an adjunct professor on the side. Most of all, she wants to help create better opportunities in life for people like her.

“The first physics class I had was taught by a Black woman with a child, and she was so positive and accommodating. That really stuck with me,” Ford said. “Those kinds of interactions are what inspired me to continue my education. And, someday, I’d like to do the same for others.”

She and her son continue to enjoy everything about their new lives in northern California, but Ford is also keeping the door open to returning to the Puget Sound area someday. She says she sometimes feels obligated to return home due to what she calls “survivor’s guilt.”

“Part of me thinks I should return to the area I was raised in,” she said. “I want to give back to my community and help other people find their own way out. But I also really like living in the Bay Area. It’s really hard to say at this point.”

No matter where she ends up, Ford will always be grateful for the opportunities she discovered at Central. Her higher ed journey started because of her own desire to create a better life for her family, while CWU provided her with opportunities that helped her reach her potential as a scientist. But, ultimately, she had to put in the work.

She still feels enormous gratitude for the people at Central who supported her during her journey, including Craig, Marshall, and Drs. Darci Snowden, Nathan Kuwada, and Pamela Nevar.

“They are the ones who supported me, especially during quarantine, when all of my resources as a single parent became non-existent,” Ford said. “They taught me to not allow fear to limit my options or make the decisions in my life. Apply for that job, scholarship, or program. Take the leap. You’ll never win if you don’t take a chance on yourself.” ■

Ford and her 9-year-old son, Mosea, have found a home in Berkeley, but they may someday return to the Puget Sound area.



McNair Scholars Opens Doors, Changes Lives

Underrepresented students
find validation and support in
pursuit of advanced degrees

By David Leder



Senior physics major Isaac Smith is involved in high-level research at CWU that most undergraduates could only dream of.



Dr. Pamela Nevar

“Many of these young people feel like they **don’t belong** in graduate school, so we try to **show them** that, **‘Yes, you do belong.** You’ve earned this.’” **Pamela Nevar**

The success of CWU’s McNair Scholars program over the past 30 years is difficult to quantify. But, based on the reviews from current and former participants, their experiences have been life-altering.

Since 1992, a dedicated team of CWU staff and faculty has been recruiting students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue future opportunities in academia. To be accepted into the program, students must be first-gen and come from either low-income background or be underrepresented in graduate education. Some scholars are all three.

Through the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO program, juniors and seniors who are accepted receive paid research training, networking opportunities, institutional support, and academic and professional development skills as they prepare to advance beyond their undergraduate studies. Central’s McNair chapter was among the first in Washington to provide students from underserved backgrounds with opportunities for academic growth and development beyond their undergraduate education.

Program director Pamela Nevar and her staff offer assistance and support to 27 students per academic year. Upon being selected, the scholars connect with on-campus faculty mentors in their major and work with them to advance their proposed research projects. The summer after their junior year, the scholars earn a stipend—which may include room and board for students who

live on campus during the summer—to pursue their original research under faculty mentorship.

“We serve as a support system and give these students guidance that they may not otherwise receive,” said Nevar, who took over as program director in 2018. “As first-generation college students, they don’t have access to that kind of guidance from their own families, so we try to provide a kind of home away from home so they can continue to grow, both personally and academically.”

Participants attend a weekly McNair class, where they learn about the graduate school application process, refine their research methods, and develop relationships with campus experts and others in their field. They’re also afforded plenty of one-on-one time with their mentors, advisors, and the McNair staff.

Guiding students through the grad school application process and supporting their research objectives are the long-standing priorities for the program staff. But just as important is helping the scholars develop confidence in themselves.

“Many of these young people feel like they don’t belong in graduate school, so we try to show them that, ‘Yes, you do belong. You’ve earned this,’” Nevar said.

“We want to do everything we can to prepare them for success in graduate school and beyond,” she added. “We also help build them up so they can serve as role models for their friends and family members back home. We are continually amazed at everything they’ve accomplished.”



Isaac Smith

Aspiring Astronomer Conducts Out-of-this-World Research at CWU

Long before Isaac Smith set foot on the CWU campus, he had his sights set on becoming an astronomer. Now, the first-generation college student is looking to capitalize on his one-of-a-kind experience in Ellensburg and carry that knowledge with him to graduate school.

