CRIMSON & BLACK

Central Washington University

Spring 2022

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On the Cover: *Jim Wohlpart was installed as the 15th president of Central Washington University on May 19, 2022.* Photograph: David Dick.

Left: *Skeletal models wait to be unpacked in the Health Sciences building. It is the first time Food Science and Nutrition, Clinical Physiology, Exercise Science, EMS/Paramedicine, and Public Health have all been under one roof.* Photograph: David Dick.

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CWU PRESIDENT
Jim Wohlpart

EDITORS
Kremiere Jackson, Vice President of Public Affairs
Paul Elstone, Vice President of University Advancement
David Leder, Content Writer/Editor, Public Affairs

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS/EDITORS
Robin Burck ('17), Matt Carstens ('11), Hayley Harrell, David Leder, Kathleen Singleton ('22), Rune Torgersen ('18)

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Bret Bleggi, Barb Goll, Kevin Hill ('12)

PHOTOGRAPHY
David Dick ('97), Department of Public Affairs stock, and others as credited.

Central Washington University is an EEO/AA/Title IX Institution.
Alternative format: DS@cwu.edu.

COMMENTS:
editor@cwucrimsonandblack.com

UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION AT:
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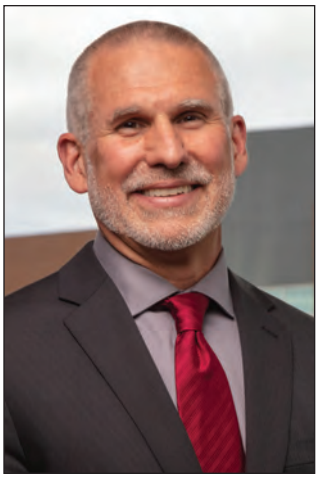
Email: alumni@cwu.edu
Call: 509-963-2160 or 1-877-846-2287

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Wildcats,

Spring is in the air, and that means a time for new beginnings at Central Washington University.

As we send our 2022 graduates out into the world, I can't help but reflect on all of our successes and the many challenges we have overcome to reach this point. For most of us, this spring carries with it a special feeling of accomplishment after enduring two years of stops and starts, postponements, and cancellations. Now, we are fortunate to celebrate a fresh start, both for the university and the communities we serve.

It's difficult for me to grasp that I am already celebrating my one-year anniversary as a member of the Wildcat family. In many ways, it still feels like I am just getting started on an endlessly rewarding journey. But, at the same time, I feel a great sense of pride in knowing how much we have achieved during my short time here.

Day after day, I am inspired by the genuine dedication of our faculty and staff, who work tirelessly to provide our increasingly diverse student body with the knowledge, resources, and life skills they need to conquer real-world problems and develop modern-day solutions.

But they can't do it alone. Our students—many who come from underrepresented backgrounds—have shown an unbelievable amount of perseverance to get to where they are today. A desire to guide and shape future professionals is the main reason I chose to pursue a career in higher education, and after observing the work of our students over the past year, I can confidently say that CWU's future is bright.

We are also fortunate to have such strong support from the state, including the commitment to develop modern, state-of-the-art facilities, like the new $60 million Health Sciences Building featured in this edition of *Crimson & Black*. We are planning even more campus upgrades, and we hope these improvements will help us attract even more elite talent for our award-winning faculty.

Above all, CWU aims to give our students hands-on learning experiences inside and outside the classroom, with an emphasis on building personal relationships and professional networking opportunities. As our graduates are well aware, we expose our students to real-world problems that prepare them to perform at a high level from day one—and that is why so many of our alumni excel in their chosen fields.

As we begin to chart a prosperous future for Central, I can't express how honored I feel to be part of such a uniquely influential institution. We are in a category of one. I hope you enjoy this edition, and I look forward to sharing even more CWU success stories in the years to come.

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.

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Your generosity helps CWU deliver a transformative education to every student so they have the opportunities and experiences they need to excel in their fields and become the leaders, thinkers, and innovators of tomorrow.

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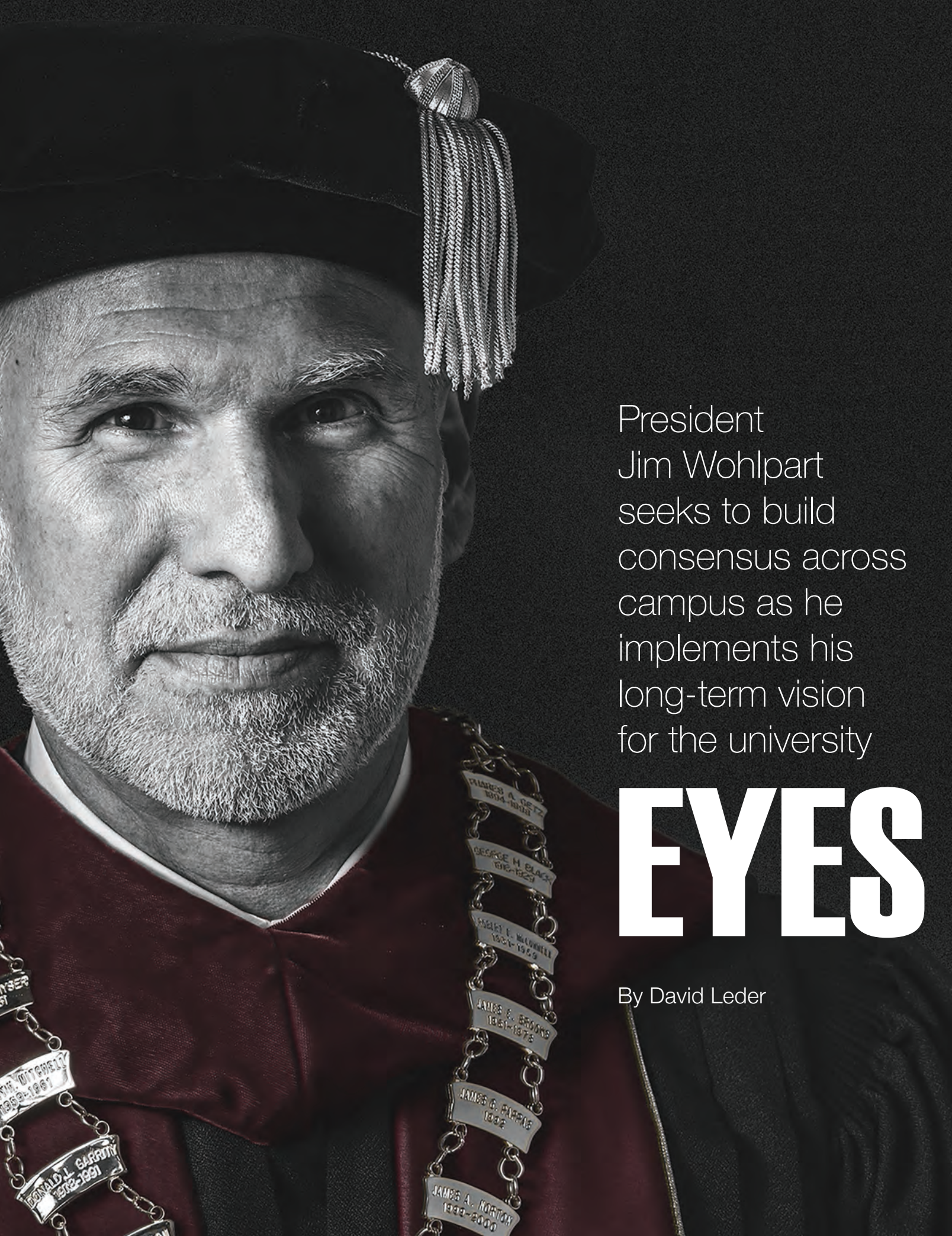


President Jim Wohlpart seeks to build consensus across campus as he implements his long-term vision for the university

EYES

By David Leder

Long before he was named the 15th president of Central Washington University, Jim Wohlpart was drawn to the institution because of its 130-year tradition of serving students from all different walks of life.

As a 25-year veteran of higher education leadership, he felt a personal connection to Central's faculty and staff, who have built a reputation for giving students the knowledge, practical experiences, and life skills they need to carve out successful careers and make the world a better place.

"What I saw in CWU was the great work that was happening with students, and I was eager to become part of that community," said Wohlpart, who became a Wildcat in June 2021, with his official installation taking place May 19 of this year. "The faculty and staff here truly make a difference in the lives of students, their families, and their communities."

But it wasn't only the professors, lecturers, and support staff who inspired Wohlpart to pursue the opportunity to join Central. The students themselves also played a significant role in his decision to move out west after spending six years at the University of Northern Iowa as the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs.

"CWU provides access to higher education for a unique type of student—determined, hard-working, persistent, and even tenacious, but also humble, kind, and generous," said Wohlpart, who spent 21 years at Florida Gulf Coast University before his time at UNI. "The alchemy that happens here both inside and outside the classroom provides these students with what they need to be prepared for professional careers, civic agency, and a life of purpose and meaning."

Needless to say, the president has been impressed—even overjoyed—by his frequent interactions on campus and in the community since he arrived in Ellensburg last spring with his wife, Sasha, and their two dogs, Annabelle and Leopold. During the past year, he has spent countless hours listening to key stakeholders, gathering information about what he can do to further elevate CWU's stature around the state and the region.

In talking to students, employees, alumni, donors, legislators, community leaders, and business owners over the past year, Wohlpart's primary takeaway is that Central "transforms lives by providing an engaged learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom." As the university develops a focused and clarifying vision, mission, and strategic plan—a process that began last fall—it will elevate this work of providing active and meaningful learning experiences.

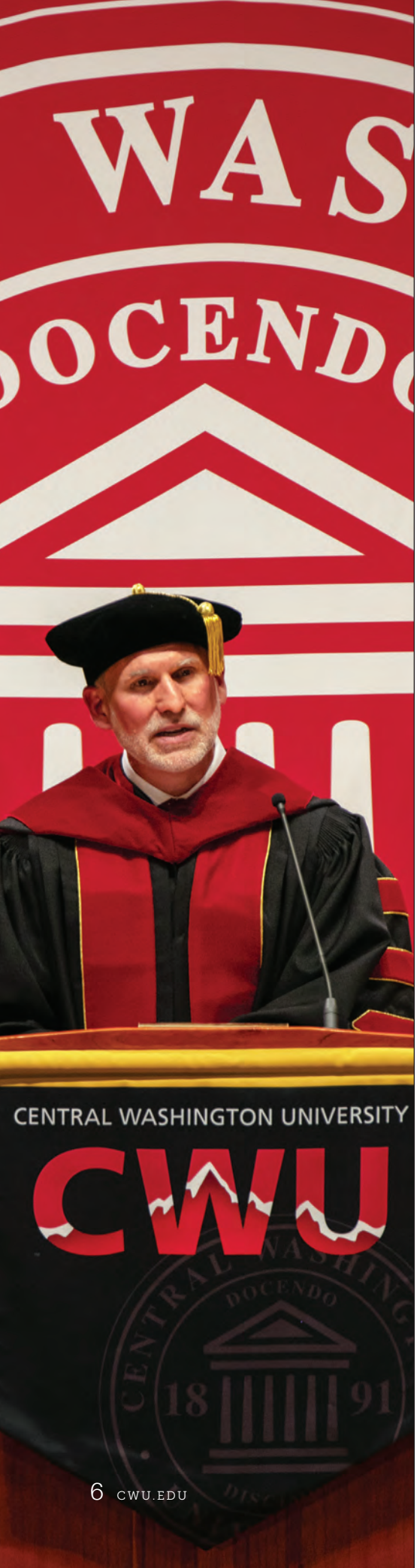
ON THE FUTURE

"Our students are given the opportunity to apply their learning in real-world settings, solving real-world problems," he said. "This is what employers are looking for—graduates who can hit the ground running and add value on day one."

