

CRIMSON & BLACK

Central
Washington
University
Spring 2023





"Humans are connected in so many different ways, and the pandemic showed us that we can also bond with each other remotely. We're not always going to be together physically, but we can still meet face-to-face with our phones and computers. That has become the main message in my work."

Kate Im, CWU Art Professor

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Online Edition

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On the Cover: Junior Bahja Hirsi, a law and justice major at CWU-Des Moines, is one of hundreds of students who take advantage of our eight branch campuses across the state. She says Central is helping her live out her dreams by striving to be a model learning community of equity and belonging: "CWU is my happy place, where I feel like I belong as a Black Muslim woman." Photograph: David Dick.

Left: CWU Fine Arts Professor Kate Im often uses red thread in her works to represent the power of human connectivity. See *In Focus*, page 40. Photograph: David Dick.

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EXECUTIVE EDITORS

Jim Wohlpart, President
Andrew Morse, Chief of Staff
Paul Elstone, Vice President of
University Advancement

MANAGING EDITOR

David Leder, Public Affairs

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS/EDITORS

Barb Arnott ('09), Robin Burck ('17),
David Leder, Jodie Nicotra, Tara Roberts,
Rune Torgersen ('19), Savannah Tranchell,
and Annie Young

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bret Bleggi and 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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or

Office of Alumni Relations
400 E University Way
Ellensburg WA 98926-7508

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



Dear Wildcats,

As we put the finishing touches on another memorable year at Central Washington University, I am proud of all that we have accomplished together. We are creating a strong and vibrant future here at CWU.

With active participation from students, faculty, and staff across the university, we spent the latter half of 2022 finalizing our new Vision and Mission statements, which have already begun to guide us as we strive to be a model learning community of equity and belonging. Alongside these carefully crafted statements, our shared governance groups on campus came together to define a set of Core Values. We also launched CWU's new brand, created a framework for our 10-year Strategic Plan, and made significant progress on our new website, set to go live this fall.

The work we are doing now will be essential as Central seeks to make higher education more attainable, more affordable, and more rewarding for all. As we proudly declare in our Vision and Mission statements, CWU believes everyone deserves the same opportunities to reach their potential—to pursue a life of purpose and impact. We have accepted it as our duty to do whatever we must to help all people create better lives for themselves and their communities through education.

But we know that if we are to achieve those lofty ambitions, we must confront the many adaptive challenges we are currently facing as a university and as a society. CWU believes our talented, dedicated faculty and staff can deliver the kinds of innovative solutions that will help our students be successful while strengthening communities across Washington and the world.

In this edition of *Crimson & Black*, you will read all about Central's plans to provide our students with ample opportunities to thrive. One story takes a detailed look at what our Vision and Mission will look like in practice from the perspective of faculty, staff, and students. A corresponding article examines how CWU's robust high-impact practices elevate the development of our students into bold and innovative changemakers—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Additional highlights in this edition include:

- an in-depth look at the undergraduate research taking place in all four colleges;
- the pivotal role Central has taken to train the next generation of K-12 teachers;
- the career arc of renowned motivational speaker and CWU alumnus Eric Boles;
- the story of three Starbucks Coffee Co. senior executives, all of whom are CWU graduates.

As you can see, the spring edition of *Crimson & Black* is full of Wildcat success stories. We hope you enjoy this snapshot of where CWU is today—and where we are headed. The future is indeed bright at Central Washington University.

Sincerely,

A. James 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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my alumni mentor
and their support
as I prepare for
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Fulbright Scholars for Central



Three faculty selected
for 2022-23 program,
placing CWU among
impressive company

By David Leder

Central Washington University is known for a lot of things, not the least of which is our world-renowned faculty. Every year, CWU professors and researchers are invited by their colleagues around the world to visit other countries so they can share their expertise with fellow scholars at peer institutions.

As an added bonus, they return to Central with a wealth of information that they proudly impart to their colleagues and students. In recent years, members of the CWU faculty have traveled to all seven continents—yes, including Antarctica—to fortify their already robust knowledge base.

rs Raise the Bar



CWU Professor and Fulbright scholarship recipient Susan Kaspari and her family in Norway with their dog, Lupine. From left are 9-year-old Hyla Cunningham, Kaspari, 12-year-old Cedar Cunningham, and husband Jesse Cunningham.

Photo courtesy of Jesse Cunningham.

In terms of prestige, the recently completed academic year was particularly impressive. In 2022-23, CWU boasted three Fulbright Scholars among its ranks: Provost Michelle DenBeste, Associate Dean of the College of the Sciences Elvin Delgado, and Geological Sciences Professor Susan Kaspari. Their selections helped Central earn recognition from the Department of State as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program Top Producing Institution.

“This is a pretty big deal for CWU to have three Fulbright Scholars in the same year,” said DenBeste, who visited France last fall. “Having three selections in the same year is amazing, even for a larger institution. This recognition just goes to show that Central is home to some of the most influential scholars in higher education.”

DenBeste, Delgado, and Kaspari are among the approximately 900 U.S. scholars—faculty, administrators, or other professionals—who were chosen to lecture and/or conduct research in a wide variety of academic and professional fields during the past year.

The Top Producing Institution recognition is given to the U.S. colleges and universities with the highest number of applicants selected for a single academic year.

“This is so great for Central,” Kaspari said. “All three of us will return enriched and inspired to share what we learned with the CWU community.”

“Receiving a Fulbright is a great honor for me and my colleagues,” Delgado added. “But, most of all, it highlights the quality of faculty we have here at Central.”

Fulbright is the federal government’s flagship international educational exchange program, and it is among the largest and most diverse exchange programs in the world. Since its inception in 1946, more than 400,000 participants from all backgrounds and fields—including recent university graduates, teachers, scientists, researchers, artists, and others from the U.S. and 160 other countries—have participated.

Fulbrighters study, teach, conduct research, exchange ideas, and contribute to finding solutions to complex global challenges. The program’s alumni include 41 heads of state or government, 62 Nobel Laureates, 89 Pulitzer Prize winners, 78 MacArthur Fellows, and countless leaders and changemakers who carry forward the Fulbright mission of enhancing mutual understanding.

DenBeste, Delgado, and Kaspari were preceded in recent years by three CWU colleagues: Geography Professor John Bowen (Scholar, 2019-20), Sport and Movement Studies Professor Stefan Ward (Scholar, 2020-21), and Associate Professor of Student Engagement and Community Outreach Maureen Rust (Specialist, 2021-25).

Central’s three current Fulbright recipients recently shared their experiences with *Crimson & Black*. The following are brief overviews of those conversations:



Geology professor and researcher Susan Kaspari studied light-absorbing particles in ice cores during her Fulbright exchange in Norway. “I saw polar bears up close!” she exclaimed.

Photos courtesy of Susan Kaspari.



Susan Kaspari

The longtime CWU geological sciences professor completed her nine-month Fulbright Scholar program in Norway this spring, and she plans to remain in Europe until July with her husband and their two children, ages 12 and 9.

Since her arrival last August, Kaspari has been engaged in sustainability work as both a professor and researcher. She has spent the majority of her time in the city of Tromsø, and doing research and teaching on Svalbard.

Kaspari said it's hard to put into words how valuable her Fulbright experience has been for her as a professional and as a person. Among the highlights: "I saw polar bears up close!" she exclaimed.

"As a researcher, I am excited to be initiating new projects in the Arctic, which is warming faster than any other place on Earth," said Kaspari, a 2021 Distinguished Faculty award recipient. "Being able to study these changes in person has been very informative for me, and the opportunity I have had to do research in the Arctic will also be integrated into my teaching in my climate-related courses."

When Kaspari first arrived in the Arctic, she investigated the presence of black carbon, dust, and organic materials in snow in and around Svalbard. In the months that followed, she estab-

lished new research collaborations, spent time at the Norwegian Polar Institute, and attended conferences on ice cores and glaciology in Switzerland and Sweden.

She also taught a course for two weeks at the Arctic University of Norway, where she co-advised a graduate student for most of the year, and was a guest lecturer in a glaciology course at the University Centre in Svalbard.

"As an educator, living in Norway has been eye-opening since I have such a strong interest in sustainability," Kaspari said. "Because of Norway's strong social system, everyone here is food-secure, has access to housing and health care, and the cost of attending university is negligible. This will certainly influence my teaching in my sustainability-related courses at CWU."

Kaspari said the most eye-opening revelation for her while living in Norway has been the contrast between the Norwegian social safety system and that of the United States, where community organizations (e.g., food banks, Planned Parenthood, and Habitat for Humanity) are needed to fill the gaps. This divide is especially intriguing to Kaspari when she examines the situation from a social sustainability lens.

"Norway's government takes care of basics like health care, education, and food security, so they don't need those organizations," she said. "We have to do a lot of that work at the local level, which can get really complicated. Over here (in Norway), they don't have those issues."

Kaspari examines the presence of black carbon, dust, and organic materials in the snow in Svalbard, Norway.



Michelle DenBeste

When CWU's provost and vice president for academic and student life traveled to Paris in October, she knew she would gain a wealth of valuable experience. What she didn't know was how beneficial her Fulbright visit would be for Central.

"I knew I would get a lot out of it, but I wasn't sure that the experience would be CWU-specific enough," said DenBeste, who received a Fulbright International Education Administrators (IEA) grant. "But I was pleasantly surprised. I came away with a lot of good contacts from around the world, plus some ideas for new programs here."

During her 10-day trip, DenBeste visited a number of higher-ed institutions, including the University of Angers, the University of Paris, and the Paris Fashion Institute, and connected with new colleagues around the world—many of whom she plans to work with to advance CWU's international studies programs.

"Going to Paris made me think about how we can intentionally expand our offerings to our own students, while also making the campus experience even better for our international students," she said.

Above all, DenBeste realized how important it will be for Central to inform students and prospective students about the many international study opportunities that are available to them, including Fulbright Scholars. She pointed to the value of study abroad programs, both for current students and for international students coming to the U.S.

"Study abroad helps students recognize their strengths, and it helps them learn to be more self-sufficient," DenBeste said. "Their overseas experiences should be about learning new cultures and building academic knowledge, but they should also be about adventure. There's a real sense of accomplishment that happens because they find so many opportunities for growth."

DenBeste's interactions in Paris also showed her that CWU can take advantage of even more opportunities to bring international students to campus. For that to happen, she hopes Central continues to build lasting relationships with our partner institutions worldwide.

"We need to show their families that when they come here, they will be safe and well taken care of," she said, noting that CWU has one of the largest Japanese programs in the state, with more than 5,000 students who have visited the university. "They also need to know that their credits will count toward a degree here. The more accessible we can be for our international students, the more they will see CWU as a place they want to be."



CWU Provost Michelle DenBeste returned from her Fulbright Scholars visit to Paris with many new ideas about how to promote international study opportunities and attract international students to Central. Above, DenBeste attends a reception at Paris City Hall at St. Germain en Laye. Below, DenBeste and other Fulbright recipients visit a French high school called Lycee Julie Victoire Daubie.