“When I was applying to colleges, I was looking for a place that would provide me with opportunities to grow, and I knew that the larger schools wouldn’t be a good fit,” said Smith, a senior physics major from Spokane.

“Looking around the state, CWU was the only place that had a high-end telescope available to students, so that got me really excited. I’ve been able to spend around 400 hours working with ours, and that kind of experience is just incomparable.”

Over the past two years, Smith has been working with Professor Cassandra Fallscheer to build a spectrograph as part of his McNair Scholars research project. Unlike a telescope, which only sees in black and white, spectrographs help astronomers analyze colors in outer space and identify exoplanets.

With Fallscheer on sabbatical during fall quarter, Smith is now managing the project—something most undergrads could only dream about.

“Most undergrads, if they even get to do this kind of research, are usually just grunts,” he said. “But this summer, I got to help install a \$70,000 piece of glass into a telescope. And that’s just one example.”

Smith, who also leads the CWU Astronomy Club, said it’s “all on me to get stuff done” while Fallscheer is away. But he’s up to the challenge.

“That never happens anywhere else, let alone in a setting where you are getting paid,” he said. “To say this opportunity is priceless would be an understatement.”



Leni Halaapiapi

McNair Program Paved Alum’s Path to Graduate School Success By Rune Torgersen

Before he settled on computer science, Leni Halaapiapi was going to school for mechanical engineering. All of that changed when the 2019 CWU alum took his first computer science class and saw his passions for math and technology converge into one rapidly growing, cutting-edge field just waiting to be explored: nuclear cybersecurity.

As a first-gen student, Halaapiapi took an exploratory approach and dove into his CWU education with an eagerness to learn both in the classroom and in the field.

“Being a first-generation student is hard, because you don’t really have your family telling you what to do, where to go, or what to expect,” Halaapiapi said. “You’re the first one of them to ever go through something like this. I learned quickly, though, and during my freshman year, I made sure to take advantage of all that Central has to offer, which led me to McNair.”

He now attends Oregon State University, where he’s researching the cybersecurity measures necessary to safeguard nuclear power plants as they transition to digital infrastructures. It’s critical work, and it all started with the support and encouragement he received in the McNair Scholars program. Halaapiapi paired that opportunity with his hunger for knowledge, and now he’s conducting critical research that will make the world a better, safer place.

“McNair is a great program,” he said. “Without it, I wouldn’t be where I am today—in grad school, doing research on nuclear cybersecurity. I have so much gratitude for being picked to be part of the program, and getting to meet so many great people along the way.”



Bianca Sanchez

Psychology Graduate Discovered Passion at Central By Rune Torgersen

Bianca Sanchez never saw herself going to college, much less pursuing her doctorate in school psychology. The 2022 Central graduate went through high school checking the boxes necessary to graduate, and only applied to CWU to see if she could get in. Once she was accepted, she started down a path that would take her places she could have never anticipated.

"I'm a first-generation student, which is one of the reasons why I never really thought about college, because my mom never went," said Sanchez, a native of San Diego who won the James and Katie Gaudino Award at the 2022 SOURCE Conference. "Central gave me the opportunity to realize my potential and start learning more about the things I care about."

Sanchez's mentor, Dr. Olivia Holter, directed her toward the McNair Scholars program, which opened up the door for her to pursue a psychology degree, and eventually a school psychology certification at the post-graduate level.

"I truly think that the lessons I've learned over the last two years as part of McNair have really prepared me for graduate school," Sanchez said. "They really helped ease my worries and gave me the sense that they were prepared for all the questions I might have, and the issues I might run into."

Having just started her doctoral studies at Illinois State University this fall, Sanchez looks forward to providing others with the inspiration she felt was missing in high school.

"I wish I'd had better representation during my time in the public school system," she said. "A big part of why I do what I do is that I hope that my representation—being a brown woman in this space—can help kids like me see that they can be whatever they want to be, with no limitations."

Photo courtesy of Juan Flores.



Juan Flores

CWU Connections Helped Graduate Figure Out His Future

Juan Flores sometimes has to pinch himself when he thinks about how far he has come since graduating from high school in 2011.

