



The Squirrel Squire

Official Press of the Westfield State
University Honors Program

Volume 16, Issue 2

Spring 2025

Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference



NRHC student presenters pose for a photo with Dr. Lee and Dr. Sackett-Taylor.

This semester, 17 Honors students along with Dr. Juliet Lee and Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor traveled to the Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference (NRHC) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This year, there were over 400 students and faculty in attendance from a variety of schools in the northeastern United States. This year's theme was, "History at the Crossroads," a very fitting theme considering Harrisburg has a monument named, "Gathering at the Crossroads." Students traveled by Amtrak, making it safe and sound to Harrisburg. Throughout the conference, Honors students presented their research and creative work, as well as heard from a variety of people, students, and faculty.



NRHC Conference - cont. on p. 3

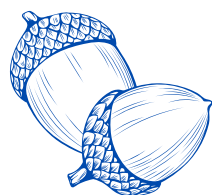


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***The Squirrel Squire* Student Intern:**
Sicilia Campbell

Student Contributors:

Mekhi Bowen, Jason Brewster, Lily Dufresne, Ally Griswold,
Autumn Jones, Amber Lyons, Cady Spelman, and Lia Steskla

Faculty and Staff Contributors:

Gretchen Konrad, Dr. Juliet Lee, and Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor

The Honors Program would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Spring 2025 edition of The Squirrel Squire newsletter. The edition highlights Honors Program accomplishments and the amazing things Honors students are doing to build community at Westfield State University.

Follow us on Social Media



Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference

What is the Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference?

NRHC Conference - cont. from p. 1



City as Text

“City as Text” is a highlight of NRHC, where attendees spend the day exploring the host city. This year, students explored Harrisburg, including the murals, the “A Gathering at the Crossroads” monument, or engaged in community service for the Downtown Daily Bread food pantry or made blankets for Warm Hearts.

NRHC Research and Creative Presentations

Students shared their research and creative work in poster, roundtable, and panel presentations. WSU Honors students Amber Lyons and Aaron Smart also shared their art in the art gallery. Amber also created the official artwork for the cover of NRHC. In addition to presenting, students attended a panel on publishing and a film showcase.



NRHC Keynote Speakers

A feature of NRHC are the guest speakers. This year, students heard from Lenwood Sloan, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Monument Project, as he shared the history and development of the “Gathering at the Crossroads” monument. Students also heard from Frank Grumble from the Historic Preservation Specialist for Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and how he supports communities to preserve historical and cultural spaces.



NRHC Social Events

Students met other Honors students at various social events during the conference. These included karaoke night, this year’s gala with an Enchanted Garden theme, the WSU Honors Program meal, and ice cream!

NRHC Awards

WSU represented in the awards ceremony, with Abigail Tiburcio as a SEA Award recipient, Michelle Trieu winning a Torch at the raffle, and WSU students won a medal for their singing skills at karaoke night!



NRHC Conference - cont. on p. 4



Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference

The NRHC Conference: A Student Perspective

"It gives you the freedom to learn about the culture of the host town, make new friendships, professionally network, and have fun!"
Autumn Jones

"There were many students from different schools, disciplines, and backgrounds that gathered together every day of the conference to share one thing in common, their love and commitment to furthering their education and aspiring to be future leaders of the world. The amount of support and love felt through the three days there was unreal."
Mekhi Bowen

"I volunteered for a no-sew blanket event in the hotel the group was staying at and coincidentally Sicilia did the same, so we formed a pair and started to make some blankets. In total, we were able to make three. One was a brown flannel pattern, another a T-rex, and the final an outer space-themed one. It was nice to give back to the community of this city, it was a nice way to express my gratitude to the locals."
Lia Stesla

"Everyone at the conference brought their unique life stories, and we all connected through this shared experience."
Allison Griswold

"As a commuter student, this was especially meaningful to me, as the trip allowed me to connect with peers I likely wouldn't have met otherwise. I'm genuinely happy to say that NRHC has given me many new friendships."
Lily Dufresne

NRHC Conference - cont. from p. 3



The Squirrel Squire Dedication

The Honors Program recognizes Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Professor of Economics, as an outstanding Honors Program faculty and dedicates this issue of The Squirrel Squire to her.



I am grateful to be recognized by Honors students with this dedication. Truly the honor and privilege of working with Honors students over the last decade has been the highlight of my career so far.