Another critical way in which Central contributes to student success, he noted, is through relationship-building and one-on-one instruction. The personal learning experiences students enjoy at Central aren't as common at larger institutions, and Wohlpart believes these relationships are a major reason CWU is in a category of one.

"One of the things I've heard over and over again from alumni is the way in which a single faculty member or staff member got to know them, took an interest in their journey, and helped them find their purpose and passion," he said.

CWU President Jim Wohlpart



Vision Takes Shape

As the world of higher education becomes more competitive every year, Wohlpart understands that the status quo will not suffice if CWU is going to achieve its true potential. He has heard repeatedly that the university must adapt to academia's ever-changing landscape, which led him to convene a team of faculty and staff to create a new vision, mission, and strategic plan for the institution.

The president's objective for the committee is to establish a bold, forward-looking vision that will propel the university forward. Along the way, he is seeking consensus around a narrow vision that CWU "can be really good at, and be leaders at, but that is still off on the horizon."

"We need a vision that can pull the whole community forward," Wohlpart said. "We do such great work here, making an incredible difference in the lives of our students, our employees, and the local community. But can we take that work to the next level? Attract even more students who would benefit from the type of educational experience we offer and help them succeed? If we can, our ability to transform even more lives will be expanded."

However, if the university is to accomplish these short- and long-term benchmarks, Wohlpart says increasing enrollment will be paramount. He would like to see student numbers return to 11,000 to 12,000—compared to roughly 10,000 in each of the past two years—so Central can offer a more rich, vibrant campus experience.

"Increased enrollment will make our campus more alive, and it will allow us to strengthen our academic programs and add new programs in student engagement and success," he said, adding that CWU is currently searching for a vice president for student engagement and success. "In order to increase our enrollment, we will also need to increase our retention rates and graduation rates for all students, especially those from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. We will also be able to provide better support for our faculty and staff."

Another potential calling card for the university will be the growing number of new and renovated facilities on the Ellensburg campus. In addition to the $60 million Health Sciences Building (which opened this spring) and the $60.5 million Health Education project (which broke ground this winter and includes a renovation of Nicholson Pavilion), CWU is hoping to advance capital projects for Psychology, Art + Design, and Family and Consumer Sciences in the years to come. The concept for a multicultural center is also in the works.

"Diversity is a source of strength and renewal—of innovation and creativity—and we need to find ways to sustain and celebrate the various cultures, histories, languages, literacies, and backgrounds that our students bring with them to campus," Wohlpart said. "A multicultural center would allow us to do just that."

From left: daughter Kathryn Wohlpart, President Wohlpart, wife Sasha Wohlpart, and aunt Sandy Linsin at the ice cream social.

New Funding Sources

As Central advances toward its goal of developing more student-enrichment programs and upgrading campus facilities, Wohlpart emphasized that another major piece of the puzzle will be funding. Since his arrival, he has been seeking to expand the Office of University Advancement so the university can build new alumni partnerships and business relationships that will help CWU become even more of a destination.

Vice President of University Advancement Paul Elstone is working alongside Wohlpart to identify and cultivate new funding sources so Central can share its story more broadly with alumni, donors, and state lawmakers.

"If we can expand the gifts brought into the university and show our supporters the difference that their gifts make, we can continue to grow our impact," Wohlpart said. "We have such a remarkable story to tell, and we believe that if we do that more effectively, this will help us increase our enrollment."

Wohlpart and Elstone understand tapping into new financial resources—scholarships, endowments, and grants—will be a multi-year process, and it will involve a great deal of time and travel. They already have visited alumni in Arizona, California, and all over Washington, and they are exploring more outreach opportunities in the coming year. Wohlpart also plans to spend more time in Olympia, working with legislators on capital funding requests to further enhance CWU's physical footprint.

"They always have wonderful things to say about CWU," he said. "We need to continue to build those relationships so we can gain even more support at the state level."

Strong Reception

After one year on the job, Wohlpart couldn't be more pleased with the opportunity he's been given to join CWU. Likewise, his colleagues and members of the student body couldn't be any happier with their new leader. The shared sentiment across campus seems to be that this president is a perfect fit for Central.

"President Wohlpart has been incredibly supportive of student concerns, and he has met with us numerous times to work on developing solutions to those concerns," said ASCWU President Madeline Koval, who serves on the Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan Task Force. "He is working to reunite this campus … and from what we have seen, Jim is trying to modernize CWU's culture and launch us into the future."

The CWU community celebrated President Jim Wohlpart's installation on May 19 with an ice cream social, tree-planting, and reception. Pictured above with Wohlpart: Board of Trustees Vice Chair Ray Conner; below: guests toast the president.

Koval noted that the university will face some "growing pains" as it shifts collectively toward a new way of thinking, but she believes Wohlpart has put the university on the right track.

"In the long term, this will make CWU a more organized, equity-minded, and harmonious place for students, faculty, and staff," she said, adding that she and her peers appreciate the president's insistence that everyone's voice be given equal value.

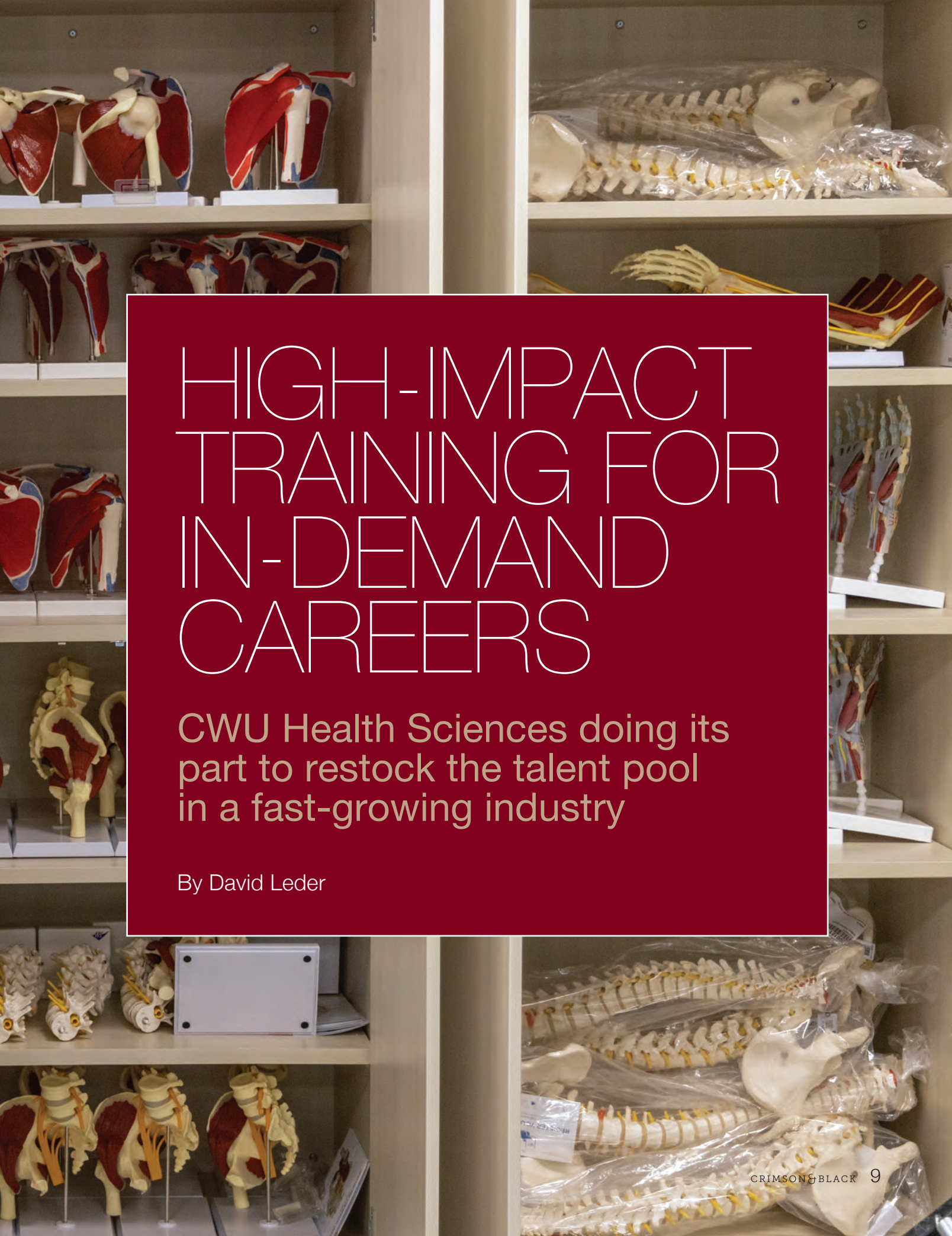
Sigrid Davison, the associate director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, offered a similar take as her student colleague on the task force. She pointed to Wohlpart's ability to adapt to disparate groups on campus and in the community, and she applauded him for making a genuine effort to bring people together.

"He is thoughtful and intentional with his actions, and he is proactive about communicating, which helps soothe the power imbalance between those who are in the know and those who are not," Davison said.

Aside from Wohlpart's relatability, adaptability, and desire to unite people, Davison appreciates his relational approach to leadership. She also likes how the president listens to and embraces a wide variety of perspectives.

"Leadership is a skill, and it happens within a social context," Davison said. "A good leader adapts their approach to the context they find themselves in, and this president is able to step into other people's worldviews. I believe this leadership approach will be highly effective in advancing CWU into the future." ■

Exercise Science Professor Ken Kladnik examines an anatomical model with student Caleb Volkoff.



HIGH-IMPACT TRAINING FOR IN-DEMAND CAREERS

CWU Health Sciences doing its part to restock the talent pool in a fast-growing industry

By David Leder

You can't help others if you don't help yourself first. No one understands this concept better than health sciences majors who spend countless hours mastering their craft so they can one day apply their expertise toward the common good.

A desire to improve people's lives—along with the skyrocketing need for health care professionals nationwide—are among the main reasons so many college students these days are gravitating toward health sciences careers. The CWU Health Sciences department is keenly aware of the vital role it plays in the big picture, providing its students with a well-rounded foundation of scientific knowledge that can spawn any number of career directions.

Whether they want to become doctors, nurses, dietitians, nutritionists, dentists, physical therapists, epidemiologists, emergency medical technicians (EMT), educators, or clinical physiologists—all of which are critically needed in today's society—health sciences majors recognize that the specialized training they receive here at Central will lead to limitless potential.