The first-generation college graduate and first-generation Mexican immigrant didn't know what career path he wanted to pursue. So, he attended Wenatchee Valley College for two years before transferring to CWU, where he completed a BS in chemistry in 2017.

Now, the former McNair Scholar is a PhD candidate in physiology at the University of California-Davis, researching how human learning is affected by timing at the cellular level—a phenomenon called "connective plasticity."

"There is a timing aspect to how we learn, and we are looking at which proteins are responsible for changes in plasticity," said Flores, who moved to Quincy with his family at age 8. "What we are finding is that plasticity is limited if humans introduce more than one learning stimulus at the same time. We learn better if we have a break in between sessions of learning."

Flores, 29, often looks back on his time in Ellensburg as setting the stage for his current success. He points to the personal connections he made in the Chemistry Department and McNair Scholars program as the catalyst. He thanked Central professors Allison Scoville and Carin Thomas, and many others, for mentoring him.

"The reason I enjoyed my experience so much was the faculty support I received," Flores said. "Everyone at CWU is so accessible, and because CWU is smaller, you really get to connect with people. There is a sense of community you get there that is hard to find other places."



Cameron Bundy

From Bartender to PhD Candidate in Five Years

Just five years ago, Cameron Bundy was bartending in Yakima and hadn't give much thought to pursuing a college degree. Today, the 2022 CWU alum and first-generation college student is immersed in a PhD program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in New York, pursuing his passion for applied mathematics.

"I didn't envision my life going the way it was, so I decided it was time for a change of scenery," said Bundy, 30, who started his higher ed journey at Yakima Valley College in 2017. "I fell in love with math right away, and that eventually brought me to CWU."

He connected with the McNair Scholars program in the winter of 2021 and put his applied mathematics knowledge to the test, using differential equations to research the spread of COVID-19 under varying lockdown conditions. That work helped him gain the attention of RIT, one of the most respected institutions in the U.S. for mathematical modeling.

"What helped me was the specific kind of research I was doing," Bundy said, adding that his participation in the national Mathematics Contest in Modeling (MCM) was equally beneficial. "I prepared a convincing essay to prove my credentials, and I think they appreciated how I took the time to explain my situation."

Bundy can't say enough about the support he received at CWU, thanking McNair program Director Pamela Nevar and Professor Jean Marie Linhart for helping him discover his current path toward an advanced degree.

"A lot of times, people like me just need someone to tell them that they can do something," Bundy said. "Dr. Linhart and Dr. Nevar reassured me that I did belong and that I could do anything I set my mind to."

**CWU McNair
Scholars Program
was founded in 1991**

**Current Department of Education grant is
\$1.3 million
over five years**

**More than
800
students served
over 31 years**

**27
eligible students
served per year**

Lasting Legacy

A close-up portrait of Mateo Arteaga, a man with a full white beard and mustache, wearing black-rimmed glasses. He is looking slightly to the right with a gentle expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with some green light visible at the top.

By Rune Torgersen

Yakima
EOC Director
Mateo Arteaga
is retiring after
decades of
helping others
unlock their
potential

This winter, Mateo Arteaga will be going to Hawaii for a week, just to let it all sink in.

After 23 years with the university, CWU's director of the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) in Yakima is retiring, leaving behind a legacy of opening doors and shattering ceilings for those who might not otherwise have made their way to college. His work with the EOC has been a continuation of a lifelong passion for education and opportunity for migrant workers and other first-generation students.

"First-generation students are incredibly dedicated, because they've decided that they're going to work hard for it," said Arteaga, himself a first-gen student. "I had no set path in life, my dad was a farm worker, and through my hard work in getting an education, I was able to become an advocate for farm workers"

Arteaga grew up in the Yakima Valley farm worker community, occasionally migrating to Oregon for lima bean season. He never saw himself as a perfect student, and he didn't have college anywhere near his radar until his mentor gave him some advice that would change his life forever.

"My first mentor was the owner of that farm who told me that an education is something nobody can take away from you," Arteaga said. "They can throw you in jail, or any number of other things, but they can't take away your education. So, that seed was planted early on."