Honors education at Westfield State University has been a driving force in my personal and professional development since the first time I set foot on this campus. I met my predecessor, Dr. Vanessa Diana, during my campus interview in 2012. Her enthusiasm and the opportunities available to work with highly-motivated students helped make my decision to accept my faculty position here at Westfield.

In 2013 I designed my first interdisciplinary honors seminar titled, “Indigenous Environmental Management”. The course examined the natural resource management practices of Indigenous Americans throughout history and considered the economic, socio-cultural, and spiritual influences impacting consumption, conservation, and allocation decisions made by indigenous communities. I was awarded an Innovative Pedagogical Initiatives grant which funded a three-day trip to Washington DC where the class toured the National Museum of the American Indian, engaged in a conversation with tribal leaders at the Embassy of Tribal Nations, and participated in an Intercultural Symposium on “Patterns of Native Health and Well-being” hosted by NMAI. This experience was the launching pad for an educational career grounded in high impact practices and experiential learning.

After serving on the Honors Advisory Council for 5 years , in 2018 I was given the opportunity to serve as the Honors Program Faculty Fellow. It was during that time that I developed the Honors Peer Mentoring Program that continues to this day. The following year I became the Assistant Director of the program and I shifted my focus to curriculum innovation, co-designing the Honors Discovery Seminar (HNRS0101) and Intro to the CHP (HNRS0201) and teaching the very first Honors Discovery Seminar in Fall 2020 completely online. In 2021 I became the Director of the program, spearheading revisions to our program policies to improve transparency and equity in our admissions process, developing and implementing a 3-year strategic plan, leading a collaborative process to define the program’s core values, and securing grant funding to support new initiatives including an expanded Honors Orientation model, Honors Speaker Series, and strengthening our Honors Living and Learning Community model.

I live and breathe the Honors Program Value Pillars every day. I foster my own academic curiosity and commit to life-long learning, I give back to my community through service and leadership, and I strive to advance equity and inclusive excellence at our institution and beyond. My professional mission is to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources, support, and inclusive learning environments they need to thrive. This ethos is at the heart of Honors higher education. Now as a member of the



The Squirrel Squire Dedication

The Squirrel Squire Dedication - cont. from p. 5

Executive Board of the Northeast Regional Honors Council, I am taking that mindset and broadening it's impact throughout the region.

Honors education has taught me that I can overcome challenges by using them as opportunities for growth. I stand firm in my conviction that ANYONE can be an Honors student. It's about motivation and drive. It's about wanting to get the most out of your education. Its about taking risks and being surrounding by a supportive community when you inevitably experience failures. It's about growing your leadership capacity day by day, moment by moment.

I now serve the university as Assistant Provost for Educational Excellence and Retention. I am continuously drawing on my experiences in the Honors Program to implement new initiatives across campus that close achievement gaps, enhance the student experience, and foster a culture of belonging for all learners. I am so grateful for my mentors – Dr. Glen Brewster and Dr. Vanessa Diana – and my team of co-conspirators – Gretchen Konrad, Dr. Juliet Lee, and members of the Honors Advisory Council. More than anything, I am grateful for the Honors students. You have been my greatest teachers.

Honors Program Student Leaders

Student Honors Association E-Board Members and Honors Student Interns



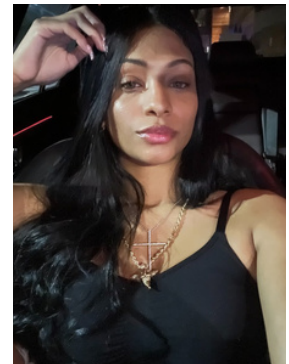
Mekhi Bowen
LLC Academic Advisor



Mia Comeau
LLC Academic Advisor



Jordan Sutter
Social Media Intern



Abigail Tiburcio,
Social Media Intern



Sicilia Campbell
Newsletter Intern



Jillian Constant
Community Service Intern



Student Honors Association E-Board





The Squirrel in our Squire



By Amber Lyons



Amber Lyons (they/them/theirs) is a junior majoring in Graphic Design. They are inspired by art's ability to communicate complex and subversive ideas. In addition to being part of the Honors Program, Amber is a member of the Tri-Alpha Honor Society and the TRIO Program as a first-generation college student. They enjoy creating art that reflects their identity. They aim to pursue a career in design while incorporating art historical narratives into their work.

Below, Amber describes their process for creating the new logo for *The Squirrel Squire*.