Photos courtesy of Michelle DenBeste.



Elvin Delgado

Few academics can say they have been awarded two Fulbright scholarships, but CWU's Associate Dean of the College of the Sciences is one of those rare exceptions.

Delgado received a Fulbright IIE Research grant in 2006 when he was a PhD candidate at Syracuse University. Then, last summer, he was awarded a Fulbright Specialist Program Award, which gave him an opportunity to complete a three-week project at the University of Chile in Santiago.

During his time there, the longtime CWU geography professor worked with scholars at the University of Chile on energy transition issues; conducted preliminary fieldwork in the O'Higgins region to explore the potential transformations of rural energy landscapes associated with energy transition policies; met with policymakers and government officials to discuss the implications of large-scale solar projects in agricultural land; and delivered lectures and presentations at the Ministry of Energy and different universities in Santiago.

He also collaborated in the development of a research grant proposal draft, met with undergraduate and doctoral students at the University of Chile, helped develop a draft syllabus for an online course about energy transition and rural energy landscapes, and more. Needless to say, Delgado's experience in Chile was career-altering.

"I'm an associate dean now, but I am a scholar first—that will never change," he said. "I love research and I will always stay involved in that, no matter where my career takes me."

But even though Delgado's Fulbright scholarship has ended, that doesn't mean his work is completed—far from it. In the coming years, he will continue to collaborate with his new colleagues at the University of Chile and use what he has learned to enrich his CWU students and colleagues.

"One of the goals of this grant was to exchange knowledge and establish a new research agenda with scholars at the University of Chile," said Delgado, regarded as an international expert on energy resource geography. "We will study and compare the socio-environmental and political-economic implications associated with energy transition policies that incentivize the deployment of renewable energy projects in Washington and Chile, which are dealing with many of the same energy transition issues.

"The work I am doing will ultimately benefit our students because my research informs my teaching," he added.

For example, the online course he helped develop—titled "Rural Energy Landscapes"—will be team-taught by him and a professor in Chile, giving students at the University of Chile and CWU an opportunity to take the class simultaneously. Delgado also plans to participate in an academic exchange program with his Chilean colleagues, allowing both institutions to share vital energy transition research findings with one another.



Associate Dean of the College of the Sciences Elvin Delgado spent three weeks in Chile last summer doing research and sharing his energy resource geography expertise with colleagues at the University of Santiago and other institutions.

Photos courtesy of Elvin Delgado.



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED



Students, staff, faculty see promise in CWU's new vision and mission

By David Leder



MEChA de CWU members Yaritza Granados, left, Samantha Perez Loreto, Lesly Eustaquio, and Angela Portugal serve horchata at the Equity Services Council Night Market this spring.

As Central Washington University embarks on our journey of implementing a new vision, mission, and strategic plan, many observers have correctly noted that the objectives outlined in these carefully crafted statements are already underway.

We recognize that we have a long road ahead of us, and there is much work to be done before we can proclaim that we have achieved our goal of being a model learning community of equity and belonging.

For CWU to accurately state that we are an inclusive, equitable institution that nurtures culturally sustaining practices and expands access and opportunity for all learners—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identification, or socioeconomic status—the entire campus community must take concrete steps to define our new reality.

One of CWU's priorities, as noted by President Jim Wohlpart, is to build more diversity in our faculty and staff ranks so that prospective students see more of themselves in their future mentors on campus.

"We must hire and retain a more diverse employee base that can provide role modeling, coaching, and mentoring to our students of color," said Wohlpart, who spearheaded the university's vision, mission, and strategic plan work upon his arrival in the summer of 2021. "We also need to move toward becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution in intentional and strategic ways, making certain that all of the support systems are in place before we submit our application."

As of fall 2022, CWU's student body was approximately 42% people of color, with a growing number of applicants every year coming from east of the Cascades. While a large percentage of Central students hail from King and Pierce counties, communities with high Hispanic representation, such as Yakima, Sunnyside, Toppenish, Wenatchee, and Moses Lake, have become a growing priority for recruiters.

CWU understands that in order to attract even more students from our own backyard, we must build a stronger culture of belonging and improve our efforts to advance more equitable approaches in our systems and structures. Forty-three percent of our students are the first in their families to go to college, and the number of first-generation students at our eight University Centers and instructional sites is approaching 50%.

These individuals rely on our help, and we need to do an even better job of showing them that our main objective is for them to succeed—in college and in life.

"Finding a support system in a new, strange place can be hard, but having a community that supports you can be integral to your success as a student," said Luis Reyes, who is graduating this spring after serving as ASCWU president for the past year.

"I like to highlight my own experiences when talking to prospective students, and that helps give them insight into how I found my home here at Central. Just letting them know that there are large windows of opportunity here on campus allows them to understand they have room to grow."

Vision:

Central Washington University will be a model learning community of equity and belonging.

Mission:

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



Putting Students First

Since many of our students have never set foot on a college campus before they arrive at Central, they often need a little extra guidance. It is comforting for first-time students to know that CWU faculty and staff are here to guide and mentor them so they can enjoy the same advantages as their more traditional counterparts.

By keeping our unique demographics top of mind, Central believes we can make good on our commitment to student success and ensure that all learners have access to the engaged- and applied-learning experiences that are essential for academic excellence and professional preparation.

“Of all the institutions I’ve taught at or visited, I’ve never been around a faculty culture that is so student-centered,” said music Professor Mark Samples, who also serves as chair of the Faculty Senate. “When I first got here, I was surprised at how often faculty invoked the question of ‘what’s best for the student?’ when making decisions. But I’m not surprised anymore. I know now that this is an extremely valuable part of our culture.”

Samples and his colleagues take pride in going the extra mile for their students, regardless of where they are from. Preparing young people to become vibrant contributors in society and the workforce is—and always has been—job number one. But it also means taking the time to listen and understand where they’re coming from.

“While we still have work to do as we strive toward our ambitious vision, the faculty at CWU has always sought ways to involve students in interactive learning,” Samples said. “We can build a model learning community through activities in class, or just having informal conversations with them before or after class to let them know they belong in a university—that they belong here at Central.”

Long-Term Plans

As outlined in CWU’s six-year legislative plan, The Central Experience, we are committed to providing access to a wider range of prospective students, improving financial literacy in the communities we serve, addressing the learning loss that occurred during the pandemic, and introducing vital student-support programs that will prove essential as we seek to expand our applicant pool.

The Central Experience isn’t only about recruitment, retention, and student success, however. The plan also identifies the critical need to address societal issues affecting the lives of people in our community, such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and mental health counseling. Each of these represents adaptive challenges that CWU is committed to addressing head-on.

“Adaptive challenges are those issues that we do not have easy answers to,” Wohlpart said, adding that Central also recog-

Aaron Nelson, right, and Jessica Berkey are the president and vice president of CWU’s EQUAI student club. EQUAI stands for Equality through Queers and Allies.

nizes the need to develop more engaged learning opportunities through high-impact practices, which are known to produce better outcomes for more students from varying backgrounds. “These challenges force us to question our own values, beliefs, and perceptions, and they make us ask new questions—questions we may not even know that we need to ask.”

But you have to start somewhere, and a number of key figures on campus believe CWU is heading in a positive direction that will serve us well for many years to come.

Mal Stewman, the Diversity and Equity Center (DEC) director, says it’s been refreshing to see the consistent messaging and authenticity from the Executive Leadership Team about the university’s direction. Central is trying to “walk the walk” with regard to our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and he says it is especially exciting to see the words “equity” and “belonging” in CWU’s vision.

“One of the things that is key for us as we move forward with this vision and mission is to be deliberate about where we want to go,” said Stewman, who earned two degrees from Central (’96 and ’12) and worked in CWU Athletics for eight years before taking over at the DEC last fall.

“Setting forth this bold vision of where we want to go is very important to that process. But if we’re going to achieve those lofty goals, it’s going to take everyone—faculty, staff, and students—to work together. We all have to do our part.”

Thinking Outside the Box

Having strong student-support structures on campus will be essential for CWU to become a model learning community of equity and belonging. But, as Stewman notes, the commitment reaches beyond the classroom. If CWU wants to attract a more diverse population of students, faculty, and staff, it must find ways to effect change in the broader community.

“We have always had a challenge in this area, which isn’t very diverse by default,” he said. “Central has to find a way to increase our reach in the community and show people from other places that CWU really is a community that is striving to offer a sense of belonging.

“We have to establish more spaces that signify that belonging—like more cultural food options, and access to hair-care services



ASCWU President Luis Reyes says “students feel like they belong at CWU now more than ever.”

for people of color—because you can’t fake it,” he added. “If we’re going to invite those students to come here, we have to provide those things to build up and support our communities of under-represented people.”

Plans for a new multicultural center on campus also feed into CWU’s long-term plans. Reyes, the ASCWU president, believes having a space that celebrates people from all different cultures will be a game-changer for Central as we lean into our vision and mission. Students voted in 2022 to use a portion of their Services and Activities fund to help pay for the center, and the university is working with lawmakers to fund the rest of the proposed \$6 million structure.

“Building a space where students feel like they can identify with others like them—but also feel like they belong in a space made just for them—is very important,” Reyes said. “Along with the continuous support of our Equity and Services Council programs here on campus, students feel like they belong at CWU now more than ever.”

That is music to President Wohlpart’s ears. But, at the same time, he knows our work has only just begun.

“I have heard great enthusiasm about the work we have been doing over the past year and a half,” he said. “But that optimism is still a cautious optimism because everyone knows we have a long way to go to truly live into our vision. Our vision cannot simply be words on a page; it must transform what we do as a university. And then, most importantly, our work must radiate out into the world to create a better, fairer, and more just place for everyone to live, work, and learn.” ■

Central is making a more concerted effort to be inclusive of all cultures and ethnicities.



CWU EMPOWERS STUDENTS TO LEARN BY DOING

Renewed focus on high-impact practices
aimed at helping every student achieve
the best outcome

By Jodie Nicotra

Even if you've never heard the term high-impact practice—HIP for short—chances are you've encountered at least one of them at Central Washington University.

As Central leans into our new vision of being a model learning community of equity and belonging, there is a renewed emphasis on providing students with more practical, hands-on learning opportunities so they can develop the skills they need from the moment they enter the professional world.

While the CWU faculty may not always define their teaching methods as high-impact practices, many of these student success-focused initiatives are already underway in the classroom and the field.

Examples of HIPs include capstone courses and projects, first-year seminars or experiences, common intellectual experiences, internships, e-portfolios, and learning communities. But not all HIPs are part of academic curricula. Participating in living-learning communities, attending student events, volunteering, and even meeting with an advisor also count.