"Job prospects in health sciences are good, largely because we have excellent programs and there is a growing need for health care professionals in this state and around the country," said Ethan Bergman, the department chair and a professor of nutrition. "Our graduates are highly sought after, and because of that, they are also able to receive good salaries right away."

Health sciences is one of the fastest-growing professions in the country, mirroring the meteoric rise of health care-related positions over the past decade. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, employment in health care occupations is projected to grow 16 percent between now and 2030—much faster than the average for all occupations—adding about 2.6 million new jobs to the national economy.

The financial outlook is also brighter than most other occupations, boasting a $69,870 median annual wage for health care practitioners and technical occupations, compared to the median annual wage for all occupations ($41,950). Thanks to the training and real-world experience they receive at CWU, Wildcat alumni tend to have an advantage from the beginning.

"All of our programs are very highly regarded, and we have a lot of very successful graduates that come out of CWU," Bergman said. "For example, our paramedicine program has been around for nearly 50 years, and many of the EMTs around the state—and even the country—were trained here.

"We also have graduates working in highly regarded PhD programs, at medical schools, the state Department of Health, the National Institutes of Health, and many other high-profile organizations," he added. "We truly feel like we are making a difference because we are sending so much high-level talent out into the world."

Aside from job availability and financial incentives, variety is another major draw for young professionals considering the health sciences field. The industry encompasses everything from medicine to public health; physical therapy to nutrition; optometry to medical transcription—plus a wide array of specialties that are in increasingly high demand nationwide.

Those who enjoy helping others and seek a rewarding, lucrative career are beginning to see the advantages of pursuing the myriad health-care career opportunities that have arisen over the past decade. CWU continues to be at the forefront of this trend, and the institution has taken some important steps to solidify its role as a trusted training ground for the health sciences professionals of tomorrow.

Most notably, the university built a $60 million Health Sciences Building that opened this spring, complete with high-tech research equipment, state-of-the-art laboratories, interactive technology, and industry-specific amenities designed to give students as much real-world experience as possible before sending them out into the workforce.

Assistant Professor Robert Pritchett, center, measures the oxygen consumption of Miranda Roseman during an exercise science class.

"The new Health Sciences Building provides the learning environment that will allow our graduates to enter their careers with an outstanding knowledge base and experience so that they are better able to serve society," Bergman said.

Hands-On Learning

The entire faculty is looking forward to preparing the next generation of health sciences professionals in an environment that is better-suited to the needs of today's industry than the learning facilities previously spread across campus.

The unrivaled labs for nutrition, paramedicine, biomechanics, exercise physiology, clinical physiology, anatomy, and other disciplines have instantly elevated CWU's stature in the health sciences education community, and these spaces will provide added incentive for prospective students and faculty to consider Central.

"This new facility will help attract more people from around the world, and that will hopefully bring more money, experience, and students to all of our programs," said Nutrition Professor Tafere Belay, who looks forward to using the new food science laboratories for his micronutrient deficiency research.

"It's very important that we have these state-of-the-art labs now because they will encourage more students and researchers to consider Central," he added. "These facilities are very unique, and we need to keep promoting that."

Similarly, the new biomechanics lab offers students and researchers with unparalleled opportunities to study human movement techniques, the impact exercise has upon skeletal muscles, the importance of proper posture, and more. The lab will provide an essential knowledge base for students, helping them "visualize physics," according to biomechanics Professor Karen Roemer.

"For most of them, these labs are probably going to be the last time they will have access to facilities like this," she said. "If you become a physical therapist, for example, you have to work off the knowledge you gained in your labs. You will no longer be able to use force plates to visualize force, or use the special instruments we use to monitor muscle activation."

Employing real-life examples to illustrate biomechanics principles is one of the most important benefits of the new biomechanics lab, Roemer believes.

"The value of having access to these labs cannot be overstated," she said. "These experiences have the potential to help them for the rest of their careers."

Likewise, the Laboratory for Anatomical Discovery inside the new building is truly one-of-a-kind, especially for a regional institution like CWU. Integrative Human Physiology Professor Leo D'Acquisto believes the new lab will entice more people interested in clinical and exercise physiology, pre-physical therapy, athletic training, and pre-medicine to attend Central. The lab also will be available to high school science classes and health practitioners in the region so they can explore the inner workings of the human body in more detail.

"There aren't many schools our size that use human cadavers as a central educational tool," D'Acquisto said. "And now, with this laboratory, we can do even more. The new space will allow us to work with six to eight cadavers at one time, so our students can break up into small groups as they learn about the structures in the human body."

The new anatomy lab is more than twice as large as the former space. Plus, it offers better lighting and features technology that allows students to view three-dimensional structures on screen. Anatomical models are also being used to provide a more "blended" learning environment.

"Our students get quite the experience," D'Acquisto said. "They get to compare and contrast between models and cadavers, and that is a wonderful way to learn. The blended approach creates a rich teaching and learning environment, and that's what we're all about here."

The lighting in each tasting room in the sample lab can be color adjusted to limit bias based on the color of food being taste-tested.

National, Global Impact

It's difficult to exaggerate the potential impact the evolving CWU Health Sciences department—with its new building and world-renowned faculty—could have on the advancement of national, regional, and global health sciences initiatives.

Here on the home front, the demand for nurses, paramedics, public health specialists, epidemiologists, nutritionists, physical therapists, and related professions has never been higher, prompting CWU to do whatever it can to keep the professional talent pool stocked.

The Health Sciences curriculum provides students with a knowledge base that can help them in any number of careers. And just because they start in one area doesn't mean they can't branch off into a different discipline later on. The variety and depth of instruction offered at CWU make this possible.

"We focus on every part of the life cycle, from a woman who is thinking about having a baby, to preparing that person for giving birth, to when the baby is born, and throughout their growing years—all the way through their life," said Bergman, the department chair.

"We then provide our students with the necessary tools to help people maintain healthy lifestyles, from nutrition to public health to clinical physiology. Our graduates come out of here with a very broad understanding of how the human body works and how to keep people healthy so they can live longer."

Looking at health sciences from a global perspective, CWU also has the potential to influence how certain health conditions, like micronutrient deficiencies, are studied in other countries.

Belay, the nutrition professor, also sees future opportunities for the department to expand its global reach. The native of Ethiopia has spent much of his career studying third-world health conditions, and he believes it's time for CWU students to become more involved in what's happening around the world.

That means encouraging more health sciences students to study abroad.

"Global nutrition is a lot more complicated than what's happening here in the U.S.," Belay said. "When students go abroad and experience some of these differences for themselves, it encourages them to contribute more to those efforts instead of only what's happening at home.

"Those experiences have the potential to make their future contributions even more significant," he added. "And if we start to think more globally with regard to worldwide nutrition, I believe we can broaden our impact."

The same holds true for public health, biomechanics, exercise science, paramedicine, and other disciplines that fall under the CWU Health Sciences umbrella. For the past dozen years, the research and training that has taken place on the Ellensburg campus has helped people lead healthier lives—and it has helped make the world a better place. Now, the department wants to shoot for the stars.

"Having the new building is great, but we also have a big responsibility," Belay said. "Now, we have all the tools and the labs that we need to do the kind of influential work that can help people around the world. This is an exciting start, but we also have a big challenge ahead of us. And, with our amazing faculty and students, I believe Central will meet that challenge." ■

Healthy Habits are Central to

By Hayley Harrell

Healthy mind, healthy body. You can have one without the other, but combining the two will surely put you on a path toward overall wellness.

CWU Health Sciences disciplines focus on helping people become better versions of themselves, whether it's eating better (nutrition), exercising more efficiently (biomechanics, physiology), or learning how to safeguard the health of others (public health).

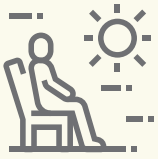
And when you include the future paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and pre-med students who come out of this growing department, it's safe to say our communities are safer and healthier because of these CWU students and faculty.

Here are some recommendations for how to attain peak physical and mental shape:

- **Eating Right:** Feed your body to fuel your day the right way. Experiment with new foods like fresh-pressed juices, buckwheat waffles, superfood bowls, and plant-based protein substitutes. You can also take a cooking class and learn healthy food preparation techniques from CWU alumni now serving the community.

- **Daily Exercise:** Be sure to get in your steps and hit the weights so you can maintain strong muscles and bones. The CWU campus offers many opportunities for faculty, staff, and students, including a 50-foot climbing wall, a full-service exercise facility, a swimming pool, and more.

- **Soak Up the Sun:** Remember to get plenty of vitamin D to give your body the nutrients it needs to keep you going strong. You can take a walk around the neighborhood, or a bicycle ride along the Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail. This 250-mile trail invites you to travel from the forested Cascades to the mighty Columbia River, all without leaving Kittitas County. Or, just sit on the deck or by the pool—any outside time counts.



- **Meditation:** Practice mindfulness in small moments throughout your day. Find a place that feels calm and quiet, feel your breath as it goes in and out, notice when your mind has wandered, and return your attention to your breathing. Practice this in 5- to 10-minute increments, as time allows, during your busy week.

- **Interpersonal Relationships:** Social interactions will keep you sharp and invigorated. They may also stir your soul. If you're looking for a social outlet, try participating in a new activity or reconnecting with an old friend. It could be a fellow Wildcat you have lost touch with, someone you forgot to call back, or a public health leader who has guided your community through hard times. The power of positive connections can do wonders for our well-being.

BUILDING MOMENTUM

By Matt Carstens

State-of-the-Art Facility Connects All Disciplines Under One Roof and Exposes Students to Real-World Settings, Scenarios

The best things in life are usually worth the wait.

That old refrain couldn't be more true for CWU's Department of Health Sciences, which was established in 2008 but has never had a place to call home. Until now.

After 14 years of hard work, planning, and anticipation, department leaders can hardly believe their good fortune now that the $60 million Health Sciences Building has finally opened on the Ellensburg campus.

And make no mistake: There was plenty of waiting involved.

"It's been a long process," said Vincent Nethery, a Clinical Physiology professor and the department's founding chair. "Sometimes progress doesn't quite go at the speed you'd like, but that happens in many aspects of life. And we saw continual progress along the way."

Since Health Sciences was introduced, the department has been spread out over several buildings on the Ellensburg campus, including Michaelsen Hall, Black Hall, Farrell Hall, Purser Hall, and the Psychology Building.

But starting in the spring quarter, the Clinical Physiology, EMS/Paramedicine, Exercise Science, Food Science and Nutrition, Public Health, and Integrative Human Physiology programs were all united under the same roof for the first time.

Finding a permanent home was always the department's goal, and despite some occasional hiccups, the project continued moving forward thanks to consistent support from the administration, academic colleagues, and support staff.

Slowly but surely, the university secured funding through different phases of the state's capital budget cycles and eventually broke ground on the three-story, 81,395-square-foot structure in early 2020.

It took a little longer than expected, but their dreams have finally become reality.

"Even if it didn't quite fit the original timeline, that was a great motivation and incentive to continue to pursue a lot of the developments that have taken place within the department itself," Nethery said. "We knew that, down the road, we would have a facility that would not only be centralized for the entire department, but also incredibly functional for the things that go on in the educational setting."

When the Health Sciences Building opened in March, it became the final addition to CWU's "Science Neighborhood," a concept that began in September 1998 with the introduction of Science I on the west end of campus.