For my version of the Squirrel Squire logo, I was inspired by Westfield State University's iconic emblem logo. I also wanted to keep some of the characteristics of the original Squirrel Squire logo. I enjoyed the use of simple black line art and the serif style font. Emblem style logos combine typography and imagery contained within a defined shape, like a circle or crest. This style is often used to convey tradition, heritage, and authority. I felt that this style would represent the professional appearance and reputation of the Squirrel Squire, while referencing our institution's university crest.

For my creative process, I used Adobe Illustrator and began with a circle outline as the base for the design. I chose a serif font, Athelas, and curved the type around the shape using the Type on a Path tool. I wrote "Honors Program Squirrel Squire" on the top curve and "Leaders, Learners, and Change-makers" on the bottom curve. I altered a squirrel vector that I sourced online to simplify some of the fine details. I adjusted the font size, spacing, and the size of the squirrel many times until I found a calculated balance between the elements.

Thank you, Amber!

We love the new logo for *The Squirrel Squire* newsletter.





Honors Speakers Series



Spring 2026 Semester Guest Speakers

The Spring Speaker Series is an Honors Program signature event organized around a different theme each year. This spring, the theme was, “Social Justice and STEM,” and each of our three speakers shared their expertise in their research and teaching around how social justice and STEM are connected.

The Commonwealth Honors Program at Westfield State University Spring Speaker Series: Social Justice and STEM

Dr. Alexander Moore
presents

EDUCATION DOES NOT EXIST AND MATHEMATICS IS ITS SYMPTOM



What on earth does this title of this session have to do with social justice and STEM?

Traditional grading in STEM relies on some students necessarily failing (Baldino & Cabral, 2013, 2015) because otherwise there would be no meaning in “passing.” This presents an interesting challenge for the intersection of STEM and Social Justice, where STEM fields run the risk of “being so scientific” that normativity takes priority over diversity.

What will this session include?

In this session, participants will listen to a very brief lecture on a mathematics topic they have likely never seen before. The purpose of this is to simulate the generic student in a mathematics course who has never engaged with that content. To complete the simulation, I will quickly grade participants’ work, as if it were a real mathematics course. Papers will be handed back, and participants will be faced with the “quantity of their success.” Then, participants will engage in a discussion about their reactions to their grades and my comments. I will conclude the session by making explicit the connection between this activity, the title of the talk, social justice, and STEM. I purchased the talk with some research I am currently writing (Moore et al., in progress), showing that marginalized identities in STEM are a particularly important subversive force against fascism in STEM.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025
4:30–5:30PM
WILSON AUDITORIUM A

The Commonwealth Honors Program at Westfield State University Spring Speaker Series: Social Justice and STEM

Dr. Jessica Stephens
presents

THE HIDDEN MESSAGES IN STEM CLASSROOMS



Job growth in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields is projected to increase by 10.5% by 2030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). Despite this growth, studies continue to highlight significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups in STEM (National Academies of Science 2023). This lack of diverse perspectives continues to contribute to systemic issues across society. The barriers to entering and advancing in STEM are complex, spanning the educational to professional pipeline.

In this interactive workshop, we will explore how hidden and implicit messages in the STEM classroom impact student recruitment and retention in STEM. Participants will engage with various biology topics designed to provoke discussions about underlying messages and brainstorm strategies to foster more inclusive practices. Attendees will be equipped to recognize how messaging is embedded in classroom materials and encouraged to think critically about how these messages shape perceptions of STEM.

MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2025
4:30–5:30PM
SCANLON BANQUET HALL C

The Commonwealth Honors Program at Westfield State University Spring Speaker Series: Social Justice and STEM

Dr. Tiera Tanksley
presents

BUGS, BOTS & ALGORITHMIC BIAS: EXAMINING THE PROMISE & PERIL OF AI IN EDUCATION



Since the high-profile release of ChatGPT in 2022, the desire to leverage the power of AI to transform teaching and learning has hit a fever pitch. Believed by many as the “silver bullet” that will bring an end to educational inequality, AI technologies continue to proliferate within college classrooms and across campuses, promising to bolster academic achievement, spark student engagement and ensure campus safety all while lessening the workload of overworked and systemically underpaid faculty and staff. However, as research is beginning to show that many of the AI technologies being used in and designed for postsecondary institutions are rife with algorithmic biases that threaten to exacerbate – rather than remediate – educational inequity for historically marginalized students.