No matter how HIPs are defined, they have been proven to help students from all backgrounds develop the skills they need to succeed, while also providing a significant boost to their résumés. The well-documented success of HIPs at other higher ed institutions has put them front and center at Central over the past two years. Here's a look at how they are taking shape in the departments across campus.



Digital marketing Professor Sayantani Mukherjee has placed an emphasis on high-impact practices in her teaching.

Bringing HIPs into Focus

Marketing Professor Sayantani Mukherjee is one CWU faculty member who has always used HIPs in her teaching, even before she knew them by that name.

She incorporated them partly out of necessity, since the subject matter of digital marketing lends itself to the kind of experiential learning associated with high-impact practices. Mukherjee, who is based at CWU-Lynnwood, has embedded them throughout the curriculum of the digital marketing minor, which has become one of the largest minors in the College of Business despite being launched only two years ago.

“The digital landscape is such that you cannot have content and theory by itself without having some form of high-impact practice in it,” she said. “For example, it’s just not enough to talk about TikTok in the abstract if you don’t play around with TikTok.”

One of Mukherjee’s most successful HIP experiences was a small independent-study group that was invited to participate in a Google Challenge. The international technology conglomerate put up \$10,000 and connected student teams with a nonprofit—in this case, a Reno-based organization that worked to make healthy food accessible to vulnerable groups.

The CWU student team created multiple advertising campaigns and 16 Google ads aimed at different audiences, and they were recognized by the company as a “top marketer.”

Kahlia Mafua (’22), the student team leader for the Google Challenge, said being involved in the project took her marketing knowledge to the next level.

“It was different from any sort of simulation that you go through in school, or any sort of academic reading,” Mafua said. “It’s you in the driver’s seat doing client relationship management, trying to get your cost per click down, revising your copy to make sure that it resonates with who you’re grabbing, and also targeting your audience. It really was game-changing.”

Mafua now works as a digital marketing coordinator for Columbia Hospitality in Seattle. She attributes that opportunity directly to her Google Challenge experience with Mukherjee.

“My technical understanding of Google Ad Words was what got me into my role now,” Mafua said. “Being able to speak on a technical level in a field that’s very tech-heavy was truly amazing.”

Hands-On Experiences

Associate Professor of Marketing Claudia Dumitrescu has long recognized the importance of HIPs to student success. As director of the growing CWU Agribusiness program, she understands that typical career paths for students draw on the types of skills HIPs provide—everything from deeper critical thinking to better communication.

Many of Dumitrescu’s class projects involve students working directly with local industry professionals, including Tree Top, Domex SuperFresh, and Loftus Labs. Students in her recent online marketing research course, for instance, worked with a fruit-grower in the Yakima Valley to examine consumer perceptions of different apple breeds. The student teams collected data, then presented a professional report on their findings to the company.

“It provided the students an opportunity to enhance their learning of current marketing issues in the agribusiness industry,” Dumitrescu said. “We were able to connect the marketing concepts to practice, and they realized that ‘Hey, yeah, we do need to make research-based strategic decisions.’”

HIPs have been making some serious headway in the College of Business, but they’re also catching on in other departments on campus.

In Geological Sciences, for instance, HIPs in the 200-level gateway course prepare students for upper-division courses. As part of collaborative assignments and mini-research projects, students collect data in the field and analyze online data sets while learning foundational scientific practices like recording observations in a field notebook.

Professor Anne Egger, who has a joint faculty appointment with the departments of Geological Sciences and Science and Mathematics Education, noted that HIPs are just as rewarding for faculty as they are for students.

“You start to see them take on the mindset of a scientist as they engage in a research project or see how something they’ve seen in a textbook looks in reality,” Egger said. “There’s an intellectual leap to make, but they have to make that in order to become a geoscientist.”

Creating Equitable Outcomes

HIPs benefit college students in myriad ways, but one outcome that may get overlooked is the role they play in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

High-Impact Practices

- Capstone Courses and Projects
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Diversity/Global Learning
- ePortfolios
- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Internships
- Learning Communities
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Undergraduate Research
- Writing-Intensive Courses

CWU Provost Michelle DenBeste explained that diversity takes into account race and ethnicity, but it also means supporting the needs of first-generation students, non-traditional students, and others who historically have felt like they don't belong at a university.

"High-impact practices done well can be a way to really reach those folks," she said. "It gives them both a sense of belonging and the tools to realize all of their potential."

Mukherjee pointed out that students from underrepresented groups make up a large share of Central's student population (approximately 42% as of fall 2022). These students want to use their university experiences to gain equal footing with more privileged groups, and they have embraced the use of HIPs to further their education.

"I think if we intentionally embed HIPs in our curriculum, it could help the students really flourish as they graduate," Mukherjee said.

Not only that, but HIPs themselves can be used as a way to increase students' awareness and sensitivity to issues of equity and diversity. Mukherjee does this through the choice of non-profits she and her students work with. Last winter, for instance, her students worked with a Seattle-based nonprofit that aims to build a diverse and inclusive community around chamber music.

"I think part of the experience of having a high-impact practice is that students become familiar with diversity and equity in various forms," she said. "Having viewpoints exchanged and negotiating a shared dialogue with those viewpoints automatically becomes part of the class."

For Eric Hougan, an associate professor in the School of Education, the impact of HIPs on diversity and equity can start even before a student arrives on campus.

He is involved with CWU's groundbreaking Teacher Academies program, which partners with about a dozen school districts around the state to support and diversify the educator workforce by connecting with underrepresented populations in cities ranging from Renton and Puyallup on the west side to Grandview, Selah, and Kennewick east of the Cascades.

Through the Teacher Academies program, high school students take a dual-credit course that studies education through the lens of equity and social justice. Its service learning and community engagement components connect high-schoolers with elementary classrooms in their home communities. This work, combined with advising and mentoring, is designed to help students build their sense of belonging.

"One of the things we're working on at CWU is to make sure that feeling of family is extended into their undergraduate experience as well, by developing the sort of ecosystem that they feel they're part of, and they feel like they belong to," Hougan said.

Scaling Up the Use of HIPs

One aspect about Central that attracted DenBeste when she interviewed several years ago was the widespread use of HIPs on campus. But, for the most part, she noticed faculty didn't call them that, and there were no coordinated efforts to use HIPs intentionally.

She and her colleagues, including President Jim Wohlpart, have begun to recognize that HIPs create deep, résumé-friendly learning experiences while also increasing equity among students. Being more intentional about implementing these practices helps increase diversity on campus and in the communities CWU serves.

In an effort to apply HIPs more broadly at Central, the Office of the Provost applied for—and was accepted to—the 2022 Association of American Colleges & Universities Institute on High Impact Practices and Student Success.

Now DenBeste has a task force of faculty and staff developing a plan to put into practice what they learned about HIPs at the institute last summer. Over the past academic year, the task force has sought to create a university experience that will naturally incorporate five to seven HIPs throughout a student's time at Central.

DenBeste and the task force are holding an institute this summer to get more faculty and staff involved in the effort to more deliberately utilize HIPs and accommodate more students. She believes integrating HIPs more robustly will allow Central to better serve our entire student population.

"There's no one way to do high-impact practices," DenBeste said. "But if you're doing them consistently, students who feel like they belong at the institution are far more likely to succeed, and students who are connected with other students are a lot less likely to give up when the going gets tough. We need to build those things in for our students so that when it's really hard, their impulse won't be 'This is not for me, I'm quitting.'" ■



A group of CWU computer science students helped develop a software app for this Ford Mustang, with help from Bob Rapp of Envorso. L-R: Lucas Keizur, Kirsten Boyles, Richard DeYoung, Craig Turnbull, Joe Corona, and Rapp.

Computer Science Students Develop App for Ford Motor Co.

By Rune Torgersen

Five Central Washington University computer science students were presented with the monumental task of creating an app from scratch. The capstone project was sponsored and overseen by the Ford Motor Company, and developed in just 10 weeks in early 2022.

The team of students designed and built an app to assist electric vehicle owners in finding charging stations, using a new programming language and framework, for a real client expecting real results. Bob Rapp, senior partner at Envorso and mentor to CWU computer science students, came away from the project impressed with the students' work.

Kirsten Boyles, Lucas Keizur, Craig Turnbull, Richard DeYoung, and Joe Corona are all graduating computer science majors. The group was advised by CWU Professor of Computer Science Szilárd Vajda, while development and strategy decisions were left entirely up to the students—the definition of a high-impact practice.

"Professor Vajda gave us a lot of really good guidance," Boyles said. "He was the one who really pushed us when we expressed interest in going the Flutter and Dart direction and helped us keep our end-goal in sight so we didn't get lost in the tunnels along the way."

Flutter, a software development framework, and Dart, a programming language, were both unfamiliar to the team, but they learned the ins and outs of these new systems as they developed their app, to great success.

"Rather than assign ordinary, abstract school projects, I try to find real-life, client-led capstones for my students," Vajda said. "This way their work is very in demand and they get the opportunity to work with industry professionals before they graduate."

As a result of their success, all five students on the team were offered internships with Envorso to continue building their app for possible worldwide release.



**Hands-on Research
Sets Stage for
Professional Growth**



Biology major Sapna Sharaf said she has gained a variety of skills and knowledge through her work in Associate Professor Timothy Beng's chemistry lab.

By Tara Roberts

Central students develop skills and insights through research, scholarship, and creative activity

When Emily Raney started her studies at CWU, she introduced herself to her advisor with two facts: she loved electricity and she wanted to become a Disney Imagineer.

During her senior year in 2020-21, she was a research assistant for a project led by Greg Lyman, chair of the Engineering Technologies, Safety, and Construction Department in the College of Education and Professional Studies.

Raney helped set up wind-recording gear on the roof of Hogue Hall, organized data, and shared that data with the project's partners. For her senior project, she designed another wind-measuring device.

Her research experience taught her the essential skill of troubleshooting, either by using her prior knowledge or learning to do something new. It's come in handy in her post-college job—as a Disney Imagineer, just as she planned.

"Research enhances what you learn in the classroom, and it kind of sears it into your brain a little bit more, because you're actually using this in something that you can see the results in," Raney said. "It's wonderful turning in a project and getting a grade, but then you forget about it and you move on. With this project, I kept using those skills and I really learned a lot more."

Aside from preparing students like Raney for their careers, undergraduate research at CWU also puts them on the path to continuing their studies, if they choose.

Timothy Beng, an associate professor of chemistry who works with undergraduate and graduate students in his lab, explained that grad school applicants with research experience are more competitive in the job market.

"These days, when an undergraduate student is able to show they've done some research, it comes with a lot of transferable skills like being able to present, troubleshoot, collaborate, and overcome impostor syndrome," Beng said.

Research Tied to CWU Vision

Undergraduate research is among the American Association of Colleges and Universities' list of high-impact practices (HIPs), which are "based on evidence of significant educational benefits for students who participate in them—including and especially those from demographic groups historically underserved by higher education."