As far as passion can take you in college, experience plays an equally important part in your success. And, after he completed high school, Arteaga simply wasn't ready for college. His counselor tore up his application when asked to review it, and he told Arteaga to pursue something else.

"I remember to this day, he should have told me to go to community college, get your skills to where they need to be, then you can transfer to a state university," he said. "To this day, I'm grateful to him in a way, because he was right. I wasn't ready."

A stint in the military taught Arteaga several important lessons about teamwork, leadership, and perseverance in the face of adversity. Those experiences also taught him that the military was not the direction he wanted to go.

So, when Arteaga left, he resubmitted his application to UW in hopes of pursuing a career in teaching applied to what is now known as Yakima Valley College (YVC).

YVC fostered Arteaga's budding passion for leadership, and in 1976, he became Washington's first Latino student body president. Once he had his degree, he began his teaching career in North Bend, fulfilling his dream and opening the door to a career in education that would take him through several administrative positions, nonprofit work, and community outreach. Then, in 1999, Arteaga applied to work at Central.

"When I interviewed with CWU, they asked me whether I could work with school districts and nonprofits, and whether I was bilingual," he said. "I was able to check everything off that list through my experiences."

After getting his foot in the door, Arteaga helped the university open the Yakima EOC. As the principal investigator

for the EOC, the High School Equivalency Program (HEP), and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), he acted as a liaison between the federal government and the institutions receiving the grants necessary to keep those programs running.

As those programs grew, it became necessary to branch the EOC off into its own program, under Arteaga's direction. In his position, he has been able to leverage his knowledge of the first-generation student experience to provide prospective students and families with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about college.

"My experience as a first-generation student has helped me guide others through the process," Arteaga said. "My parents had no idea how the system worked, and figuring that out prepared me to save others the time."

He specifically remembers a young woman from the CAMP program, Juanita, who wanted to go to college but her parents wouldn't let her. Arteaga's colleagues found a way to convince them.

"Our CAMP director and her husband went over to their house for dinner and had an honest conversation about what college is like and the opportunities it would offer their daughter, and Juanita ended up going to CWU," he said proudly.

Arteaga's success in running the EOC has continued over the years, leading to his role as president of the Council on Occupational Education from 2010 to 2012, and numerous recognitions and awards from the TRIO organization. His former employee and current supervisor, CWU Director of Grants Miriam Bocchetti, says Arteaga's name is known far and wide because of his dedication to student success.

"I was in Philadelphia for a conference, on a tour bus, and a woman sat down next to me, and asked me where I was from," Bocchetti said. "I said Washington, and she immediately asked me if I knew Mateo Arteaga. That always happens whenever I go to conferences around the country. People who are part of TRIO always ask me how Mateo is doing. He just has that impact on people."

In 2021, Arteaga was a driving force in securing the funding to establish CWU's second EOC in Wenatchee. With only 142 such programs nationwide, Bocchetti says EOC programs are very hard to get funded.

"It's extremely difficult, so the fact that we not only got our Yakima EOC funded again, but also got an additional location in Wenatchee, stunned us all for a good month or so," she said.

As he prepares himself for retirement, Arteaga offers some sage advice for students who might feel their dreams are too far out of reach.

"Never give up, no matter what happens," he said. "There have been challenging times at CWU just like any other workplace, but I never gave up believing in my students and believing in myself to do the right thing. I'm so glad for the opportunity to be part of this team and really make a difference." ■

CWU Is Committed to First-Generation Scholarship Support

One of the primary barriers that prevents students from completing their college education is financial hardship—specifically, a lack of financial aid. The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) recently conducted a study that reported 59% of first-generation college students had expressed concern about their ability to pay for the upcoming term, compared with 32% of their peers who are not the first in their family to attend college.

In an effort to support students who face this hardship, Central Washington University awarded approximately 700 scholarships totaling nearly \$1.4 million in support last fiscal year. Included in this funding was a generous gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation, which will be directed to supporting first-generation students.

Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholarship

Since 2015, the Coca-Cola Foundation has granted CWU \$250,000 to provide support to underrepresented or disadvantaged first-generation students through the Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholarship.