In this presentation, I will discuss the challenges, critiques, and calls to action that currently permeate the field of education concerning AI and highlight how an explicit focus on justice and educational equity within the design, procurement, use and teaching of AI technologies can produce transformative changes for teaching and learning. I simultaneously center the technological innovations of Black youth that complete a 5 week critical AI summer program at UCLA, and in doing so showcase how we can collectively reimagine, rebuild and even refuse anti-Black AI systems within education.

Co-sponsored by the Office of Belonging, Inclusion, and Learning and the Education Department

THURSDAY, APRIL 10TH, 2025
4:30–5:30PM
ELY LIBRARY, EMILEE DAWN GAGNON PRESENTATION SPACE

Dr. Alex Moore



Dr. Alex Moore of the Mathematics Department kicked off the series with a talk on how broader systems in mathematics, in particular, assessments, shape student identities and their experiences in the math classroom. Through a lesson simulation, he engaged the audience to consider how traditional grading impacts the feeling of success, or lack of, in mathematics. From the simulation, Dr. Moore supported us in considering the philosophical orientations of mathematics to bring attention to exclusionary practices and how we can challenge these practices to be more inclusive in math.



Honors Speaker Series - cont. on p. 9



Honors Speakers Series



Honors Speaker Series - cont. from p.8

Dr. Jess Stephens



Dr. Jess Stephens of the Biology Department was the second speaker in the series. She shared examples of how science lessons are traditionally taught, followed by counterexamples of how the same lessons can be reframed to be inclusive and expand our thinking around science and society. Her talk closed with important connections to today's current events, in particular, how the false objectivity of science is being used to harm marginalized communities.

Dr. Tiera Tanksley



The series culminated with invited guest speaker, Dr. Tiera Tanksley, of the Center for Critical Internet Inquiry at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her talk provided a historical and contemporary perspective on algorithmic bias and racism in Artificial Intelligence (AI), followed by sharing how a justice-oriented focus can transform AI, including sharing the technological innovations of Black youth in a course she teaches and how they resist and reimagine anti-Black AI systems.



Honors Events on Campus



A Murder Mystery

The Student Honors Association (SHA) hosted a 1920's jazz-themed Murder Mystery in March in the University Hall Multipurpose Room which we decorated to match the event's theme. This fun event included appetizers, a mocktail bar, and each guest portraying a character and dressed in costume for their role. Guests mingled with each other, getting to know one another and tried not to spill information about the mystery. Midway through the evening, tragedy struck, the club owner by was found murdered. Guest were tasked with finding six hidden clues at the scene of the crime in order to solve the murder. The detective then entered the room and began questioning the guests, as they were all potential suspects. Later in the evening, participants held a vote based on clues and evidence gathered throughout the night to guess who was the murderer. The murderer was then revealed --- it was the Broadway producer, portrayed by Ethan Mallinson.

The event concluded with award presentations, with Cady Spelman winning best dressed, Will Onorato winning best actor. This night of intrigue and deceit was filled with laughter, style, and camaraderie. We look forward to hosting another mystery-themed event in the future.

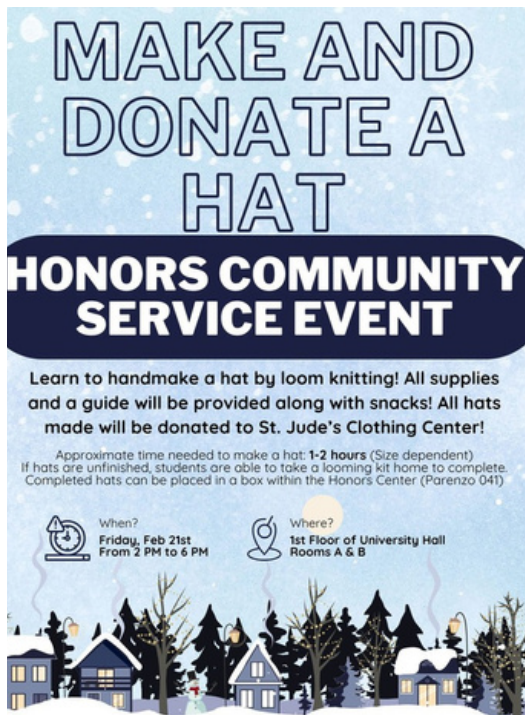




Honors Events on Campus



February 2025
Hand Loom Hat Knitting Event
organized and led by Honors
Community Service Intern
Jillian Constant.



February 2025
SHA hosted a Just Dance event in the
Honors Center.