Tim Englund, dean of the College of the Sciences, said faculty members know undergraduate research is a high-impact practice, so they open the door for students to get involved. Along with providing hands-on experiences outside of the classroom, extra-curricular research helps students develop valuable connections.

"It's an opportunity to engage in a small-group setting with a professor," Englund said. "Not one person in front of the class and 35 people sitting out there, but really working closely with a professor and learning the discipline, all the nuances."

For example, the CWU Biological Sciences Department has partnered with the Washington State Department of Transportation for years to monitor wildlife along Interstate 90 and design migration corridors to reconnect habitat areas disrupted by the freeway.

In the social sciences, students and faculty in American Indian Studies and anthropology are using ground-penetrating radar to search for unmarked graves near Fort Simcoe Historical State Park, where the government ran a boarding school for Native children from 1861 to 1920.

The benefits of undergraduate research extend far beyond STEM and social science fields, however.

In the College of Business, the Virtual Analytics Lab (VITAL) allows students on all Central campuses to work with real-world financial, environment, social, and governance data—an important emerging trend in the investment world. Studying real data allows students to identify patterns and imperfections, said Han Donker, chair of the accounting department.

"If you're in biology, or in chemistry or physics, you have a physical lab," he said. "In business, our lab is the financial markets. So how can you do research on financial markets while not just reading a textbook? You need real data."

In the arts and humanities, students take their skills beyond the classroom through scholarly activity and creative expression. Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities Jason Knirck said undergraduates in his college typically complete capstone classes that culminate in a public-facing project, such as a music or theater performance, research paper, or art exhibition. Graduate students do similar work for their theses.

Knirck noted that these projects provide students with opportunities to express their creativity and explore their interests, while simultaneously building a portfolio.

"I want them to graduate with something that they're proud of: 'Look, I made something that wasn't there before,' or 'I played a piece that I never thought I'd be able to play,'" he said. "I want them to leave with that experience that can help them confidence-wise."

The Value of Undergrad Research

In May, CWU students from across majors and campuses gathered for the Symposium on Research and Creative Expression (SOURCE), a university-wide celebration of research, scholarship, and creative activity.

After being mostly online for the past three years, the SOURCE conference included in-person and virtual activities, highlighting the work of more than 300 students who applied to give presentations or performances. Faculty judges provided feedback and determined awards, and local K-12 school groups, alumni, and Wildcat community members were in attendance.

The conference aligns with Central's vision of being a model learning community of equity and belonging, where experiential learning is the main objective, said Christy Gilchrist, Central's director of research and sponsored programs.

"SOURCE showcases the depth and the breadth of scholarly activity and creative expression, and the diversity of it," she said. "It also fosters the connections among students, faculty, alumni, employers, and professionals in the field—so it really is a big event."

As a master's-granting university, CWU doesn't have PhD students or the expansive infrastructure associated with a large research university. But research is still critical to Central's mission, and the university's student-centered community and experienced faculty connect undergraduates with projects that develop their skills outside the classroom and help them share with the world what they've learned.

"Once you dig in and put a research project together, you have to really start understanding what's going on and saying, 'All right, well, if I understand this, let's put a theory to test,'" Gilchrist said. "Do we know the answer to this? No? Well, let's figure something out."

Beyond Typical Teaching

At large, research-focused universities, many top researchers spend little or no time teaching undergraduates. But at Central, the faculty brings with them to their classrooms the knowledge and experiences they gain through research, scholarship, and creative activity. That way, even students who don't participate in the research projects stand to benefit.

When faculty are current in their fields, they teach the most applicable theories and techniques, Englund said. This holds true in fields like mathematics—his area of expertise—that may seem static.

“You might say, ‘Well, calculus hasn’t changed in 200 years. Why does a mathematician need to stay current?’” Englund said. “Yeah, that’s probably true for calculus, but we also need to know what’s happening in the field of mathematics so we can direct students in the appropriate ways.”

Observing their professors practicing and sharing their work can also help students understand that people who excel in their field are ordinary people whose accomplishments others can aspire to, Knirck said.

“We have a lot of first-gen students for whom academia, at times, needs to be demystified,” he said. “It’s important for them to normalize, ‘what’s an academic conference like?’ ‘What is a master class like in music or theater?’ ‘What does it mean to have your art go to a juried exhibition?’”

Professors who are enthusiastic about their research can draw out students who hadn’t imagined participating in out-of-class projects.

“When I initially thought about research, I was overwhelmed about being able to manage it,” said Sapna Sharaf, a junior biology major. “But it’s really a fun experience, especially when you’re able to do it during undergrad. You can take it with a professor that you’re really interested in what they’re doing.”

Sharaf said she has gained a variety of skills and knowledge through her work in Beng’s chemistry lab.

Central leaders see all of these benefits in action, Gilchrist said, and they want to encourage more participation through programs such as SOURCE, internal grants for faculty who involve students in collaborative research—and, perhaps, other opportunities.

“I love the fact that people are proud of what we have here,” Gilchrist said. “And if they’re proud of that, what kind of support could we have to really enhance our students’ experience here in that high-impact practice?” ■

Students Blown Away by Wind Research

By Tara Roberts

Imagine installing an enormous array of solar panels on the roof of a building, only to watch them blow away in a windstorm.

National building codes don’t include enough specific criteria for attaching energy-generating equipment to low-rise buildings. But Central’s Greg Lyman, chair of the Engineering Technologies, Safety, and Construction Department, aims to change that. In 2017, he and his collaborators received a \$350,000 National Science Foundation grant to create a physics-based strategy for predicting how high winds affect these systems.

In 2019, Lyman and a team of CWU students installed a fleet of sensors onto solar panels on the roof of Hogue Hall. Whenever the Ellensburg winds blew over the past four years, the sensors logged data about vibrations, air pressure, how much strain the wind put on the equipment, and more.

The students helped Lyman program, build, and troubleshoot the system. For example, when the team wanted to measure how wind flowed across the roof, students modeled and 3D-printed a sensor.

“They did a lot of real-world, applicable engineering,” Lyman said. “It was literally that: design, build, and test actual sensors and data acquisition systems for a complex engineering project.”

He sent the data to Florida International University, where researchers built a full-scale model of the system in a wind tunnel, and to the University of Washington, where a team helped with analysis.

Now, Lyman and his collaborators are preparing to publish the results, with the students as co-authors.

“If we focus on student success, while we as faculty are performing our research, it’s a great opportunity to get students involved,” he said. ■



Greg Lyman, chair of the Engineering Technologies, Safety, and Construction Department, believes in sharing his research experiences with students.

Professor Builds Compendium of Compounds By Tara Roberts

People with diabetes face a heightened risk of heart attack, stroke, eye and kidney problems, and other health complications. Some treatments for the disease can cause even more side effects, leading researchers around the world to explore better options.

Timothy K. Beng, an associate professor of organic chemistry at Central, is helping expand the possibilities for diabetes treatment by synthesizing a library of nitrogen-containing compounds that could form the basis of future medications.

“As we speak, about 70% of diabetes medications have nitrogen in them ... so this lends credibility to the type of molecules that we want to work with,” he said.

Sometimes, scientists find medically useful molecules in plants. However, Beng says, this limits potential treatments.

“As synthetic chemists, we’re entrusted with the responsibility of saying, ‘Look, this is all nature can do. What can we do better?’” he said.

By making molecules in the lab, Beng also can sustainably create significant amounts of the compound, providing more material for other researchers and future drug developers to work with.

When Beng synthesizes molecules with potential, he hands them off to collaborators at Central and universities in Indiana,

Louisiana, and North Carolina, who study their biological activity and toxicity.

Meanwhile, he collaborates with researchers who are investigating whether the compounds could be useful in treating other diseases. For example, he plans to work with researchers in Cameroon who study Leishmaniasis, a tropical parasitic disease that has been historically neglected by the scientific community. ■



Beng and junior Sapna Sharaf study compounds in the lab.

Finding a Connection Between Crime and Taxes By Rune Torgersen

The complex interplay between sales taxes, crime rates, education, and quality of life drives a staggering amount of local politics, especially in states like Washington where no income tax is collected.

Counties often rely on Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes (SPLOST) to fund their crime suppression measures, which creates an interesting situation in which funds for those programs are dependent on the strength of the local economy, and the strength of the local economy is typically impacted by crime.

Associate Professor of Accounting Fabio Ambrosio recently published research into this phenomenon, using a holistic view of this cycle.

“The issue with tax revenue and crime rates is that they’re both effects, not causes,” said Ambrosio, who is based at CWU-Des Moines. “We can’t just assume that there’s a connection between tax revenue and crime rates, because we have to separately study what drives tax revenue and what drives crime rates, and whether we can really close the circle by throwing tax dollars at crime suppression measures.”

One of the issues facing this approach is whether crime suppression programs like more jails, judges, and police officers actually reduce crime levels.

“If you’re trying to stop people from stealing, rather than arresting them faster, prosecuting them better, and putting more people in jail, maybe you should try to understand why these people are stealing, and that’s what this research has been about,” Ambrosio said. “Instead of throwing tax dollars at crime suppression measures, we should invest tax dollars into preventing and avoiding what drives people to commit crimes in the first place.”

According to Ambrosio’s research, reliance on SPLOSTs is actively removing funding from the communities that need it most. Since sales tax revenue increases when people have more money to spend and crime rates increase with higher poverty rates, revenue ends up flowing into counties with more market dominance and less need for crime suppression.

“The sales tax is flowing in the opposite direction of where the need is,” he said. “The money is flowing into these market-dominant counties that also happen to be the counties that need the money the least.” ■

Cataloging Spanish in Central Washington By Rune Torgersen

Language is fluid, constantly mutating, and adapting to its speakers and their environments. It's one thing to utilize Spanish sentence structures and vocabulary on paper, but it's quite another to understand how people actually speak the language with one another, especially in situations of language contact.

Through an ongoing research project, CWU Assistant Professor of Spanish Dr. Andrea Herrera-Dulcet and her students are cataloging the specific variety of Spanish that has developed over time in the Central Washington region.

To accomplish this feat, Herrera-Dulcet and her students are building the Corpus del Español de Central Washington (CECWA), a digital archive—or linguistic corpus—filled with oral interviews with Central Washington bilinguals showcasing the intricacies of the local Spanish dialects, in addition to the contexts in which they are used.

Herrera-Dulcet says that “every time we linguists want to do research on a language variation and change, we need to build a corpus, especially to study language in the wild, so to speak.”

“When you say Central Washington or Washington state, I don't think people realize just how many people here speak Spanish,” she said. “It's interesting for me to hit this region, not just for socio-linguistic interest, and also to help build a digital archive that can be a platform for all these voices that have flown under the radar for so long.”

She added that CECWA can contribute to the field of sociolinguistics and social justice amplifying Central Washington's Spanish stories and experiences.