“As a first-generation student, I am leading by example that college is no longer a dream, but a reachable goal,” 2020 graduate Ivan Morales said. “Receiving the prestigious Coca-Cola Scholarship not only relieves a financial burden, but it also encourages me to continue to push forward knowing that I have the support of the organization.” ■

Scholarship Partners

In 2021, 45% of first-year students and 44% of transfer students at CWU were the first in their families to attend college.

Several generous donors have created scholarships at Central that give preference to first-generation students, and we thank them for their support.

Many of the hundreds of scholarships available at CWU are targeted toward upperclassmen. As we look to the future, we are creating a plan to help first-year and first-generation students receive the funding they need to succeed.

Scholarship applications are now open for funding in the 2023-24 academic year. Encourage the students you know to learn more about available scholarships and encourage them to apply for support today at cwu.awardspring.com.

If you are interested in creating a scholarship in your name, or in memory of a loved one, please contact Kenneth Shook, Director of Development, at 206-600-4151 or Kenneth.Shook@cwu.edu.

To learn more about scholarships at CWU and how to apply for funding, please visit cwu.edu/scholarships.



Hartless Named BOT Student Trustee for 2022-23

David Hartless was appointed by Governor Jay Inslee as the CWU Student Trustee in July, and he is now serving a one-year term on the Board of Trustees. He transferred to CWU from Yakima Valley College in 2019 and is pursuing degrees in public relations and political science. He is the president of Alpha Kappa Psi this year and plans to graduate in June.



New Chief of Staff Joins Wildcat Family

Dr. Andrew Morse became CWU's new chief of staff last summer, giving President Jim Wohlpart an important—and familiar—ally in the university's quest to make higher education more accessible to all. Morse comes to CWU from the University of Northern Iowa, where he was chief of staff since 2017. He looks forward to joining a growing institution like Central that is making a difference in people's lives.

Central Inspired Former ASCWU President to Make a Difference

By David Leder

Just seven years ago, Jasmin Means didn't know she wanted to go to college, or that she would even be accepted.

Today, the 2020 Central alumna and former ASCWU president—formerly Jasmin Washington—holds a master's degree, has authored two books, and serves as a legal navigator for violence survivors in King County. She also got married to former Ellensburg resident Evontae Means and gave birth to a son, Soule, earlier this year.

Life is good for the 25-year-old New Orleans native, but if you rewind just a few years, nothing about her current situation was certain.

"My senior year of high school, I didn't really see college as a way of life for me," said Means, who moved to Des Moines at age 9. "My parents hadn't been to college and I didn't even know what it would entail. But a friend of mine talked me into applying and I ended up getting accepted. Ellensburg was only two hours away from home, so I figured I would give it a try. And I am so glad I did!"

During her time on campus, Means served as president of the Black Student Union for two years, participated in the McNair Scholars program, took on a leadership role with ASCWU, and earned a bachelor's degree in public health.

Along the way, she overcame a learning disability (dyslexia), a physical disability (endometriosis), and psychological trauma from being a victim of intimate partner violence—not to mention the challenges associated with being a first-generation college student.

But Means' perseverance paid off, helping her get accepted to Tulane University, where she earned a master's degree in public health, with a specialization in violence prevention, last spring.



Jasmin and Evontae Means, and son Soule.

"I arrived at Tulane with an above-average knowledge of public health because the CWU program went above and beyond with its curriculum and research opportunities," she said, lauding the expertise of Professor Jill Hoxmeier and Wellness Center Director Marissa Howat, among many others.

"Dr. Hoxmeier made me feel really connected because she approached public health from a different perspective, digging into racism, discrimination, and other determinants that affect human health," Means added. "She really inspired me, and now I'm able to use what I learned to make a difference for other people."

Means works for Eastside Legal Assistance, representing violence survivors throughout King County. She also enjoys sharing her personal experiences through writing, having published two books under her maiden name. *Survivor in Me* is a children's book about surviving natural disasters (she was displaced by Hurricane Katrina as a child), and *Surviving Guilty* is about her experiences with domestic violence.

Now, she's working on her third book—no small accomplishment for a young woman with a learning disability who didn't even think college was for her.