The neighborhood also includes Dean Hall (geography), Discovery Hall (geology and physics), Hogue Technology (mechanical, industrial, electronics engineering), and Samuelson Hall (computer science, sociology, mathematics, and ITAM). The original tenant, Science I, houses the biology and chemistry departments.

"A lot of what we wanted to do with this building is to just be all in the same place," said Ethan Bergman, registered dietitian/nutritionist and Health Sciences department chair. "A lot of collaboration happens when you run into people and say, 'I'm interested in doing this project ... why don't we talk about it?'

"We had offices all over the place and didn't have the opportunity to sit down together and stick our heads in an office and ask a question."

Real-World Training

One of the consistent themes throughout the building is its ability to put students in real-world environments—a feature that had been lacking for several of the department's programs under the previous scattered setup.

In emergency medicine, for example, future paramedicine and EMT professionals had to do their training in makeshift spaces with temporary partitions, where they performed simulated trauma exercises on volunteers.

"Volunteers were spilling out into hallways and other general open walk areas as other students were walking down the hallways," Nethery said. "And they were stepping over mannequins or stepping around students in the hallway."

The new building features a simulated ambulance where students are able to work in a real-life setting and know exactly what the layout will be in the field. There also are a half dozen simulated rooms, including a kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living room that allow them to practice different scenarios.

"They can have this experience where there's a heart attack patient in the kitchen, and the person is slumped over a kitchen table, for example," Nethery said. "Paramedic students have to walk into that area and they have to negotiate chairs and tables and other things that are in a kitchen. They get that real-world experience, and it's a tremendous learning setting for them."

Nutrition Lab Upgrades

Meanwhile, all of the nutrition laboratories feature significant upgrades for prospective nutritionists and dietitians.

For starters, a quantity food lab filled with equipment found in large restaurants and commercial facilities will give students the opportunity to modify recipes and analyze nutrients in a setting similar to what they would find in a hospital or school.

Another key addition includes sensory evaluation tasting booths, where volunteers can taste different foods. The interactive process will allow students to control certain variables that might affect the taster's response.

"The sensory evaluation labs will allow people to taste two products in a very controlled environment," Bergman said. "We can change the color of the environment, so if there's a difference in color between the two products, we can use a red light to overshadow that."

The labs also feature rotating windows, which give the students staging the test an opportunity to present the products to people in the tasting booths in a very controlled setting. The subjects can then respond using an iPad.

"This will be a very well-controlled environment for doing taste testing," Bergman said.

Additional Highlights

A specialized environmental chamber will allow the examination of a multitude of physiologic and somatic responses to hostile climates, including heat, cold, and altitude. For example, first responders, military, and firefighters are often faced with such conditions while wearing heavy protective gear, and the physiologic challenges are significant. Aspects such as hydration and equipment design are important factors that can be studied.

Bergman noted that the environmental chamber can control oxygen levels, temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure. What's more, it can simulate up to 16,000 feet of elevation.

"(Students can see) what happens when someone is exercising or climbing at high elevation," he said. "That's a real exciting part of our lab."

The introduction of a comprehensive Morphology Lab will provide a variety of tools including hydro-densitometry and the application of Archimedes principles, air-displacement, Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA), and ultrasound for the assessment of structure and its links to health and function.

On the biomechanics side, the laboratories use equipment that monitors motion with digital cameras and electrodes, as well as floors with force plates, allowing students to measure and analyze how a person moves through space.

For those studying anatomy, human cadavers are an indispensable tool for students, and the new building offers a highly functional anatomy laboratory. This allows the program to expertly control lighting and temperature, while using cameras to display specific presentations on large screens for all to see.

"Before this space was available, we had our cadavers in a modified classroom, and trying to maintain the appropriate environment was quite difficult," Bergman said. "This is a state-of-the-art gross anatomy lab with cadavers and anatomical models."

Building for the Future

Nethery, who has been with the project since its inception, joked he probably won't be hanging around another 15 years. But he will no doubt keep a watchful eye on the department, and he is excited for the university to take advantage of all the opportunities the building will provide.

"We think about how the health care industry is in drastic need of more provider professionals —especially in rural areas," Nethery said. "CWU is the only major state university between the Cascade Range and Spokane, and from the Canadian to Oregon borders.

"I think it's a tremendous opportunity for the administrators of the university to say, 'Hey look, we've got this excellent facility. How can we build on this down the road, and how can we introduce programs that will better meet the health care needs of the Central Washington corridor?'"

Nethery noted that many students go elsewhere to complete further professional health care provider programs such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and physician assistant, once they finish their undergraduate degrees at CWU.

But now, with the Health Sciences Building, the university is well-equipped to consider the introduction of some post-graduate professional programs to retain those well-qualified students from Central—and attract new ones to campus.

"I think the university is in a great position to look at how we can take advantage of this facility in the best way possible," he said. "Not only to promote what the university does, but to help the university better meet the needs of rural society." ■

Going Green

All Washington state-funded buildings are required to achieve at least a silver certification from Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), which provides a framework for healthy, highly efficient, and cost-saving green buildings.

Some LEED features in the Health Sciences Building include:

- A specially designed roof features a 9,500-square-foot solar array comprised of three sections.
- A highly sophisticated direct digital control (DDC) environmental management system has internal heat pumps capable of transferring energy around the building.
- A "waste heat recovery jacket" was installed on the exhaust stack at the central heating plant to provide heat for the building. This will allow the facility to be heated with energy that would otherwise be wasted.
- Interior daylight controls limit energy consumption.
- Interior lighting created by light emitting diodes (LED).
- Limited number of parking spots encourage non-motorized transportation, which also promotes exercise.
- A high percentage of materials were recycled from Hertz Hall, which was demolished to create the site.
- Building features a variety of sustainable, recycled, and low-emission materials.
- 13 vehicle charging stations in the parking lot encourage use of electric vehicles.

Photo: The new building features an integrated experiential graphic design package that complements the architectural environment and enhances the user experience.

Practical Experience Sets Stage for Success

By Rune Torgersen

CWU Health Sciences graduates emerge well-prepared to handle real-world situations thanks to hands-on training, faculty expertise

As the world begins to emerge from a two-year international public health crisis, the demand for qualified health sciences professionals has never been higher.

This ever-evolving field requires the next generation of professionals to have hands-on experience and an intimate knowledge of modern practices from the moment they graduate, and CWU's Department of Health Sciences has taken this concept to heart.

Over the past 12 years, Central has developed into one of the industry's best at providing this elite level of training. From paramedicine and dietetics to clinical physiology and public health, CWU introduces its students to every facet of the health sciences profession, providing them with the skills they need to pursue advanced studies or thrive in their chosen field right away.

This intense focus on real-world applications drives the department's success, and with a new facility opening this year, department Chair Ethan Bergman believes this lofty success rate will only accelerate.

"It's a blossoming field," he said. "There are more and more needs for well-trained professionals all the time, and those professionals need the kind of hands-on experience we provide to succeed out in the field."

When exploring the history of the Health Sciences department, a common thread of adaptability and awareness emerges for each of its programs. The faculty strives to provide students with a training ground that represents the industry's current climate, and by working with employers across the state as part of their education, Central graduates emerge well-prepared for the stresses and complexities of the work.

In fact, some step into professional roles before they even complete their studies. When internships became less attainable during the pandemic, Public Health lecturer Amie Wojtyna started an Academic Service Learning (ASL) program that put students to work in a call center to help Kittitas County officials track cases and field requests from quarantined students.

"The students had an amazing experience," she said. "Through this work, they got trained in contact tracing, case investigation, cultural competency, HIPAA, working with human subjects, and many other professionally applicable skill sets."

Wojtyna is an infectious disease epidemiologist who spent years working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She is glad she had a chance to pass along that experience to her students, and the institution as a whole, during the pandemic.

While many health sciences disciplines take place chiefly in clinics or labs, the data analysis and applied communication Wojtyna imparts to her students are just as vital in the real world. Writing grant proposals, record-keeping and reporting, lobbying, and writing legislation each serve to keep information flowing—and, most importantly, to keep the population healthy.

"At a health department, you have infectious disease reports coming in daily, even if it's not a pandemic," Wojtyna said. "Tracking them may not be glamorous work, but it's super important, and our students leave CWU prepared for those kinds of tasks as well."

"We try to make the transition from education to experience as seamless as possible, so our students can go out there and be immediately effective."

—ETHAN BERGMAN

CWU's Health Sciences faculty remain active in the field outside of their involvement with the university, which contributes to the school's reputation of professionalism and involvement. Those experiences also help forge relationships between employers and faculty that ultimately benefit students.

It's no wonder, then, that Health Sciences graduates enjoy such a high job placement rate. For instance, as a dietetics alumni survey in 2017-18 revealed: "of graduates who seek employment, 100% were employed in nutrition or dietetics or a related field within 12 months of program completion."

Likewise, most students in the Paramedicine program can expect to be hired almost immediately upon graduation, thanks in part to CWU's nearly 50-year history of excellence in training paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs). With the program's sterling reputation, employers feel confident that graduates can perform at the level needed to save lives.

"We provide that real-world component of training that ensures students get what they need," Bergman said, adding that accredited programs like the one at Central must self-evaluate every seven years to guarantee continued excellence.

"They're exposed to equipment and its use so that when they go out in the field, they're already familiar with it. We try to make the transition from education to experience as seamless as possible, so our students can go out there and be immediately effective."

By the time Health Sciences students graduate, they're equipped with several years of field experience. Every element of the program ties back to the real world, and the experiences stay with students far beyond the confines of the classroom.

"All of the project work that we have students do are items that I hope they are putting on their resumes," Wojtyna said. "Even if it's coursework—if you're writing a grant proposal, you're writing a real grant proposal. If you're conducting contact-tracing, that's real contact-tracing. If you've done it here, you've done it, period." ■

Left: Graduate student Alberto Saldaña and lecturer Amie Wojtyna work on a simulated public health call center.

PUTTING THEIR HEADS TOGETHER

CWU instructors work closely with students on research projects, helping jumpstart their careers

By David Leder

"The relationships we have with our students are reciprocal—we get as much out of them as they do out of us."

—JARED DICKINSON

When preparing for post-baccalaureate programs and careers in health services-related professions, there is no substitute for experiential learning.

Students can attend all of the conferences, read every piece of literature, and immerse themselves in internet research. But until they have an opportunity to learn by doing, they are simply going through the motions.

The CWU Health Sciences faculty not only understands the value of bringing in graduates and undergraduates to participate in real-world research; they insist on it.

"Our department has a strong history of mentoring and working closely with students, both in the classroom environment and when conducting research," said Leo D'Acquisto, a professor of integrative human physiology and exercise science.

"We try to provide as many mentorship experiences as we can because we want to expand our students' knowledge about the structure and function of the human body, and teach them how lifestyle choices impact the well-being of the human body and society at large."

D'Acquisto and his colleagues are always looking for new ways to involve their students in the scientific process, whether it's collaborating on research or seeking out opportunities to present their findings at regional and national conferences, and publishing in peer-reviewed journals.