The monumental task of documenting the intricacies of an entire spoken language is still ongoing, but CWU Spanish majors are already using it to conduct sociolinguistic research and examine the intricacies of how English and Spanish interact to create the unique vernacular seen today in the region.

In the future, the goal is to have interdisciplinary researchers use CECWA to examine linguistic, cultural, and anthropological issues relevant to our community. ■



Assistant Professor of Spanish Andrea Herrera-Dulcet, left, is partnering with her students to develop a linguistic corpus of Spanish spoken in Central Washington.

Training Tomo Teachers

CWU is developing
a pool of diverse,
community-oriented
educators for the
21st century

By Rune Torgersen

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Recipe



CWU Teacher Academies helped graduating senior Ingrid Valencia decide to pursue a career in education. She will be teaching in her hometown of Grandview this fall.

In 1891, the Washington State Normal School opened its doors in Ellensburg, tasked with educating the teachers of tomorrow. The institution blossomed into what we know today as CWU, expanding its scope into a full-fledged state university and educating professionals in a wide variety of fields.

While Central's selection of degrees may have broadened over the past 132 years, teacher education has remained at the heart of what we do. Learning experiences that change how we see the world and ourselves are why we're here.

Jennifer Dechaine, director and associate dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies, sees a bright future for teacher education at CWU, and an opportunity for us to do even more good with the communities we serve.

"We have a great opportunity to be improving and developing our partnerships with school districts and communities," Dechaine said, "and creating that holistic system to meet future teachers when they're in high school and giving them a seamless pathway to their own classroom. I look forward to seeing that all come together."

In an effort to set students on this path even before they get to college, CWU has partnered with more than 20 schools statewide on the innovative Teacher Academies program. Since 2009, these partner schools on both sides of the Cascades have been introducing high-schoolers to the fundamentals of teaching during their senior year, in the form of a dual-credit class.

The teachers who conduct these classes partner with CWU faculty to ensure that the curricula align with Central's programs and objectives, providing students with opportunities to spend time assisting elementary school teachers and helping them get a feel for the profession.

Ingrid Valencia, who is graduating this spring, has been hired back to Grandview High School, the very same school where she first attended a Teacher Academy. She noted the program was what initially inspired her to pursue a teaching career.

"If it wasn't for the program, I wouldn't even have considered education," she said. "But because I joined Teacher Academies, I was able to explore it prior to coming to college. I made up my mind to pursue it here at Central."

Beyond her personal experience, Valencia says the Teacher Academies are helping teachers feel more connected to their communities—something the state is trying to do more of as it seeks to diversify its educator workforce.

"It's positively impacting people in a lot of different ways," she said. "Besides helping to alleviate the teacher shortage, it's asking people to come back and teach in the communities they were part of in high school, which is a really great opportunity, especially for more rural areas that need more teachers. It makes the teachers a lot more connected to their students and their community."

Helping Fill the Void

As the nation grapples with a teacher shortage that was exacerbated during the pandemic, Washington has taken a nuanced approach to solving the problem.

Rather than simply focusing on educating as many teachers as possible, there's a statewide focus on ensuring that children have teachers who properly represent them in their own communities. One of the ways the CWU School of Education hopes to meet this need is through a recently awarded Leaders in Education Advancing Diversity, Equity and Racial Justice (LEADER) grant, which will fund the development of a regional community partnership aimed at diversifying the teaching workforce in an equitable, culturally responsible way.

The \$150,000 grant will fund collaboration and research into a plan tailored to specific teacher needs in the North Central Washington region. After examining community needs and resources for two years, CWU will submit its plan to the Legislature for approval for additional funding to put the plan into motion.

Mónica Medrano, the regional director of CWU-Wenatchee and CWU-Moses Lake, says that in addition to forging new pathways for students and educators alike, this work seeks to help educators unlearn some habits that might be contributing to problems with diversity in the K-12 teacher ranks.

"It's like this uncoupling of what's been done and what's been considered right, and asking ourselves how we start new and fresh to make sure we're providing students with the opportunity to thrive in their pursuit to become educators," Medrano said. "But it's also to prepare them to be educators where they are going to be educating—to serve the students in their own communities, wherever they may be."

Hands-on Training

Diversifying the teaching profession across the state builds on CWU's established reputation for fostering excellence in education. While the School of Education continues to seek out innovation, the teachers it produces are making their presence felt in the education landscape.

Just last summer, 2018 Elementary Education alumna Jenna Perry was awarded the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Young Educator of the Year Award for her efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere in her Skagit County kindergarten classroom. Perry credits CWU's teaching program with preparing her to do this important work and make a tangible difference in her community.

"There's great inclusionary practices in Central's courses that help prepare you for multilingual learners, so we leave equipped with the knowledge we need to teach, and teach well," she said. "I love Central, and I love the education program, and I loved all of my professors. There are definitely some that stick with you."

Perry pointed to Professor Tim Lawless, who reached out to her when he learned of her award, remembering her and the work they had done together.

“The connections you make are so powerful,” she said, “and it’s those professors who help you make the most of your time at Central that exemplify what teaching is all about.”

Perry was hired to the same school where she did her student teaching, immediately after she graduated from CWU. She also grew up in the Burlington School District, and being back home has given her insight into the lives of her students, as well as how to best meet their needs.

“It’s all about connection,” Perry said. “Students aren’t going to be the best learners they can be unless they trust their teacher and feel like they can mess up without being judged. So much of the beginning of my school year is about making those connections and relationships.”

Vision for the Future

Dechaine, from the School of Education, believes the work that the teacher education program is doing coincides nicely with the university’s new vision and mission statements, which emphasize

the need for modeling what true equity and belonging look like in higher education.

“Thinking about our new vision and mission statements—expanding high-impact practices, sustainability, and community partnerships—teaching does all of that by nature,” Dechaine said. “You can’t do it without community partnerships; you can’t do it without high-impact practices. The direction we’re headed brings me the passion we’ll need to get there.”

“Washington State Normal School” is still emblazoned over the doors to Barge Hall to remind us of our roots. But as the CWU School of Education continues its mission to address the issues facing the teaching profession in the U.S., a future of teachers with deep connections to their communities and a commitment to fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment in their classrooms comes into focus.

If you ask Perry, it all comes back to that special CWU touch.

“There are teachers that you forge these connections with where if you’re just roaming around Black Hall, you can peek into classrooms and sort of wiggle your way into the back if the professor is someone you know,” she said. “It’s very comfortable, and they treat you not so much as a student, but more as part of their team.” ■



Teach STEM Co-Director Allyson Rogan-Klyve, right, hand-delivers a classroom supply basket to CWU education graduate Amber Jefferson at a CWU-Des Moines event.



LEADERSHIP BEGINS FROM WITHIN

The Game Changers CEO Eric Boles uses his own life lessons to help others grow

By Savannah Tranchell

Photos courtesy of The Game Changers Inc.

In 1998, Eric Boles found himself afloat.

It had been four years since he was let go from his dream job as an NFL football player, and at age 28, he found himself lacking identity and direction. He was still smarting from his experience in professional sports and he had no idea where his career would go next.

Then Boles had his aha moment.

"I was at a United Way function, and there was a gentleman, Bob Moawad, who was speaking on the importance of attitude and leadership," the CWU Athletics Hall of Famer said. "He talked about competence and belief systems and how those things come together.

"I realized that it was my struggle when I was playing—I had the confidence that I could get to the NFL; I didn't have enough confidence to stay there," he continued. "Instead of my confidence increasing my competence, my lack of confidence negatively impacted my competence."

But even beyond that insight, Moawad—who died in 2007—gave Boles something else: a chance. At the end of the United

Way event, Moawad mentioned he was a Central Washington University alumnus.

"After the talk, I immediately went up to him and told him I was very interested in what he was doing," said Boles, a 1991 CWU graduate. "He began to mentor me, and that's where it all began."

"It" is a career as a globally recognized leader in executive coaching and training. Boles worked for Moawad's company, Edge Learning Institute, for several years, and eventually founded his own business, The Game Changers Inc., in 2010.

Through his work with the Lakewood-based company, Boles helps organizations implement the principles of team dynamics, leadership, and peak performance that he learned from his pro football experience.

Boles has partnered with multinational corporations like Dunkin' Brands, Starbucks, Alaska Airlines, Hasbro, Kraft Foods, USAA, the U.S. Air Force, New York Life, and the National Association of Realtors to impart his holistic approach to performance management, helping more than a half-million professionals accelerate their careers.



CWU alumnus Eric Boles has become a renowned motivational speaker through his company, The Game Changers Inc. The former CWU football standout went on to play in the NFL and uses those experiences to inspire leaders around the country.

Through it all, Boles has remembered the two main principles engrained in him both by Moawad and his time as a CWU student and football player: 1) To grow others, you have to grow yourself first; and 2) it's all about relationships.

GROWTH-BASED LEADERSHIP

Since he founded The Game Changers 13 years ago, Boles noted that workplaces have changed—a lot. The pandemic brought an explosion of telework opportunities, and the growing millennial and Gen Z workforces have different expectations around work-life balance and values alignment.

What also has changed dramatically is the vital role leaders play within their organizations.

“Everything rises and falls on leadership,” Boles said. “During my playing days, I saw the difference. It wasn’t always the most talented teams that won. It wasn’t just competency; it was chemistry. There was a synergy between the players on winning teams. It’s the same in business. That synergy is dictated by the culture, which is completely influenced by the leader.”

Boles doesn’t blame the shift in workplace cultures on the pandemic, but he admits the past three years did help accelerate that change. As part of The Great Resignation in 2021, more than 47 million Americans voluntarily left their jobs, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Although it wasn’t talked about as much before a couple of years ago, that trend was already underway, with voluntary separations rising nearly every year since 2009, the Harvard Business Review reported.

“The pandemic proved that people have options, and that hasn’t always been the case,” Boles said. “It has challenged businesses, employers, and leaders to realize how important the connection is with those they lead.”

Leaders need to hold themselves to the same standard they hold their employees to, or higher, he said. He believes his purpose is to coach, train, and inspire leaders throughout the

world to unleash their potential and the potential of those around them.

“It begins with unleashing their own potential,” Boles said. “My ability to properly influence those around me has a lot to do with bringing out the best in myself. I don’t have to be a great leader or a perfect leader, but I do have to be a growing leader. That creates space for the people around me to grow as well, and that growth gives them the ability to flow over obstacles.”

Boles’ training curriculum—which follows a “lean, practice, teach” model—offers two separate programs to help leaders develop their skills: “Moving to Great” and “Lead with Purpose.” Boles and his staff teach the leaders, who then turn around and educate their own teams. The two programs have proven to be highly successful in the U.S., and they have been translated into eight languages for use around the world.

“When a leader has a growth mindset, it makes a positive impact on everyone around them,” he said. “Wherever there are people who need leadership, those qualities matter.”

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Boles admits that nothing he has accomplished in his career would have been possible without the power of relationship. And it all started with his first visit to Ellensburg in the late 1980s.