"My mindset has always been to help change people's lives in a positive way," Means said. "I genuinely love what I do, and it all started at Central." ■

CWU Earns Four DownBeat Student Music Awards

For the first time in its history, the CWU Department of Music earned four DownBeat Student Music Awards, which were published in the June issue of the renowned "jazz, blues, and beyond" magazine. CWU's Jazz Ensemble 1 took home two awards during the 45th annual competition. Music alumna Alison Banchero ('21) and the Alison Banchero Band also received awards for their performances. The DownBeat Awards are considered the most prestigious awards in jazz education.



New Dean of College of Education and Professional Studies Introduced

Sathyanarayanan "Sathy" Rajendran was named dean of CWU College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) earlier this year. Rajendran joined the CWU faculty in 2011 and was the department chair and a professor in Engineering Technologies, Safety and Construction. He previously served as the Faculty Senate chair. Rajendran said he plans to spend ample time "listening, learning, and leaning on existing expertise" to understand more about each department.

Alumna Joins Exclusive Company with National Award

By Kathleen Singleton and Robin Burck

Education isn't only a career for Cindy Sholtys-Cromwell; it's her passion.

Over her 27-year career, she has taught high school, served as an assistant principal at Coweeman Middle School, served as principal at Butler Acres Elementary, and is now the principal of Loowit High School and Kelso Virtual Academy in southwest Washington.

"I love collaborating with other principals and educators to improve, grow, and refine systems and methods to ensure all students are achieving at high levels," said Sholtys-Cromwell, a 1995 CWU education alumna. "I can't wait to see what the future holds for my work."

One of Sholtys-Cromwell's most notable accomplishments came in 2021, when she was recognized as the National Digital Principal of the Year by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. She is extremely proud of that recognition, but she recognizes that she couldn't have achieved it on her own.

"The award is a reflection of the hard work of my amazing team and the dedication we had to the Kelso community in the middle of the pandemic," she said.

As a first-generation college student from Toppenish, Sholtys-Cromwell credits CWU with providing her a solid foundation for her career. During her time in Ellensburg, she often relied on help from university faculty and staff, and she points to that support as a key contributor to her success.

"One of the things I appreciated about Central was the phenomenal staff that were a part of my education," she said. "To this day, I reflect upon many CWU faculty members, and I strive to follow their example."



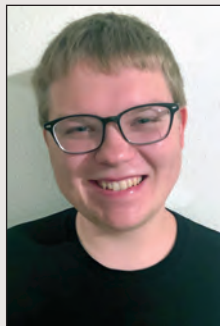
Cindy Sholtys-Cromwell

To those looking to follow in her footsteps, Sholtys-Cromwell advises them to never forget what it feels like to be a student.

"Listen to your students' voices, be a champion for them, and help every single one of them find their gifts and talents," she said.

More than 25 years after earning her degree, Sholtys-Cromwell remains appreciative of her time at CWU and hopes to encourage current and future Wildcats to dream big.

"I am very proud of the fact that I am an alumna of Central and have shared that message with many principals and educators across the nation," she said. "I would love to be able to encourage and support future and current Wildcats to make the message loud and clear that Central Washington University produces the best!" ■



Music Graduate Receives National Recognition

CWU Music graduate Jacob Batchelder was named one of 13 winners of the Yamaha Young Performing Artists (YYPA) Competition for his skill, talent, and artistry as a trumpet player. The prestigious competition celebrates student musicians across the U.S. excelling in jazz, contemporary, and classical genres. Batchelder, a 2022 alumnus, was the principal trumpet in CWU's Symphony Orchestra and also participates in other groups, including the Jazz Band.

Dining Services Wins National Award for Fresh Bar

CWU Dining Services joined some elite company this spring, earning a Loyal E. Horton Dining Award for its groundbreaking Fresh Bar concept. The annual National Association of College and University Food Services Dining Awards celebrate exemplary menus, presentations, special event planning, and new dining concepts. Central was the only state institution to receive the prestigious honor this year. Fresh Bar received a silver award in the Retail Sales – Single Concept/Multiple Concepts/Marketplace category for medium-size institutions.

Biochemistry Alum Now an Elite Scientist for USDA

By Robin Burck

Shao-Yeh Lu has worked hard to pave his own path in life, becoming the first in his family to immigrate to the United States and the first to go to college.