"Our students are extremely valuable to us when it comes to collaborating on research projects," he said. "We believe in working closely with our students and doing our very best to prepare them for further academic studies and careers in health-related professions."

The Health Sciences department regularly assembles teams of faculty and student researchers who work together to collect data, take measurements, evaluate data, and showcase their findings to large audiences, whether in person or in a scientific journal.

"The faculty-student collaborative research effort is a hallmark of the department," D'Acquisto notes.

More often than not, those faculty-student relationships develop into high-profile opportunities for Health Sciences graduates—many who continue on to earn advanced degrees, enter the medical field, become physical therapists, or teach in higher education. Some, like Jared Dickinson and Tim Burnham, return to CWU to impart their expertise.

"I began studying the consequences of aging on muscular and skeletal health during my graduate program at CWU 20 years ago, and I have really enjoyed continuing that work here as a professor," said Dickinson ('06), a former student of D'Acquisto who started teaching clinical physiology at Central in 2020.

"The relationships we have with our students are reciprocal—we get as much out of them as they do out of us," he added.

Practical Applications

Nutrition Professor David Gee subscribes to the same philosophy as his human physiology colleagues, tapping his students' knowledge whenever possible. He appreciates their fresh perspectives, but most of all, he recognizes how beneficial these research opportunities are for their professional development.

"I like that my students have a chance to do important research that can have an impact on the general population," said Gee, who began tapping into the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) database in 2011-12.

During his year away from teaching, Gee traveled to Washington, DC, to uncover relevant research topics for his students to explore in NHANES, an extensive information repository maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He proudly reports that the results of his fact-finding mission back East were "career changing."

"Collecting all that data has been very fruitful for my students," Gee said. "I help them analyze the data, and then they use it to complete some very influential research. Now, graduates and undergraduates can use what they are learning to help people in their own communities."

Research collaborations have been producing similar results for biomechanics and clinical physiology Professor Eric Foch.

Over the past five years, he has been working alongside graduate students to gather data on female runners to help them prevent injuries to their hips and hip muscles.

Foch and his students have published a number of peer-reviewed studies, and he believes their findings have the potential to create a better quality of life for runners. But, at the same time, he recognizes that the primary objective of the studies is to help CWU students prepare for their careers.

"Like researchers at other institutions, our goal is to present valuable new information to physical therapists so they can use it to treat their patients," Foch said. "The overall intention of this work is to help people. But, in many ways, it affects the researchers and graduate students the most."

Another benefit to publishing health sciences research far and wide is that it makes the university more relevant in professional and academic circles. That recognition is something money cannot buy.

"This kind of work makes us current," Foch said, "and even if the research doesn't have a direct effect on the work taking place out in the world, it makes us a reliable source of knowledge when we attend conferences.

"We try to think beyond the textbook-and-exam format to give our students an accurate look at how things work in this field. That approach has helped us as instructors, and our students really appreciate having those experiences." ■

Left: Professor Leo J. D'Acquisto, right, demonstrates the measurement of resting metabolism to graduate students Chicena Mortimer, left, Andrew Austin, and Bailey Feinauer, laying down.

Associate Professor Karen Roemer, right, works with grad students Cherylin Ihegbu and Jessy Moore in the new biomechanics lab.

Biomechanics Helps Subjects Find Balance

Even before the state-of-the-art biomechanics lab opened in CWU's new Health Sciences Building, teams of students and faculty already were making many crucial discoveries through research.

For the past few years, Professor Karen Roemer has been working with her grad students on human movement biomechanics research, including one study that measures people's ability to maintain their balance when redirecting their "attention to focus." Her team used muscular-skeletal models and a laser-pointer at different distances to understand how balance and motor control functions change with age.

"Loss of balance is a significant health risk for older people, so we wanted to see what would happen when we redirected their attention to focus," Roemer said of the study published in early 2021. "We found that it was often just people's perception of objects close to their body that made their performance deteriorate."

The findings have led to discussions about new training programs that instruct older people how to focus on far-away objects while maintaining proper balance.

"The study confirmed that if you want to balance, focus on something in the distance," Roemer said.

Another influential study she has undertaken in recent years, in collaboration with the University of Leipzig and the Institute of Applied Training Science in Germany, analyzes the posture of javelin throwers so they can improve performance. Roemer and her students also look forward to using the new biomechanics lab to work with CWU athletes to study their cognition as it relates to cutting maneuvers (moving side-to-side).

"Sports provides us with a great context because we are able to define stress on the body," Roemer said, adding that the biomechanics program is essential for students pursuing degrees in physical therapy, strength training, and related disciplines.

"We help them understand movement technique. Not just how to train muscles, but what movement does to the skeletal system and how it can increase the risk of injury."

Proper Posture Deters Running Injuries

Roemer's biomechanics colleague, Eric Foch, also understands the importance of working with athletes when conducting research. During his time at CWU, Foch has focused his attention on how injuries occur in female runners, specifically in their hips.

Over the past five years, his students have helped him gather data on nearly 40 runners so they can perform statistical analyses. The team has published two separate studies about hip motion and hip muscle activation, which have helped many runners alter their technique to prevent long-term injuries.

"Gait retraining is a great method for helping runners prevent future injury," Foch said. "We observed something in the hip and knee motion that wasn't right, and with the help of a large mirror and some verbal feedback, we are able to remind runners about how to make the necessary changes to their posture."

In addition, Foch and his students have determined that a person's strength doesn't necessarily influence how they move. A runner's gait often relies on smaller muscles that surround the hips, which have more of an effect on side-to-side motion.

"They aren't the strongest muscles, but they are a big part of the supporting cast that keeps hips aligned and moving straight ahead," he said. "We are hoping that our current study will help us deliver the proper verbal cues to runners so we can have a more specific intervention." ■

National Database Propels Research

CWU Nutrition professors David Gee and Tafere Belay have discovered a way to add value to their students' research experiences by incorporating data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

The federal database contains tens of thousands of nutrition-related research surveys, but many of the studies have not been analyzed at a granular level. That's where Gee and Belay have stepped in to give their students new opportunities.

"NHANES helps me provide my students with instruction about how to analyze data to fit their specific areas of interest," Gee said. "We are able to whittle the numbers down to a certain group—just men, for example—and get a more reliable estimate about certain conditions like LDL cholesterol levels or high blood pressure."

Three of Gee's students are currently immersed in an NHANES-related study about weight cycling by measuring glucose and insulin levels in the blood to determine insulin resistance. Another study is examining the relationship between dietary factors and the prevalence of multiple risk factors (such as diabetes and hypertension) associated with severe COVID-19 outcomes.

"The main benefit for our students is they can do impactful studies and work with a high-quality database without having to take time and resources to collect the data," Gee said.

Similarly, Belay is tapping NHANES to complete vital research about micronutrient deficiencies involving iodine, iron, vitamin D and others. Moreover, he also evaluates demographic and health survey data sets in low-income countries to assess maternal and child undernutrition.

In one study, he and his students are examining the effects of iodine deficiencies in pregnant women, which is common in underdeveloped countries like his native Ethiopia.

"Global nutrition is our focus," Belay said. "We are also studying nutrient deficiencies in the U.S., but these issues are more common in low-income countries. Research like this allows us to have an impact beyond our own population."

In addition to studying micronutrient deficiencies, Belay and his students are examining whether alfatoxins—a grain contaminant found in corn, peanuts, and other grains—may be contributing to liver cancer.

After learning to take advantage of NHANES in recent years, Belay is eternally grateful to Gee for training him on this career-altering database.

"I have seen a lot of interest from my students, and when they want to do a specific kind of research, they can do it," Belay said. "Using NHANES has allowed me to be there more for my students." ■

Assistant Professor Tafere Belay works with student and CWU basketball player Samantha Bowman in the Bod Pod. The device measures weight and volume to calculate density and body fat percentage.

Associate Professor Jared Dickinson, right, works with students to measure resting metabolism.

Seeking Clues to Muscle Shrinkage

What happens to our skeletal muscles as we age, and what are the potential impacts of those changes on our functional mobility?

CWU Clinical Physiology Professor Jared Dickinson and his students have been seeking answers to these questions, and many others, through a series of research projects examining the impacts aging and exercise have on muscle health. These studies include assessment of the size and strength of the muscle, as well as changes within muscle at the molecular level using very small muscle samples obtained from study participants.

Over the past two years, researchers have been working with two cohorts—one in their 20s; the other in their 60s and 70s—to study what happens to human leg muscles as people age.

"As we get older, our muscles shrink and we're not as strong," Dickinson said. "The goal of this research is to better understand what contributes to that, and what we can do to slow that process down so we can preserve functional mobility and still perform our daily activities."

By analyzing tissue samples at the molecular level, the researchers hope to identify what factors may contribute to the difference between muscles of younger and older individuals. (Samples obtained in collaboration, but not on campus. The CWU team generates all of the data.)

The researchers are also looking at the response of the muscle of older adults to various exercises, in particularly different forms of aerobic exercise. The team is especially interested in introducing high-intensity exercise to the equation to study which movements may help delay muscle deterioration.

Dickinson noted that, at the molecular level, both aerobic (i.e., cycling) and anaerobic (i.e., weightlifting) exercise have been shown to contribute to increased muscle volume.

"We want to see if there is anything in the muscle-wasting process that we can exploit through exercise," he said. "Our goal is to preserve the function of muscle tissue as we get older, and we're looking at the role of exercise intensity in tailoring protective strategies for older adults. Such strategies could benefit both the muscle as well as the cardiorespiratory system."

As the research has evolved, so have the methods of data collection. The team recently started using ultrasound as a non-invasive way of monitoring muscle size and muscle quality in younger and older subjects.

"Ultrasound is now helping us learn more about the structure and function of muscles through aging," Dickinson said. "As we continue to compare the muscles of younger and older people, we're trying to develop that methodology as another tool we can use to monitor the health of skeletal muscles as we get older." ■

ATHLETES RELY ON ENERGY AVAILABILITY FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

By Matt Carstens

Athletes, by definition, need more energy reserves than non-athletes so their bodies can perform at a higher level.

But what happens when athletes don't have enough energy storage to support the physiological functions needed to reach their physical peak?

CWU sports nutrition Professor Kelly Pritchett and her colleagues have been looking for answers to these questions by studying the phenomenon of low energy availability (LEA). Simply put, LEA refers to whether athletes are getting enough energy from their food to support optimal health, physiological function, and athletic performance.

A recent CWU study focused on a group of elite athletes with spinal cord injuries, who, depending on their injury level, have a wide variability in body composition, mobility, bone health, and metabolic and neurological function—all of which can impact the energy needs for a specific sport.

"Sometimes it comes down to fueling barriers and knowledge," Pritchett said. "Maybe, in this population, preparing food is more difficult. Some para-athletes have GI (gastrointestinal) or gut issues that could inhibit fueling."

Others may have trouble fitting into a race wheelchair or have discomfort due to the position of the body in their race chair after fueling, she added.

"They may have some different barriers to fueling from an exercise standpoint that you may not see in an able-bodied population," Pritchett said. She pointed specifically to marathons, where wheelchair racers have their hands taped, which makes it inconvenient or more difficult for them to take in carbohydrates during the race.