Boles, who grew up Tacoma, visited Central with a group of high school friends who were recruited to play football—and he remains grateful to this day about his decision to become a Wildcat.

“It wasn’t me who was coming in as a recruit; it was my buddies,” he said. “I came in with a really tight group of friends, and we built that group at Central, and remain really close to this day. That’s what helped grow me so much: the powerful relationships and friendships I made there.”

He firmly believes that strong, authentic relationships are essential to finding success as a leader, and that message is at the root of a lot of what he talks about with his clients.

“You can’t do life in isolation; it requires authentic, vulnerable relationships,” he said.

Boles recalled one connection he made during one of the first training events that launched his executive coaching career. He had the chance to train a group at a YMCA in Tacoma, and among the participants was the wife of a Starbucks executive who ended up asking him to train a group of their leaders.

“The currency of everything is relationship,” Boles said. “You have to find ways to add value to others and use the help that’s provided. I had to get comfortable asking for help. What I’ve been able to accomplish all comes down to building great relationships.”

SAGE ADVICE

Boles says people tend to get hung up on the idea of networking or mentoring, but, most importantly, he recommends keeping it simple.

His advice for students preparing to launch their careers is simple: start talking to every single person who is actually doing something you might be interested in.

“Just find one person you admire. Hear their story. Ask them questions. Ask them, ‘If you were sitting where I am right now, what would you do?’” he said. “If you had to get to where you are right now in half the time, where would you start?”

Those relationships don’t just benefit the student; they also benefit the leader.

“Leaders are grateful to have someone to pour into. I want others to learn from my experience,” he said.

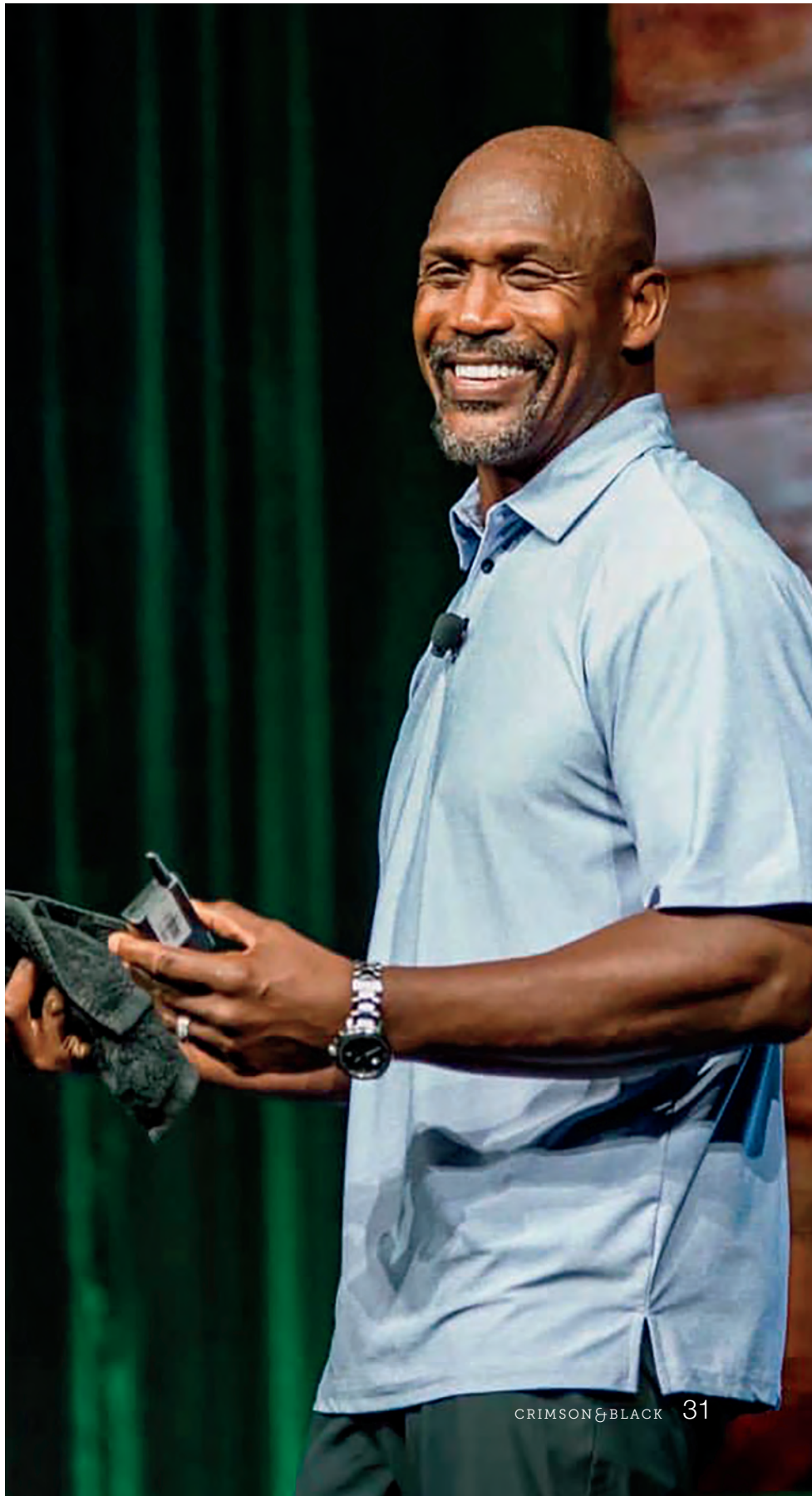
Likewise, Boles encourages his fellow CWU alumni to respond to students who reach out for advice.

“I am a big believer in those who have gone first pouring into those who are coming up. I am not giving back, I am giving what I owe,” he said. “We’re not supposed to hoard our experiences, our knowledge, our connections. We’re supposed to turn around and pass it forward.” ■

The Game Changers Inc.

- Eric Boles ('91), founder and CEO
- Clients include Dunkin' Brands, Starbucks, Alaska Airlines, Hasbro, Kraft Foods, USAA, New York Life
- Online — thegamechangersinc.com
- Book — *Moving to Great: Unleashing Your Best in Life and Work*
- Podcast — *The Game Changers*

Boles believes in building people up so they can pay it forward as they develop new relationships in business and in life.







'Cats Climb to the C-Suite

Trio of CWU alumni
thrive in leadership
roles at Starbucks

By David Leder

CWU is well-represented in the Starbucks executive ranks, with three graduates providing expertise and leadership at the highest level. From left are Zabrina Jenkins ('92), Kyndra Russell ('96), and Kelly Bengston ('96).

Starbucks Coffee Company is an iconic global brand with more than 100 million customers in 84 markets worldwide. The Seattle-based coffee retailer generates upwards of \$30 billion per year and has been on a steady growth trajectory since it was founded more than 50 years ago.

With a track record like that, it should come as no surprise that Starbucks attracts some of the world's best talent to its leadership ranks. But only one institution of higher learning—Central Washington University—can claim three graduates on the company's senior leadership team.

Acting Executive Vice President and General Counsel Zabrina Jenkins ('92), Senior Vice President of Marketing Kyndra Russell ('96), and Senior Vice President and Chief Procurement Officer Kelly Bengston ('96) all started their professional journeys in Ellensburg. As a result, all three alums are extremely proud to call Central their alma mater.

"The three of us always try to champion the CWU name within Starbucks, and it's definitely a point of pride for me when I talk about where I got started," said Jenkins, an 18-year Starbucks veteran who graduated with a business administration/finance degree before going on to law school.

Jenkins now serves on the CWU Board of Trustees—a position she has held since 2019—and previously sat on the Foundation Board. No matter where she has gone throughout her career, she always harkens back to her overwhelmingly positive experiences at Central.

"I still talk to students on campus all of the time when I'm over there," she said. "It has changed a lot since my time there, but it's still a very special place for me."

Bengston, who earned a degree in business administration, believes one of the best things about being a Wildcat is the sense of pride that is shared among the alumni. She also appreciates how CWU has maintained its culture of belonging since she was a student and residence hall advisor in the mid-1990s.

"Central has always been known for being very accessible and very personable, and that is still true today," said Bengston, a member of the CWU Foundation Board since 2017. "It still has great professors and great programs, and I feel like it's only getting better. Plus, it's in an ideal location—close to the west side, but far enough away so students can have a true college experience."

She and her husband, Kevin—also a Central alum—remain active with the foundation, and they are always seeking new opportunities to champion current and future Wildcats. Their most recent contributions have been through a new initiative called the Wildcat Promise, which seeks to help bridge the gap between financial aid and the true cost of attending a university.

"We are very passionate about first-generation students and helping them pursue their education," said Bengston, who has been with Starbucks since 2010. "Kevin and I were both first-gen

students, so we know what it's like. We understand that it's hard to afford college, and we wanted to help find a funding mechanism for students who don't have the benefit of full financial aid. With the Wildcat Promise, and other programs we support, we see students thrive."

Russell, like her two Starbucks colleagues, said she plans to become more involved in alumni relations in the years to come, while also contributing to CWU's marketing and rebranding efforts. She sees a number of growth opportunities for the institution, and she hopes to use her professional expertise to benefit Central's future.

"I have developed a lot of good alumni relationships over the years, and I feel like I can help strengthen the alumni community for Central," said Russell, who earned her degree in marketing and marketing management. "I would like to help figure out new ways for our alums to get involved in any way they can, no matter what that looks like, because there are so many different ways to help."

It All Started at Central

Russell, Jenkins, and Bengston each took charge of their own destinies, but the three Starbucks executives never hesitate to point out that their experiences at Central paved the way for their eventual rise to prominence in the world of international business.

To this day, Russell talks about how attending a relatively small institution like CWU helped shape her as a person and as a professional. For example, she learned to sharpen her analytical skills while also building strong, lasting relationships with her peers and professors.

"Central has such a strong sense of community, which really helped me grow as a person," she said. "But, at the same time, it stretches you and challenges you to go outside your comfort zone. By letting me choose the areas I really wanted to specialize in, Central gave me the power over my education that I may not have found at a larger institution. I was able to figure out what I really like to do, and that's what helped me find a career that I am passionate about."

One of the areas that piqued Russell's interest during her time at CWU was analytics—using data, insights, and innovation to drive planning, implementation, and evaluation of marketing campaigns. That knowledge helped her get her foot in the door at Westin Hotels and Resorts (which later became Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide) right out of college.

After more than 20 years in the hospitality industry, she parlayed that experience into a vice president role at Starbucks in 2017. Now, as senior vice president of marketing, Russell oversees a team of 200 and manages the company's global marketing

strategy and execution. She is understandably proud of how far she has come in her career, and she isn't shy about admitting what sparked her successful journey.

"The most useful skills I learned at Central were how to communicate and to distill information for a specific audience," Russell said. "I have always loved mixing right-brain and left-brain; creativity and analysis. Fortunately, for me, marketing allows me to do both—and Central had a well-rounded curriculum that let me explore both of those areas at the same time."