March 2025
Honors students participated
in the Relay for Life Walk on
campus. This volunteer-led
experience unites communities
to celebrate cancer survivors,
remember loved ones lost to
cancer, and raise funds to
improve the lives of people
with cancer and their families

April 2025
Tie Dye T-shirt Event hosted by SHA on the Green.



April 2025
SHA hosted a Bingo event for all Honors students.



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



Honors Seminar Series



Biology of Pregnancy



In the "Biology of Pregnancy" Upper-level Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar, Dr. Robin White (Biology) and Dr. Jess Stephens (Biology) did an excellent job of creating an accessible and motivating environment to learn. The course provided a well-rounded perspective on the complex experience of pregnancy. From learning the initial basics of sexual reproduction to understanding the fourth trimester and postpartum care, the entire class has gone through the journey of pregnancy. The first few months of the course, we spent "pregnant", and by April, we finally had a healthy "baby"! Within that time, we tackled challenging topics such as gender, abortion, and reproductive health. - Cady Spelman -

Navigating End Of Life Care



Memento Mori is a Latin phrase which roughly means "remember you must die." In the Upper-level Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar, "Navigating End of Life Globally," taught by Dr. C.J. Van Wright (Social Work) and Dr. Joan Kuhnly (Nursing), students learned about making the most of living and dying. Guest lecturers came from all members of the healthcare team and community that work with people at the end of life - A part of life that everyone will experience and is often not discussed. Beyond just discussing grief and loss, , the seminar examines the topic from an interprofessional and multicultural perspective. Everyone will deal with death in their professional or personal lives, and therefore, the topic applies to all. The course is rich with guest lecturers, writing with peer editing, group presentations, small group discussions, and sharing in a supportive, open, and honest environment with peers on this difficult topic. - Jason Brewster -



Seminar Series - cont. on p. 13



Honors Seminar Series



Swiftology

Seminar Series - cont. from p. 12

The Upper-level Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar, “Swiftology,” taught by Dr. Christopher Gullen, was an incredible experience. Throughout the semester, we delved into Taylor Swift’s music career, exploring her exceptional ability to write or co-write every song she releases. Beyond her success as an artist, we’ve also examined how she has built an extraordinary business empire, with a Public Relations strategy that sets a high standard for others in the industry. From studying the Eras Tour, creating a podcast, and analyzing her music, to engaging with readings about her life and career, this course has provided an in-depth look at Taylor Swift from all angles. Whether you were already a “Swiftie” or not, by the end of the class, it’s safe to say we all gained a deeper understanding of her artistry and impact. This course is designed for anyone to succeed, and it has been an unforgettable learning experience. - Ally Griswold -

Honors Course Enhancement

Visting the Grave of Jack Kerouac

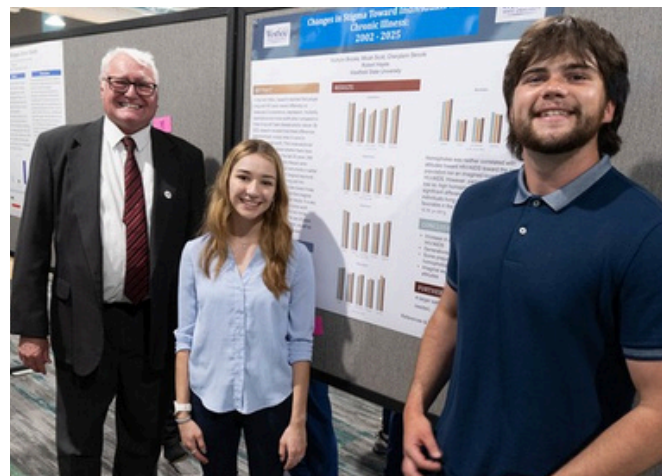
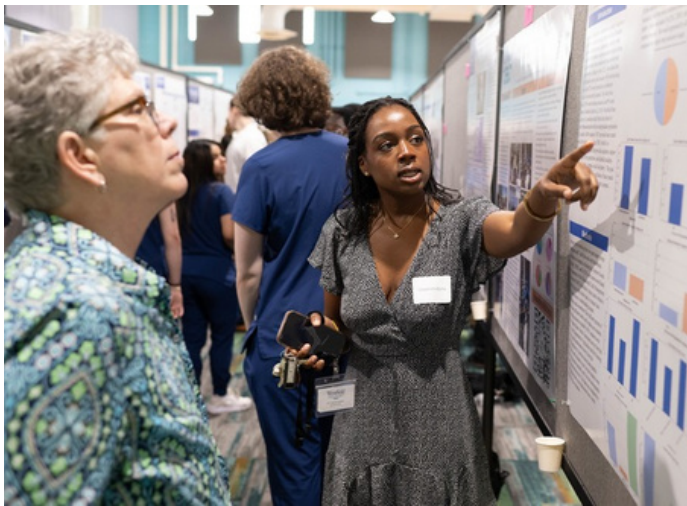
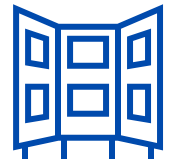