The research team relied on two tools to determine why LEA was affecting para-athletes more acutely than able-bodied athletes. The first was an energy availability calculation derived from seven-day food and activity logs, which also took into account the athlete's fat-free mass.

The second was a Low Energy Availability Female Questionnaire (LEAF-Q), which helped identify the risk of low energy availability—disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis—in endurance athletes.

Pritchett said the team found a discrepancy using the calculation, where none of the athletes were at risk for LEA. However, among those who took the questionnaire, 78% of them were at risk.

"That really leads to the fact that we need more validated tools to assess EA (energy availability) in this population," she said. "And furthermore, the LEA threshold used for able-bodied athletes may not be appropriate."

In a related study, Pritchett and her CWU colleagues have been researching the benefits of lowering para-athletes' core body temperatures prior to exercise.

Athletes with spinal cord injuries often face thermoregulatory (cooling) challenges with exercise because they are unable to sweat in the area below the injury. This can cause premature fatigue and limit the athletes' potential for high performance.

"We did some work where we gave athletes an ice slurry, like a Gatorade slushie, in an attempt to drop their core temperature prior to exercise, allowing them to feel cooler during exercise," Pritchett said. "We found it was beneficial, and their core temperature was lower during the exercise bout in the beginning."

Although more research is needed, she said the results were promising for a group of wheelchair rugby players.

"They went in with a cooler core temperature," Pritchett said. "In theory, it should create a heatsink, allowing them to play longer before they reach that critical core temperature." ■

Assistant Professor Kelly Pritchett, right, talks with CWU runner Molly Mattson about navigating protein powders. Pritchett provides sports nutrition services to help student athletes meet their health and performance goals.

Health Education Investment Aimed at Academics, Athletics

By David Leder

On the same day CWU unveiled its new Health Sciences facility, the university also celebrated the groundbreaking of its latest capital investment known as the Health Education Project.

The $60.5 million construction effort, funded by the state Legislature and private donors—including Jean and Joe Adams—features renovations of aging Nicholson Pavilion and Purser Hall, plus classroom upgrades, additional meeting spaces, an expanded fieldhouse, two new weight-training areas, and the construction of a lobby/vestibule area for the pavilion.

The dual ceremonies on April 29 welcomed state Senator Jim Honeyford and state Representative Alex Ybarra—both CWU alums—along with President-Emeritus Jim Gaudino, who helped develop the vision for the university's long-term investment in health education.

The project is slated for completion by the fall of 2023, but some of the office and classroom spaces completed during phase one could be in use later this year.

"These two projects are part of the future of Central Washington University that will allow us to meet the needs of the state for health care professionals and health education specialists," CWU President Jim Wohlpart said.

One of the overarching goals of the north campus facilities upgrade is to provide faculty and students in the Department of Sport and Movement Studies (SAMS) with the resources they need for 21st century instruction and development. Many of the current K-12 health and physical education teachers statewide have received their training at Central.

In addition to having larger, modernized office and classroom spaces, the department will be able to take advantage of a dedicated weight room that will be used only for academic disciplines. The Dance and Physical Education Teaching programs also have been gaining momentum in recent years, while the Northwest Center for Sport is training more sport management professionals every year.

"This project will address our aging facilities and provide us with the modern technology our department and Athletics need to grow," SAMS co-chair Brian McGladrey said. "One of the benefits of this project is we will be left with our own spaces. But we will continue to work together to manage the facilities so we can meet both of our needs."

The faculty believes the revamped north campus will enhance CWU's reputation as a top higher-education destination on the West Coast. The new facilities are expected to provide added incentive for students, athletes, and faculty to consider coming to Central.

"One of the big things for us is that this facility, when it's done, will allow us to have some separation so our programs can continue to grow," SAMS co-chair Rory Weishaar said. "Each of these new spaces should also help with retention and program growth."

Another goal of the project is to transform Nicholson Pavilion—built in 1959—into a state-of-the-art venue that can host large gatherings, such as commencement ceremonies, youth sports tournaments, and community events.

"This shared facility will have a significant impact on the academic experience of our students and faculty, as well as the student-athlete experience in everyday practice, training, and competition," CWU Athletic Director Dennis Francois said. ■

CWU broke ground on its next capital project—known as the Health Education Project—on April 29. Pictured, from left, are alumni donors Joe and Jean Adams, CWU Trustee Jeff Hensler, retired education professor Susan Madley, President Jim Wohlpart, ASCWU President Maddy Koval, Sen. Jim Honeyford, Rep. Alex Ybarra, President-Emeritus Jim Gaudino, Athletic Director Dennis Francois, and Dean of the College of Educational and Professional Studies Sathy Rajendran.

Public Health Training Put to Good Use During Pandemic

By Matt Carstens

Central Wins Seventh HEED Award in Last Eight Years

CWU once again received the prestigious Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from *INSIGHT into Diversity* magazine in 2021, marking the seventh time in the past eight years that Central has earned the recognition. The HEED Award recognizes colleges and universities that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion. INSIGHT into Diversity is the oldest and largest diversity magazine in higher education.

CWU-Yakima Launches High-Demand Accounting Program

Starting this fall, CWU-Yakima will begin offering a Bachelor of Science degree program in Accounting. The hybrid schedule, with classes offered in-person and online, was created to meet the needs of the diverse communities in the Yakima area. The new program will offer a combination of in-person accounting classes one day a week and online business classes throughout the week. The program was designed in collaboration with YVC and addresses a growing need in the Yakima Valley.

Photo courtesy of CDC Public Health Image Library / photo by James Gathany

When Brian Hiatt enrolled at CWU back in the late 1990s, he was admittedly a bit of an odd duck. His passions were art and science, and after trying a bit of both, he found his true love: microbiology.

"It's a very rewarding career," said Hiatt, a 2000 alumnus. "I've tested patients for Ebola, and I would have never thought that that's something I would have done when I got into microbiology. That's something you only see in movies."

After graduation, Hiatt took a job as a one-man microbiology department at a small environmental testing lab, where he worked until 2004. He parlayed that experience and his CWU training into an invigorating health sciences career with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH)—a field he never thought he'd work in but has found so rewarding that he has never left.

Brian Hiatt

"You get to interact with other folks around the country doing similar work, and you're kind of the tip of the spear when these outbreaks happen," Hiatt said. "When you get into public health, you get to participate in those types of efforts and stop people from getting sick. We need people like crazy in that field."

The last two years have been kind of a blur for Hiatt, but he still remembers being surrounded by the sounds of cheering fans, buzzers, and swishing nets when he got the call about the first confirmed COVID-19 case on U.S. soil, which happened to be in Everett.

"I was at my daughter's high school basketball game," he recalled. "It was 7 at night when my phone rang, and it was my boss calling to tell me that the sample was positive."

Taking the Lead

Working for the DOH, Hiatt had been in regular contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the situation in the Wuhan region of China, but when the first case was confirmed, his team jumped into action, collecting a specimen, carefully packaging it and sending it to the CDC overnight.

"From there, it just kind of erupted," he said. "We went into an incident management structure and everything else took off. We were kind of ground zero. The CDC sent a team out to provide support, and the response just got bigger and bigger."

As the response grew in the ensuing weeks and months, Hiatt remembers the cascade of problems that arose, including shortages of swabs and test kits.

"It was quite a ride," he said.

Throughout the early stages of the pandemic, Hiatt's department was primarily responsible for diagnostic testing and outbreak response, lending guidance and support to county health departments around the state.

Grant to Help CWU Attract More Low-Income STEM Transfer Students

A team of faculty and staff from CWU and Big Bend Community College has been awarded a $50,000 grant from the Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) program, which is specifically aimed at STEM disciplines. The initiative is intended to help low-income STEM transfer students around the state earn four-year degrees. CWU is looking to increase the number of low-income community college students in Washington—specifically from CWU-Moses Lake—who opt to continue their educations at four-year institutions.

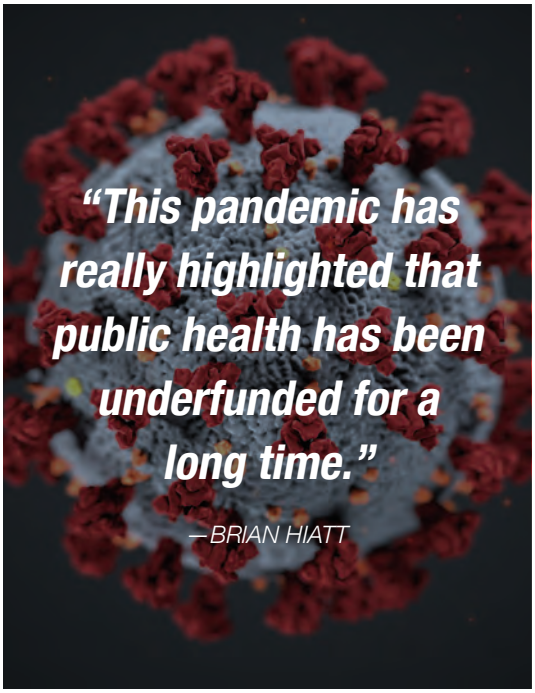
International Global Warming Study Involves CWU Researcher

CWU researcher and geophysicist Paul Winberry is contributing his expertise to the international Sensitivity of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet 2C (SWAIS 2C) project, which is seeking to examine the ice sheet's sensitivity to global warming of 2 degrees Celsius. Central is one of seven U.S. institutions selected to participate in the project that will be funded, in part, by a $2.9 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

Hiatt's role at the DOH is to provide lab support for the counties, which each have their own health officer and establish their own policies and practices. Nearly two years into the pandemic, during the Omicron variant wave, his lab was still completing around 1,500 diagnostic tests per day.

Hiatt emphasized that there remains an incredible need for staff in the public health sector, with labs and epidemiologists in every state.

"This pandemic has really highlighted that public health has been underfunded for a long time," he said. "We've increased our footprint immensely over the course of this outbreak (at the DOH). Before, the microbiology office was about 40 full-time employees. Now, we're up to about 90. We always need people."



Thrust into Action

Hiatt's colleague Shelley Lankford is a chemist at the DOH Public Health Laboratories, and similarly, fell backwards into the public health field.

She was studying to be a medical technologist at CWU in the 1980s, but after her internship was canceled, she pursued a position with a public health laboratory thanks to her academic advisor.

"I said, 'OK, I'll take this job for a year or two and learn something new and then go back and find another internship.' Then, 34 years later, I haven't done that yet," Lankford said with a laugh.

Over the past three decades, Lankford has done it all, moving through the ranks as a microbiologist, laboratory supervisor, and a training program manager, which she also managed for four years. Nowadays, she and her team of scientists, including other CWU alumni, monitor biotoxins and arsenic in the shellfish food supply and test drinking water in schools and daycares.

But, in early 2020, her position went in a completely different direction with the onset of the pandemic. In addition to analyzing shellfish and drinking water samples, she and her team began making COVID-19 testing kits to fulfill a growing demand.

"They pulled five of my eight staff members into the COVID team, so my small four-person team—myself included—had to cover all of the lab work that a team of nine were doing before the pandemic," Lankford said. "We were down to four people, so we all had to figure out our new roles."

During her tenure with the department, she has never seen such an all-encompassing effort, noting that three of the four major lab units at DOH were impacted by the pandemic response.