Similarly, Jenkins can trace her early career development back to her time in Ellensburg, where the former Wildcat basketball player and admissions counselor learned to be a strategic thinker and problem-solver. But, most of all, she learned the importance of developing meaningful relationships.

"I learned early on the importance of going out and talking to people and building a strong network. That has served me very well throughout my career," said Jenkins, who now manages all of Starbucks' legal functions, along with its global security and resiliency team.

Her team of approximately 370 employees includes another CWU alum, Sean Dyers, who mentored her when she was in high school. He even helped Jenkins land her first position at Starbucks in 2005.

"Sean has been there for me since I was a teenager, and today we work in the same department," Jenkins said of Dyers ('87), a managing director and corporate counsel. "I've been fortunate to have a lot of meaningful relationships in my career, but Sean has been one of the most instrumental to my success."

Control Your Own Destiny

Whenever Bengston thinks about how far she has come in her career, she always thinks back to what she learned while she was on campus. Like her two colleagues, she remembers the people she interacted with at CWU as being instrumental to her long-term development.

"You have to lean in and ask for help, and engage people when you need support," Bengston said. "And at Central, it seems like everyone is there to help you. That's one of the reasons it's such an amazing place to get an education."

While cultivating those personal relationships is essential for most people's professional development, your network can only do so much. Achieving your goals in life ultimately comes down to the effort you put in, she believes.

"You have to learn to make yourself uncomfortable and take things on that you may not be sure about," said Bengston, whose staff of 350 acquires everything sold at Starbucks' 36,170 stores around the world—tables, chairs, cups, milk, flavored syrups, décor—all but the coffee beans themselves. "I have found that

the most important thing is to be solutions-oriented instead of problem-focused. Don't get stuck on what the problem is; just figure out a way to fix it."

Russell concurred, noting that one of the most valuable skills she learned at Central was how to advocate for herself.

"I remember when one of my professors told me, 'The world isn't waiting for you; you need to let the world know what you're capable of,'" she said. "It was kind of a harsh reality at the time, but it helped me develop the self-confidence I needed to become a more well-rounded professional."

As one of the most trusted advisors to Starbucks founder and retired CEO Howard Schultz, Jenkins also understands the value of self-promotion. But, at the same time, she knows that to become a leader in a multi-national business, you have to present yourself as someone others want to get behind.

Above all, be approachable and authentic. Always.

"You have to recognize the responsibility that comes with being a leader," Jenkins said. "Be empathetic and relatable.

Be a problem-solver. But, most importantly, be transparent and authentic. If you're not, people will see right through you, and they won't want to follow you."

Now that they have three decades of professional experience under their belts post-CWU, Jenkins, Russell, and Bengston have a wealth of advice to offer today's generation of young professionals: Meet as many people as you can, don't be afraid to ask questions, be curious, open yourself up to new opportunities, and be a good listener.

Most of all, don't wait for the world to discover you. Believe in yourself and grab hold of your own destiny.

"Be confident yet vulnerable," Russell advised. "Be brave enough to suggest new ways of working, but show respect for how things have been done before you got there. It's also important to take the pressure off of yourself. No one expects you to know everything when you're just starting out. Don't be afraid to show them what you can do." ■



Wildcat Promise Seeks to Bridge Funding Gap for Student Borrowers

Central Washington University prides itself on providing higher education access to a wide range of students. But, for that education to be accessible to all, people must have access to enough funding to cover the cost of attendance.

Students are often faced with a gap in funding between the amount of aid they are offered and the amount they need to attend college, forcing many to drop out or decline to enroll altogether.

CWU has recognized this barrier, and as part of a broader effort to increase student retention rates and ensure that our students graduate in a timely fashion, we have developed a new effort focused on Washington resident students who are eligible for Federal Pell Grants. After the university developed an initial pilot program that produced some promising results, Central is now planning to expand those efforts with support from our donors on a new program called The Wildcat Promise.

The program is designed to close the gap between aid students receive and the total cost of attendance, while creating

opportunities for more students to build their future at Central. The Wildcat Promise provides guaranteed funding for students to supplement their existing federal, state, and other financial aid support for four years if they remain in good academic standing.

“Central Washington University is making this commitment as an investment in our students because we believe finances should never prevent them from obtaining their degree,” said Paul Elstone, vice president of University Advancement and executive director of the CWU Foundation. “The funding provided through The Wildcat Promise will remove the financial barrier students face as they seek to accomplish their educational goals.”

The goal of The Wildcat Promise is to eventually support a large cohort of students each year by providing them with funding that closes the gap between what it costs to attend CWU and the financial aid packages they qualify for. This comes out to about \$5,000 per student.

“We are just getting started with this program,” Elstone said. “I want to thank Kelly and Kevin Bengston for their early and ongoing support of Wildcat Promise. As we continue to build the program, we have a lot of opportunity for people to become involved and help students earn their degrees.”

To learn more about the Wildcat Promise, email Kenneth Shook at kenneth.shook@cwu.edu. ■



Central's new Wildcat Promise program aims to close the gap between financial aid and the actual cost of attending college.



Carnell Selected as Interim VP for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Dr. Lucinda Carnell was selected by President Jim Wohlpart as the Interim Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Her appointment began April 1 and will last until the summer of 2024. Dr. Carnell has a rich and successful tenure at CWU, having served on the faculty in the Department of Biological Sciences for the past 17 years, earning the rank of full professor in 2017. She received the Bobby Cummings Lifetime Achievement Award in 2022 for her commitment to broadening STEM participation for minoritized students.

CWU Wind Ensemble Going International in 2024

The CWU Wind Ensemble was selected to perform at the 2024 World Association for Symphonic Band and Ensembles (WASBE) International Conference—an honor that Director T. André Feagin called the “crowning achievement” of his career. Next summer, Feagin and the elite group of 49 musicians will travel to Gwangju, South Korea, for the biennial WASBE conference, considered the preeminent forum for groups like the Wind Ensemble to showcase their work alongside other top musicians.

Graduate Proves 'Education at Any Age Is Always a Win-Win'

By Robin Burck

Many people's path to completing a college degree looks different from that of the person sitting next to them. One recent CWU alumna proved that when you're determined to earn an education, nothing can stop you.

The eldest of six siblings, Rocio Loera was born in Mexico and migrated to the United States with her parents before her first birthday. Several years after living in the States, her family moved to the lower Yakima Valley town of Sunnyside, where she went on to graduate from high school and get accepted to CWU in 1983.

The timing wasn't right, and Loera left Ellensburg without finishing her degree.

"Life happens, and I left Central during my third year of study," she said. "I went to work for a nonprofit organization and two years later was hired by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and worked my way up to a supervisor position."

After serving in a supervisory role at DSHS for 20 years, Loera knew she wanted to serve her community in a different capacity, but she encountered an educational barrier that she could not overcome without a four-year degree. So, nearly 40 years after starting her educational journey at Central, Loera returned in 2019-20 to complete her degree. She proudly finished what she started last June when she walked in the CWU commencement ceremony.

"I didn't do this alone," Loera said. "I had my family's support, and my loudest cheerleader was my mother. During the difficult times, she would say, 'you're the example for your son—sí se puede,' which is Spanish for 'you can do this.'"

Alongside her son, stepfather, and siblings at commencement was Central advisor Alena Yastchenko, who Loera says was instrumental in her success, providing her with the support she needed to finish her degree and achieve her career goals.

"She always made sure I understood what was going on in class since it has been a while since I was a student," Loera said of Yastchenko, the director of Interdisciplinary Studies. "She was there guiding me through every step of the way, and if I looked confused, she would tell me to call her after class or go in during office hours to help me understand."

After graduating last spring, Loera was hired as a program and policy manager at the Washington Social and Health Services headquarters. In her current role, she is responsible for ensuring federal and state cash programs policy is accurately and expediently administered. She and her team analyze and assess the service delivery and workload impacts of proposed and new federal regulations, legislation, policies, and procedures.

When Loera looks back at her journey and how she got where she is today, she marvels:

"I was the first in my family to go to college and the last of six siblings to complete my degree. Many times, I've encouraged others to return to school to complete their education, always saying it's never too late to gain knowledge to empower yourself. There was always a voice in my head repeating those words to me. Education at any age is always a win-win; if not for employment purposes, for personal satisfaction and growth." ■



Rocio Loera



Theatre Arts Lecturer Wins Prestigious Gold Medallion

Theatre Arts lecturer Jerry Dougherty stole the show at last winter's Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) Region 7 conference when he was presented with the Gold Medallion Award. The Gold Medallion is the most prestigious regional award given by the organization. Recipients are selected for a commitment to excellence in educational theater.



Central Alum Ascends to Role of Seattle Police Chief

CWU alumnus Adrian Diaz officially became the Seattle Police Department's top cop last winter after serving as interim chief for the past two years. The 25-year department veteran earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Central in 2003. Diaz was promoted to assistant police chief in 2017 and deputy chief in July 2020.

CWU Alum Steps Up to the Big Leagues with Seattle Mariners

By Robin Burck

Little did Liz McCloskey know when she graduated from CWU that she would spend the next two decades working for a Major League Baseball club just down the road from her alma mater.

After spending time in various sales roles within the Seattle Mariners organization, the 2004 alumna now works as director of sales development and group events, leading two strategic

sales teams, including a group events branch she helped launch in 2008.

McCloskey feels fortunate to have played such an integral role in marketing the Northwest's only pro baseball team. At the same time, she knows she never could have gotten this far without a little help from her friends.



Liz McCloskey joined the Seattle Mariners right out of college and is now in charge of multimillion-dollar initiatives for the franchise.



CWU Grad Named State Veterans Affairs Director

CWU alumnus David Puente Jr. was appointed as the new director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs in late January after serving as the department's deputy director for the past three years. Puente served in the Army from 1985-92 and graduated from CWU in 2000. He spent 25 years with the Washington Department of Labor and Industries before joining WDVA as deputy director in 2020.



CWU Professor Recognized with National Diversity Award

CWU's Kuolt Distinguished Professor of Business Andy Parks received one of the most prestigious honors in U.S. higher education this spring when he was presented with the Reginald Wilson Diversity Leadership Award from the American Council on Education. The annual award is presented to an individual who has made outstanding contributions and demonstrated sustained commitment to diversity in higher education.

“Over my time with the Mariners, I have been given an opportunity to continue to grow and learn from some of the best,” she said. “In my current role, I get to experience the fun side of sales while being creative and finding new ways to fill the ballpark.”

She added that her group events team always tries to find ways to change the landscape of T-Mobile Park’s attendance, while creating unforgettable experiences that help single-game ticket-holders become ticket-package buyers in the future. McCloskey also gets to spend time mentoring the next generation of marketers.