But after earning a bachelor's degree in economics, the native of Taiwan quickly realized that was not the field he wanted to work in for the rest of his life.

Seeking a career change, he began looking into going back to school. But he didn't want to be just a number, like he was during his initial college experience. He wanted to find a university with a better professor-to-student ratio than his previous institution, and that search ultimately led him to CWU.

"Being the first in my family to go to college—but, more importantly, the first to get an education in a new country as an immigrant—was not easy," said Lu, who earned a B.S. in chemistry from CWU in 2012. "I was lost and had no direction during my time at UW. CWU made everything so much easier to navigate with clear direction. All the programs and the financial aid needed to graduate were also instrumental."

During his time at Central, he created strong bonds with many of his professors—something he had hoped would result from his return to higher education.

"Professors from the chemistry department, such as Dr. (Todd) Kroll and Dr. (Yingbin) Ge, made challenging biochemistry and physical chemistry classes fun and interesting, and more importantly, they taught me the necessary biochemistry fundamentals and skills that I would later use in my career," Lu said.

Earning a degree from Central presented him the opportunity to pursue another career and continue his education at the same time. After graduation, Lu went on to earn a PhD and is now a research microbiologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in the Agricultural Research Services division.

"CWU was instrumental in providing the knowledge, skills, experiences, and mentorship that allowed me to be successful



Shao-Yeh Lu

in my career change, and be able to work in a profession that I love," he said.

Looking back at his time at CWU, Lu remembers one professor in particular—Dr. Holly Pinkart in the Department of Biological Sciences—who made a profound impact on his education, his career, and his life.

"She was the person who opened the door for me into the world of microbiology research," he said. "Even though I was a chemistry major, she was kind enough to allow me to conduct research in her lab and provided me the mentorship I needed to continue my graduate studies in molecular microbiology."

That experience makes Lu want to encourage others to follow their passion and know it is OK to change paths, saying, "I believe there is no timetable in life we must all follow. You must follow your passion." ■

'The College Tour' Highlights Central on Amazon Prime

A national audience is learning all there is to know about CWU on the Amazon Prime broadcast of The College Tour. Season four of the series was released on the Prime Video website in May, and viewers across the country are being exposed to everything Central has to offer through the lens of its students and alumni. Ten CWU students and recent alumni are featured during the 30-minute episode, which is also available for free on Central's website.



Alumna Becomes First Female Police Chief in Richland

CWU alumna Brigit Clary was named the first female police chief for the city of Richland earlier this year. Clary, who had been serving as the interim chief, joined the Richland Police Department in 2017 as a patrol officer. She quickly moved up the ranks as a sergeant, lieutenant, and captain, before becoming deputy police chief in November 2021. That opportunity led Clary to be named interim chief in January. Now, she is leading the entire department and its staff of 120.

Tapping the Artist Within

By Della Gonzales



Patrick Stanton first developed his artistic talents at CWU and his work is now on display at Gallery One in Ellensburg.

CWU finance director is also an accomplished artist—and his creative journey started right here on campus

Patrick Stanton is a numbers guy by trade, but he's an artist by avocation.

That passion for creating is what led him to branch out from his office duties over the years. Now, CWU's executive director of financial services is a well-respected local artist who spends just as much time in the studio as he does at work.

Stanton came to CWU as a student in 1989 to pursue degrees in economics, accounting, and finance. After graduating in 1993 and working in finance for about 10 years, he advanced to the role of director of enterprise financial services and business planning in 2002.