"Usually, just one unit is affected, but this time, everyone was involved," said Lankford, whose lab has returned to more normal operations over the past year. "We have never done anything on this scope. This has been unprecedented."

'A Call to Serve'

For most of the world, the beginning of the pandemic raised people's fears, but it also created uncertainty and a slew of questions. For CWU alumna Mondana Madjdi, the onset of COVID-19 also felt like an opportunity to serve the public.

In late 2019, Madjdi was only a few months away from graduating with a bachelor's of science in public health when rumblings of a pandemic started to arise on campus.

"When you have been studying public health for a long time—when people start to talk about these infectious diseases—you always have something in the back of your mind," she said. "You kind of know it could turn into something big. You've

Governor Appoints CWU Alum Charbonneau to Board of Trustees

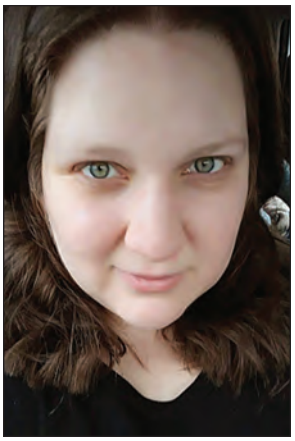
CWU alumnus and longtime STEM educator Jeff Charbonneau was appointed to the Board of Trustees by Governor Jay Inslee in January. The principal of Zillah Middle School is a former high school science teacher who won the Washington Teacher of the Year and National Teacher of the Year honors in 2013. He also received the 2015 Global Teacher Prize. At Central, Charbonneau earned a BS in Biology, a Master Teaching degree, a science teaching certificate, and a principal/administrator certification.

CWU Joins Statewide Guaranteed Admissions Initiative

CWU joined a statewide effort last fall to make the college application process easier and more accessible for prospective students. The Guaranteed Admissions Pilot (GAP) gives high school students who meet certain criteria a direct pathway to higher education. At Central, graduating seniors who earn at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA and complete the College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs) are guaranteed a place for the next academic year.

studied pandemics, you've studied how disease spreads, and you know its potential."

Madjdi and her classmates found themselves in an unique position in early 2020 when the first U.S. case was detected only a few hundred miles away.



Mondana Madjdi

"The vast majority of us in class knew what was going to happen," she said. "We weren't sure of the scope or the levels of mitigation that were going to happen to try to control the spread of disease, but we knew this was a very dangerous illness. At that stage, there was a lot of uncertainty of where it would go."

In what felt like an instant, classes were moved online, in-person internships were canceled, and Madjdi found herself back home in Port Angeles. Her pharmacist husband was working on the front lines in a hospital, while she was at home finishing her degree and trying to help her two children transition to online school.

That's when she joined the fight, volunteering as a contact tracer at Clallam County Health and Human Services.

"It very much felt like a call to arms, a call to serve," Madjdi said. "It reminded me very much of the stories you would hear about families, about women during war time. … We're not in ICUs taking care of patients with COVID, but all these things we can do in the community, in the periphery, are helpful."

Shifting Focus

Madjdi's original goal was to be a public health educator, but her volunteer position soon became permanent, and her interest in epidemiology grew. Now the epidemiologist for Clallam County Health and Human Services, she also is working on her master's degree at CWU, specializing in epidemiology.

"I have a particular interest in outbreak surveillance," Madjdi said. "I do a lot of disease surveillance, which is key to where a disease is beginning so we can intervene early on."

Ironically, she had already made the decision to continue her education before the pandemic, thinking she would need a master's degree before entering the workforce. But even after finding a job in her chosen field, she ultimately decided to continue her education, adjusting her focus to fighting the pandemic.

"I actually turned in my application the day before the first case was identified in Washington state," she said. "(With the pandemic), I've shifted to much heavier of an epidemiology focus. We have a wonderful faculty member, Dr. Amie Wojtyna, who used to work for the CDC, and I've been working with her pretty intensively."

Madjdi began the master's program the same week she started her permanent position, and despite juggling school, a job, and raising children, she knows she made the right decision.

"I knew the further I got in this career that this was going to make a difference," she said.

Creating Connections

Even though Madjdi is now two years removed from her days as a volunteer contact tracer, those moments connecting with real people during an uncertain and scary time are memories she'll always cherish.

"I think doing that very first bout of volunteer contact tracing will really forever shape how I approach public health," she said. "I always have to remember I started talking to individual people at the beginning of a pandemic who were scared, when we didn't know very much about COVID or what was going to happen."

She recalled, early on, the department had time to call people every day, check on them, and connect with them on a personal level.

"I would build a relationship with them, and then they would call me if they had questions or concerns with their illness," Madjdi said. "I will always hold onto that, because no matter how big my job gets, how many big decisions I make, … I'll always be able to remember and recall what it's like to be one person in a community, scared and needing that connection." ■

Professor Named Lifetime Fellow with National Association

Professor Anne Egger has been elected as a lifetime fellow with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of the *Science* family of journals. Egger teaches Geological Sciences and Science and Mathematics Education at CWU. The 2021 class of AAAS Fellows recognizes 564 scientists, engineers, and innovators across 24 scientific disciplines.

CWU Police Chief Named to International Hall of Fame

CWU Police Chief Jason Berthon-Koch has been named to the international Rape, Aggression, Defense (R.A.D.) Systems Hall of Fame for his 19-year commitment to teaching women empowerment and self-defense skills. He has been a R.A.D. instructor in the Ellensburg community since 2003 and he became an instructor-trainer in 2012, working with more than 500 instructors around the state since that time.

Honoring the 2022 Distinguished Alumni and 4 Under 40 Awardees

By Robin Burck

On May 13, the Central Washington University Alumni Association honored 11 individuals who are leaders in their fields or communities at the 2022 Distinguished Alumni Awards.

"I am always inspired to hear the alumni stories and see the positive impact that these alumni are making in the world," said Director of Alumni and Constituent Relations Casey Ross. "It's an honor to celebrate these individuals and the common formative experiences they had here at CWU."

Alumni of the Year

Julie A. Back ('92)—Senior Vice President and Advisor, Wealthspire Advisors

Philanthropists of the Year

Jean ('88) **and Joe Adams**

Young Philanthropist of the Year

Hilary Tanneberg ('09)—Senior Manager of Business Assurance, Moss Adams, LLP

Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Morgan M. Bresett Brown ('75)—Advertising Account Executive and Freelance Musician, Retired

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Julie A. Back ('92)—Senior Vice President and Advisor, Wealthspire Advisors

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Brian A. Clarke ('87)—Managing Member, GEW.LLC Risk Management Solutions; Co-Managing Member, HEILL Safety Solutions

COLLEGE OF THE SCIENCES

Edward L. Schneider ('69)—President and Executive Director, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Retired

4 Under 40 Leadership Award Recipients

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Amanda J. Bury ('15)—Owner and Sole Proprietor, A. Bury Pottery

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Jacob M. Ozuna ('12)—Sales Manager in Digital Client Success, Microsoft Advertising

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Andrew J. Graham ('18)—Real Estate Agent, Avalon 24 Real Estate

COLLEGE OF THE SCIENCES

Manuel Rodriguez ('05)—Director of Early College Outreach, Central Washington University ■

Distinguished Alumni and 4 Under 40 awardees, pictured from left, are Morgan M. Bresett Brown, Edward L. Schneider, Jacob M. Ozuna, Hilary Tanneberg, Julie A. Back, Joe and Jean Adams, and Andrew J. Graham.

CWU Prepares Biologist for Career Challenges

By Robin Burck

From her early days at CWU to the initial stages of her career, Anjanette Wilson has always been confident that she could overcome any challenges life threw her way.

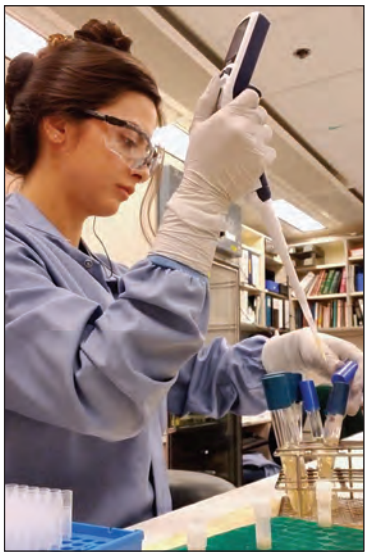
The first-generation college graduate, who completed her biology degree in 2019, arrived at Central not knowing where her higher education journey would take her. But it didn't take her long to find a comfort zone.

"I had to navigate the academic world practically alone," said Wilson, whose mother immigrated from the Philippines before she was born. "However, the guidance from my professors and advisors, along with CWU's support, alleviated the hardships that came with being a first-generation college student."

Shortly after graduation, Wilson was hired at the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) environmental laboratory as a lab tech testing for shellfish and marine biotoxins. However, her role quickly changed in early 2020 when the pandemic began and the DOH tapped her to work for the COVID-19 Response Team.

Wilson and her team would prepare between 100-300 testing kits every day for the microbiology lab, which performs DNA sequencing of test samples to determine if they are positive or negative.

Just as when she arrived on the CWU campus as a teenager, Wilson quickly found a way to adapt. She attributes much of that perseverance to the training she received while in Ellensburg.



Anjanette Wilson

"I owe it to CWU for all the soft skills required to sustain my work as a lab tech and COVID-19 response worker," she said. "My training from Central is the framework of my biological expertise, and I will forever be grateful for the biology and chemistry professors that taught me necessary skills to conduct biology research and chemistry analyses."

During the time Wilson was working in the testing lab, she worked alongside three fellow CWU alumni: Bud Taylor ('87), logistics manager on the incident management team, Brian Hiatt ('00), microbiology office director, and Shelley Lankford ('86), acting director of the Office of Environmental Laboratory Sciences.

"COVID-19 highlighted the injustices and inequities within our nation, and I wanted to be involved in solving complex environmental issues, so I applied to grad school and quickly got started," Wilson said.

Wilson now works for the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, a nonprofit organization that supports the welfare and well-being of Filipinos and Filipino Americans throughout the US.

She is also working on her master's in environmental management, with a focus on global sustainability. In collaboration with her master's project, Wilson is a graduate fellow at Global Seed Savers, an international development nonprofit organization that advocates for food and seed sovereignty in the Philippines.

"As a Filipino American, my passion in sustainable food systems is highlighted in my involvement and advocacy work with nonprofits that advocate for my culture, my motherland, and all that sustain it," she said. ■

Boeing Competition Winners Add Prestige to College of Business

A team of CWU Business students took home the grand prize at last year's Boeing Northwest Case Competition, making Central the winningest university in the competition's history. "Team No Chain, No Gain!" won $2,500 and guaranteed job interviews at Boeing by presenting their plan to implement a new commercial aircraft, using strategic supply chain planning and implementation concepts. The CWU team members were Makinzie Packwood, Lindsay Smith, Felicia Johnson, Eli Washburn, and Wendell Jopson.