“On the other end, I get to welcome newly graduated college students into sports sales and assist in the teaching and training for them to feel comfortable going out and pitching products to prospective clients,” she said.

Throughout the baseball season, McCloskey brings in various groups to the ballpark for a diverse lineup of events and experiences. She even has the honor of working on one special group event for her alma mater: CWU Night with the Mariners.

McCloskey and her team oversee the university’s most popular alumni event of the year, which attracts more than 1,000 Wildcats to the park every spring. This year’s event was held April 21.

“What a great opportunity to bring the Wildcat community together,” she said. “When College of Business Dean Jeff Stinson and I started this event years ago, I had no idea how it would end up. I had seen success with other colleges, but to be able to welcome so many Wildcats to T-Mobile Park has been amazing. Every year the number of alumni and current students is growing.”

CWU Night with the Mariners gives McCloskey an opportunity to work with current Central students and share her expertise with them so they can grow professionally while helping her put on a successful event.

“Being able to work with the Northwest Center for Sport students and give them the opportunity to experience sales through phone calls and connecting with alumni can be so rewarding,” McCloskey said. “We start planning in early October and work

through all the details leading up to the event to ensure we do it better than the year before.”

McCloskey not only acts as a mentor to students while working on the CWU event; she also gives back to the next generation of Wildcats in other ways.

Last fall, she returned to the Ellensburg campus to attend the Northwest Sport Management Summit, which welcomes aspiring sport management professionals and those interested in learning more about how sport and athletic organizations operate behind the scenes.

“I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given to reconnect with the campus and current students at CWU,” McCloskey said of the November 17 event in the SURC. “I was welcomed back as part of the third annual Northwest Sport Management Summit, where I was honored as the Alumni of the Year, and the experience was amazing. Just being on campus and getting to see all the places I used to live and the many changes made since my time in school was amazing.”

The theme of the 2022 Northwest Sport Management Summit was “Strategy and Storytelling in Sport,” which focused on effective strategic communication and how professionals in sports-related fields utilize data analytics in their industries.

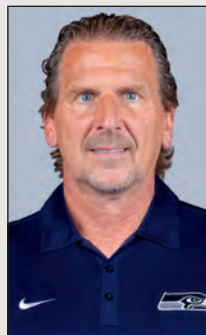
McCloskey was joined on the panel by about a dozen other industry experts, including Associated Press sportswriter Tim Booth ('00), former Seattle Seahawks running backs coach Amanda Ruller (now with the CWU staff), and San Francisco Giants Director of Team Operations Abe Silvestri ('08 and '11).

She was happy that she got to share her industry knowledge with students who are interested in following a similar career path to hers. Northwest Center for Sport Director Sean Dahlin said the feeling is mutual, and he looks forward to working with successful alumni like McCloskey in future years.

“Liz has been such a big part of the Northwest Center for Sport and she continues to mentor many of our sport management students today,” Dahlin said. “It was a huge pleasure having Liz back on campus and presenting her with the Alumni of the Year award at the summit. She is more than deserving of the recognition and is a trailblazer in the sport industry.” ■

CWU Leads Coalition Promoting More Equitable Hiring Practices

CWU has been one of the driving forces of some potentially groundbreaking work that could level the economic playing field in our state. The Washington Employers for Racial Equity (WERE) organization is seeking to create equity across all employment sectors, and Central has joined forces with three other state institutions to promote higher ed’s role in the effort to create change. With buy-in from more than 80 large employers, WERE has developed a multi-faceted plan it hopes will create tangible change in a system that has been traditionally unbalanced.



Central Alum, Former Assistant Coach Joins Seahawks Staff

CWU graduate, former football player, and former assistant coach Greg Olson was hired by the Seattle Seahawks as their new quarterbacks coach in February. The 1986 Central alumnus was the offensive coordinator at CWU from 1990-93, when future NFL quarterback Jon Kitna emerged to set numerous school records. During his final season coaching for the Wildcats, Olson’s offense led the nation among NAIA Division 2 schools, averaging 517 yards per game, including 318 yards passing.

Bonds Form Basis of Sculptor's Work

By David Leder

Every artist can point to an inspiration behind their work. For Kate Im, it's the power of human connections.

The CWU Art + Design professor's lifelong focus on interpersonal bonds often reveals itself in her artwork, although her passion is equally evident in her teaching and relationship-building.

"Even before I moved to the United States in 2011, I would always think about how I am connected to my family," says Im, a native of South Korea who joined the faculty in the fall of 2022. "My work as an artist and educator is just a continuation of that same idea."

During Im's short time on campus, her sculptures have already been featured in two gallery showings, offering her colleagues, students, and members of the Ellensburg art community a glimpse into how human bonds can influence artistic expression. Im's perspective came into even sharper focus during the pandemic.

"We all realized that our connections to other people don't always have to be in person," she says. "Humans are connected in so many different ways, and the pandemic showed us that we can also bond with each other remotely. We're not always going to be together physically, but we can still meet face-to-face with our phones and computers. That has become the main message in my work."

Im enjoys making use of red thread in her sculptures to demonstrate this sense of perpetual connectivity with other people, regardless of physical boundaries. At the annual Art + Design Faculty Exhibition last fall, she sought to show the invisible connections that exist across all cultures—specifically in Korea, Japan, and China.

"In Asian mythology, we refer to 'the red string of fate,'" she says. "As the story goes, you have a red string connected to your finger when you are born, and that thread connects you to someone who is destined to you."

Since Im was a child, she has imagined her own invisible red string that binds her to another person, somewhere in the world. As those thoughts evolved during her education and career, she wanted to find a way to express that concept visually.

When people ask, "why red?" she explains: "For me, the red thread represents a lifelong connection. It may not happen for 10, 20, or 30 years, but you will be connected to a specific person at some point in your life. You don't know when it will happen, but you will reunite with them someday."

While Im's art typically follows a common theme, her creations aren't limited to plaster and thread. She also enjoys experimenting with 3-D printing and other forms of digital media to express herself. In one of her recent works, she created a plaster mold of her hand and displayed it alongside a 3-D scan of the same hand to demonstrate the continuity that exists across different mediums.

"They are both my hand, but can you tell the difference?" she asks. "I was trying to show that both the old and new ways have value. In the same way, physical connections are always going to be important, but new technology allows us to communicate with each other in different ways. So much has changed, yet we are still connected."

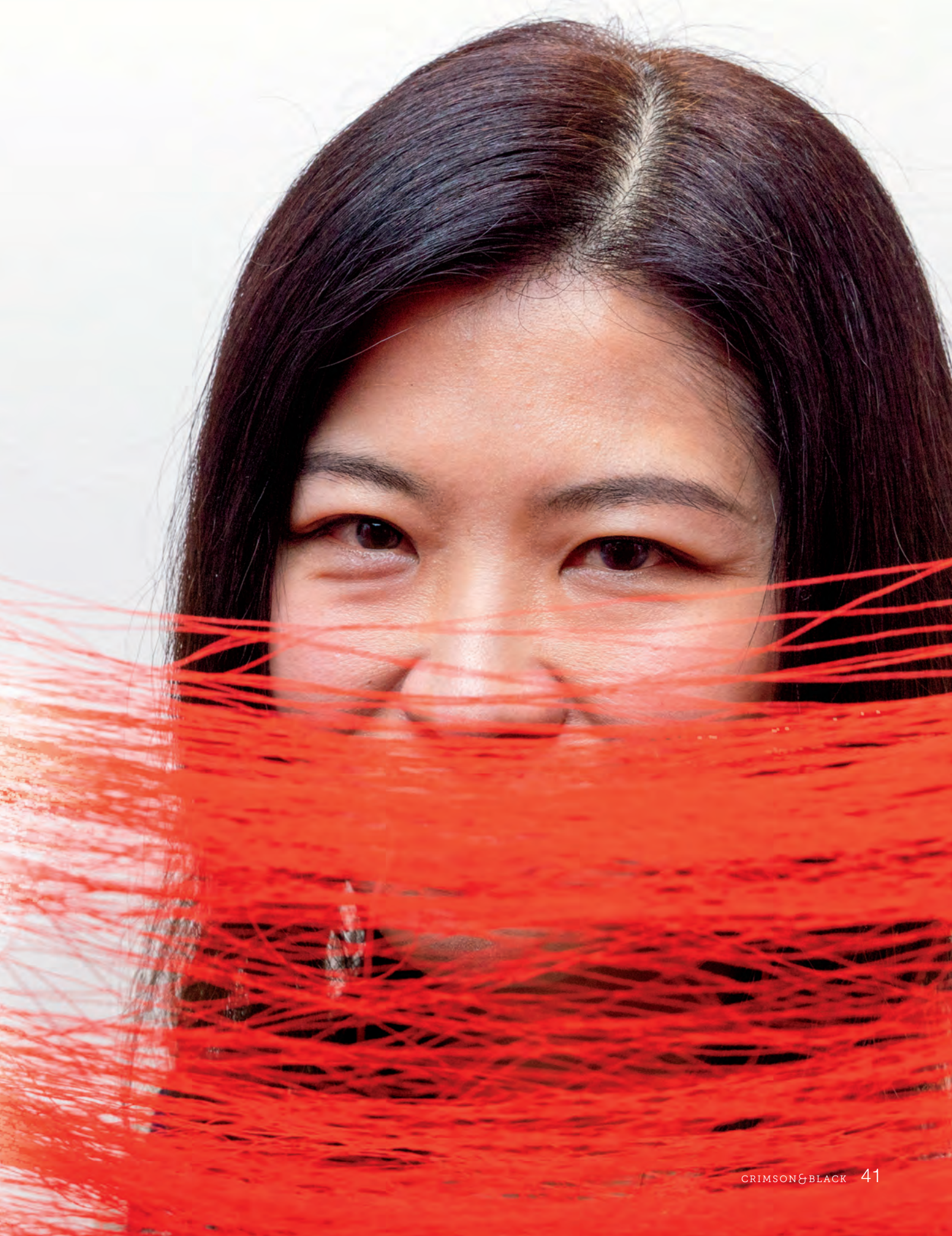
Im, who received the Grants for Artists' Progress (GAP) Award from the Artist Trust last year, notes that she has been incorporating newer technologies into her work for years—3-D printing on fabric, for example—as she tries to explain the complex networking systems that allow humans to stay in touch.

"Because of technology, we can meet each other from any distance," she says. "That's just one of the many reasons I love incorporating digital elements into my work."

Im has become so accomplished in the digital art realm that she taught a digital methods class at her former institution in Illinois. Now, she's imparting those same concepts to her CWU students through a digital fabrication class that debuted in spring quarter.

"I like to challenge my students and make them think about what's going on around them," she says. "I want them to think of their art as a form of social commentary so they can talk about it in different ways, like I've done with my passion for human connections." ■

Art + Design Professor Kate Im's work focuses on the power of human connectivity. Her inspiration is derived from her upbringing in South Korea.





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