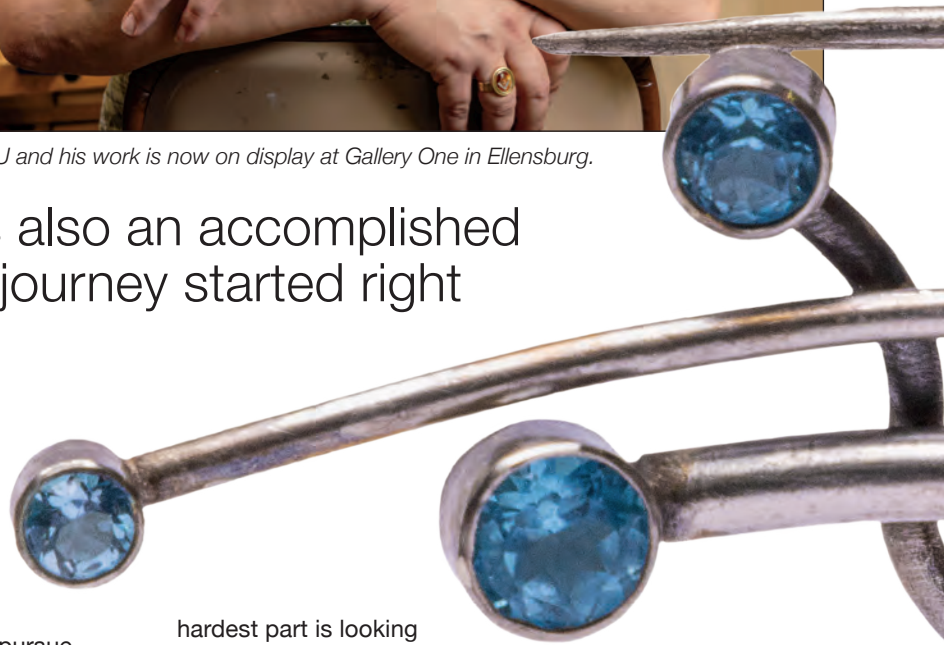
But, over time, he learned that what really stirred his soul was being creative. Everything from making jewelry to woodworking—even building oversized LEGO structures—helped Stanton realize that his true calling was working with his hands.

"The creative process is best as an escape—letting go of wanting to do something and just doing it," he said. "The

hardest part is looking at a blank piece of paper or other raw materials and not knowing how to start. The best results come about when you just go for it and let it happen, without overthinking."

As a self-described extrovert who just happened to have an aptitude for accounting, Stanton was fulfilled in his day job, but he needed a creative outlet and was seeking more human interaction. He was still early in his career at CWU when he decided to take advantage of the employee tuition benefit and enroll in a class.

Stanton had always been curious about how jewelry was made, so he figured a metal-smithing course might





give him an interesting creative outlet. He quickly amassed 65 credits before his professor eventually went on sabbatical. That's when he transitioned to a wood-design course and continued immersing himself in the creative process.

Through his time in these courses, Stanton developed a passion and talent for jewelry making that would eventually expand into other art forms. His vibrant and playful personality emanates from the fully functional LEGO cuckoo clock that resides in his studio at Gallery One in downtown Ellensburg.

"Many of these are transferable skills," he said. "The planning process, conceptualization, and execution are similar in many art forms—or gardening or cooking for that matter. People need an outlet, and it doesn't matter what it is."

Stanton's eye for design and attention to detail can be seen in every ring and necklace he crafts. His art is special in that every aspect of each piece he creates is intentional and has a purpose and/or meaning. Each piece has a story, and he can tell you where the stones came from, where he obtained the metal, how he worked with it and why, and the thought process behind his design.

Stanton's art can be
found on display at Gallery
One, or you might
catch a glimpse

of one of his rings, or a set of earrings on someone around town. However, you won't find any of his works for sale.

"I make most of my jewelry in sizes that fit me or my wife," Stanton said, adding that he enjoys donating pieces for charity auctions. "I don't sell anything. I already have a job, and I want to keep this a hobby."

Stanton spends about 15 hours per week in his Gallery One studio, having discovered that creating art is "like therapy" for him.

"It's like using a completely different part of your mind," he said. "Going to the studio is a creative outlet for me."

Outside of the university and Gallery One, Stanton and his wife, Jodi Hctor, are both actively involved in the community. Stanton served the local Red Cross chapter for 10 years as treasurer and president, before taking over as the secretary for the Ellensburg Masonic Lodge in 2008—a role he still serves in today.

No matter what he does in his spare time, Stanton always comes back to his art, and how his training at CWU led to an entirely new outlook on life. In fact, he got so much out of pursuing his artistic interests that he believes everyone should take an art class during their time on campus.

"If I could pass along anything, it would be to take classes!" he said. "You can do anything for 10 weeks, and you will get to learn a new skill and interact with students. It is truly rewarding." ■





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