Central Aviation Graduate Now Flying with Blue Angels

U.S. Marine Corps Major and 2010 CWU alumnus Josh Soltan will be flying with the Blue Angels air demonstration squadron for the next three years after being selected from a national pool of military aviators. Soltan is a C130J pilot and the second Central alum to have been selected for the Blue Angels, joining Lt. Cmdr. Craig Olson ('91), who flew two separate tours with the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron in 2002 and 2007.

Helping Others Feeds Nutrition Alumna's Soul

By Kathleen Singleton

Kathaleen Briggs Early developed an early interest in nutrition when she observed her grandfather being fed through a feeding tube. Her interest in nutrition and helping others continued to grow throughout her childhood, and eventually turned into a lifelong passion.

"I took an intro to nutrition class at a community college and was just completely sold on the subject," Briggs Early said. "I liked talking with and helping people, so it seemed like a perfect fit."

Now, nearly three decades into her professional career, the 1997 CWU alumna is helping the next generation of nutritionists acquire the knowledge they need to help their patients lead more healthy lives.

As a professor at Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences in Yakima, Briggs Early teaches graduate students about nutrition and chronic disease management. The university works to support individuals seeking to work in rural and underserved areas—a mission she wholeheartedly supports.

Briggs Early encourages students who are interested in a health sciences career to try a variety of different disciplines and job shadow with as many professionals as they can. Learning from others helped put her on the path to becoming a university professor, and she believes others should have that same experience.

She stresses the importance of asking questions, noting that the people running health sciences programs are very knowledgeable and can offer valuable advice.

"My day-to-day job in a hospital as a dietitian was quite different than my days as a professor or at the local clinic," said Briggs Early, who worked as a clinical dietitian and outpatient dietitian for Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital prior to becoming a professor in 2007.

"I really encourage people to get job shadowing experiences and try to do research on the different professions that might be available to them," she added. "There are also other areas of health science that people can study where you're working more behind the scenes, and that can also be really rewarding."

Long before she became an educator, Briggs Early set the stage for future success at CWU, where she earned a food science and nutrition degree, specializing in dietetics. Her experience in Ellensburg encouraged her to continue pursuing education and provided her with a strong foundation of knowledge.

"I had a great experience and found it to be a wonderful program," said Briggs Early, a McNair Scholar who later earned her PhD in nutrition.

After completing her education, she worked as a clinical dietician and nutritionist for several years before becoming a professor and a volunteer at the Yakima Union Gospel Mission's free clinic. There, she helps patients make lifestyle changes and provides them with essential nutrition information.

"It's really rewarding to help patients make behavioral changes that can improve how they're doing with a chronic condition," Briggs Early said. "I'll give them some essential information and they take that home and incorporate it into their lifestyle."

Her volunteer work sometimes overlaps with her professional work, which supports future medical professionals who plan to work in rural settings.

"We really try to encourage folks who want to serve in rural and underserved areas because those areas actually have a big problem with adequate health care access and adequate health care professionals," she said. ■

Kathaleen Briggs Early

Aviation Professor Named National Instructor of the Year

Professor Amy Hoover was named the 2022 National Certified Flight Instructor of the Year by the Federal Aviation Administration and General Aviation Awards Industry Board. The award recognized Hoover for her many contributions at the regional and national levels through her mentoring efforts, publications, presentations, and backcountry flight instruction. She currently serves as a flight check instructor and assistant chief ground instructor at Central.

The 'Burg Wins Best College Radio Station in the Country

CWU's campus radio station, KCWU 88.1 The 'Burg, was named Best College Radio Station at the annual Intercollegiate Broadcasting System conference. The 'Burg previously took home the award in 2015 and has been nominated every year since. The station also won Most Creative/Innovative Show and Best Phone App. The winning app was designed by Computer Science student Dylan Elliott, whose experience with the Running Start program prepared him to develop the best college radio station app in the country.

Doctor Inspires Others Through Personal Experiences

By Kathleen Singleton

There's no such thing as a normal day at work for Jesus Iñiguez. The 2011 CWU alumnus is a family doctor with surgical obstetrics training, and he currently serves as the medical director of the Seamar Community Health Clinic in Des Moines.

His services are in high demand, but he always finds time to provide the best quality care for his patients.

"I divide my time into four main areas every week," Iñiguez said. "Providing primary care in an outpatient setting, teaching residents at the Swedish Family Medicine Residency, inpatient obstetrics care, and completing administrative duties."

His ability to provide equal attention to every patient under his care comes back to his childhood. He had regular opportunities to observe the medical system up close because his father was in and out of clinics due to a metabolic syndrome.

By watching the professionals who cared for his father, Iñiguez learned how to properly care for people. He now brings that experience and compassion to his work.

"While practicing, I try to treat my patients with the care, attention, and accountability my father needs," he said, adding that his mother was a natural healer in their community, which also provided him with a valuable perspective.

As the child of Mexican-American migrant farm workers, going to college was no guarantee for Iñiguez. As a result, he now looks back on how much he appreciated the financial support he needed to pursue a degree. While in high school, his sister helped him apply for the Gates Millennium Scholarship, and that opened many doors for him once he arrived at Central.

Jesus Iñiguez

"Because of this scholarship, I was able to take opportunities during my time at CWU that supplemented my experiences in invaluable ways," he said.

Throughout his time in Ellensburg, Iñiguez focused on making connections—something that had challenged him at his previous institution. Halfway through his undergraduate training, he transferred to CWU in search of more accessible mentorship and guidance, and he quickly found both.

Aside from serving as president of the CWU Pre-Medicine Club, he volunteered at the community health clinic, did undergraduate research in the biology department, and was accepted into the Science Honors Research Program and McNair Scholars program.

CWU showed Iñiguez how important the health sciences field is, and he used those lessons to earn a master's degree from Dartmouth and carve out a successful career in medicine.

"The investment in time and energy you make in your community or network establishes priceless bonds that raise the quality of life for you and those around you."

—JESUS IÑIGUEZ

"My hope is that more of us will understand the immense benefit our lives have experienced from science, especially in Western cultures," he said. "And that is due to the proper human application of science to health."

Above all, Iñiguez emphasized the importance of giving back to the community. Yet another way he gives back is through the first CWU educational endowment that focuses on the potential to support Hispanic student-athletes. He and his brothers plan to provide a minimum of one full-tuition scholarship to underserved students every year.

"The investment in time and energy you make in your community or network establishes priceless bonds that raise the quality of life for you and those around you," he said. ■

Central Recognized for Diverse Organizational Impact Efforts

Central was featured in the September 2021 edition of *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education* magazine as a leader in institutional representation and composition. CWU was among five institutions nationwide—the only one west of Texas—featured for achieving at least a "B" grade on the four Diverse Organizational Impact and Transformation (DOIT) pillars.

University Remembers First Female Student Body President

The CWU community lost one of its most beloved public servants last fall when Shirley (Dickson) Kern died at age 98. The former librarian, who graduated from the Central Washington College of Education (now CWU) in 1945, was the institution's first female student body president, filling the role for two years when her male counterparts were called to serve in World War II. Kern is best remembered for her lifelong commitment to community service and her sincere approach to everyone she met.

Professional ceramicist Amanda Ontiveros ('19) honed her craft at CWU and often highlights her Mexican heritage in her artwork.

Central Helped Artist Shape Her Identity

By Hayley Harrell

Ceramicist and 2019 graduate Amanda Ontiveros has developed a style all her own

Whether her hands are thick with clay behind the pottery wheel or she is demonstrating a technique for her students, Amanda Ontiveros lives for art.

The 2019 Central alumna spends most of her days creating ceramic works inside the Yakima Maker Space, both for private sale and restaurants in the area. But even before she was creating awe-inspiring art pieces for a living, Ontiveros had a passion for expression. That's why she believes she has found her true calling.

"I love working in this ancient medium," she said in describing her ceramics background. "Growing up, I was always playing in the dirt. Now I can keep my hands dirty while creating pieces that inspire me."

While her personal work often focuses on her Mexican roots and the balance between life and death, Ontiveros also produces a variety of original pieces for Yakima Valley eateries, including ceramic bowls, plates, and serving platters for Crafted Eatery & Bar. Next into the kiln are pieces for 617 Nomad, a bistro and mercantile near the Cowiche Canyon Conservatory.

Before Ontiveros began exhibiting her work and producing paid pieces, her footsteps echoed through Randall Hall on her way to the ceramics studio. While she already has many notable accomplishments, her success wasn't always a given. Ontiveros took a non-traditional path toward her CWU education, and for years, her path toward a professional art career felt uncertain.

Long before she decided to pursue her Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree, she explored various career directions while splitting time as a wife and mother. But, in the spring of 2016, she decided to pair her passion for painting and ceramics with CWU's charm and value.

It didn't take long for Ontiveros to discover that she still had a lot to learn. She jokes about how often she was reminded that, as a middle-aged Hispanic woman, she stood out from most other students on campus. At the same time, she speaks fondly of her time at CWU.

"I felt so included," the 43-year-old said. "It didn't matter that I was an old lady with these college students."

That feeling was cast even stronger once Ontiveros discovered the ceramics studio, and she spent the next few years refining her craft and building her ceramics family in Ellensburg.

Overcoming Adversity

Ontiveros experimented with glazes and techniques, connected with fellow artists, and felt like she had found a home in the Art + Design Department. But, at the peak of her artistic journey, she realized she would not be able to afford her last two quarters at CWU.

Not willing to give up on her dreams, Ontiveros applied for and received the C. Farrell Fine Arts & Research Scholarship in 2018. That boost allowed her to finish her BFA while also providing her with an opportunity to show her work at the Gallery One Visual Arts Center.

Her 2019 show, "Unseen Lament," featured macabre imagery and nature-inspired ceramic pieces like logs rich with glazed oak leaves, mushrooms, and bugs. Ontiveros has always believed that art should be accessible to everyone, and she wants to encourage people to feel something.

"People love being able to touch the art," she said. "It was important to me to make sure my art could be discovered by all."

A few years after graduating, Ontiveros continues to reveal new ways she can make her art and ceramics more accessible for others.

Sharing Her Passion

While she usually has her hands full in the studio, Ontiveros is fast becoming a household name in the Yakima Valley because of her willingness to share her passion and expertise.

She enjoys getting other people involved by teaching ceramics classes for Yakima Maker Space members, including how to use ceramics tools and throw clay at the wheel.

"I love giving myself a challenge," she said. "You're only as good as your last mistake, and I'm always trying to push myself creatively."

Fall is one of her favorite times of the year because she gets to celebrate her heritage and honor her deceased loved ones by showing her work at the Día de los Muertos celebration at the Mighty Tieton art gallery. During the pandemic, Ontiveros also helped breathe life into vacant storefront windows in downtown Yakima as a featured artist for "Windows Alive."

Above all, Ontiveros is passionate about sharing her work. And while her themes often teeter on the edge of life and death, she believes they serve as a reminder of one's own humanity. She recognizes that being human is all about trying, failing, trying again, and growing through the hard times.

"I see a human before I see anyone else," she said. "We are connected because we are all human." ■

Top to bottom: A planter commissioned by Verdant Yakima. Chubby mug called "the pandemic mug" because we all gained a few pounds during Covid. Tapered mug titled "Frida." An espresso cup with skulls stamped on it in a manic way. And, a wall plaque titled "Respect & Devotion."

Office of the President
400 E University Way
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