On Thursday, April 10, students in English professor Dr. Michael Filas’ Honors section of “Exploring American Literature since 1865” took a trip to Lowell, Massachusetts. The visit began with a trip to the Center for Lowell History, a branch of UMass Lowell’s University Library, where we explored the archives of Jack Kerouac, American poet, novelist, and leader of the Beat Generation movement in the 1950s and 1960s and best known for his 1957 novel “On the Road.” There were photos of Kerouac, his belongings, and even a copy of the 120-foot on-the-road scroll. Students found the field trip to be cool and enjoyable, and it made everyone dislike Kerouac a little bit less. One artifact everyone loved was a homemade cat carrier for his smallest cat Pitou. A highlight from the trip was when Professor Filas thought Kerouac’s older brother had missed school when the attendance record was from when he died. Students and Dr. Filas enjoyed lunch at Worthen House, a pub where Edgar Allen Poe purportedly wrote “The Raven.” The trip concluded with a visit to Jack Kerouac’s grave. - Sicilia Campbell -



CURCA Celebration

Honors Students Present
Their Research Projects





Honors Spring Symposium



Commonwealth Honors Project Presentations and Cording Ceremony

The Honors Spring Symposium and Honors Cording Ceremony, a day-long event to celebrate Honors student research and creativity and to recognize students for their commitment to upholding the Honors Program Value Pillars, took place on Saturday, April 26th, in Scanlon Banquet Hall. This year's Honors Spring Symposium featured the Commonwealth Honors Project presentations of 21 graduating Commonwealth Honors scholars from across disciplines. Additionally, students in Dr. Robin White's and Dr. Jess Stephens' Interdisciplinary Upper-level Honors Seminar on "The Biology of Pregnancy" shared their research and creative work in poster and table sessions to kick off the conference. The Keynote Address, delivered by WSU alumnae and Commonwealth Honors scholar, Hannah Robins, M.Ed., was titled, "Senior Honors Project: From Then to Now." The event concluded with the Honors Cording Ceremony which recognizes the achievements of our graduating Commonwealth Honors and University Honors scholars.



Hannah Robins, M.Ed., Keynote Speaker, Commonwealth Honors Scholars and their CHP Committee members (pictured from left to right).



Commonwealth Honors Scholars and University Honors Scholars receive their Honors cords during the Spring Symposium Cording Ceremony. Congratulations and Best Wishes to our Honors graduates!



Honors Spring Symposium



Commonwealth Honors Projects

Spring Symposium - cont. from p. 15

ANANDI BREEN, PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Princy Mennella, Psychology
Second Reader: Dr. Nicholas Morrison, Psychology

JASON BREWSTER, ENGLISH

Primary Advisor: Dr. Wyatt Hermansen, English
Second Reader: Dr. Nicholas Aieta, History

KAYLA BROOKS, PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Janet Gebelt, Psychology
Second Reader: Dr. Rebecca Burwell, Psychology

WILLIAM BUCKLEY, CHEMISTRY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Ashley Evanoski-Cole, Chemistry
Second Reader: Dr. Christopher Masi, Chemical and Physical Sciences

KATHERINE CANTY, PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce, Psychology
Second Reader: Marlee Berg-Haryasz, M.S., Athletics

JILLIAN CONSTANT, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

Primary Advisor: Dr. Michael Vorwerk - S'25, Environmental Science; Dr. Lauren DiCarlo - F'24, Environmental Science
Second Reader: Dr. Lili Lei - S'25, Environmental Science; Dr. Michael Vorwerk - F'24, Environmental Science

DANIEL CURRIER, ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE

Primary Advisor: Dr. James Schlaffer, Economics
Second Reader: Dr. Erin Moore, Accounting and Finance
Honors Reader: Anthony Furnelli, MBA, Marketing and Management

JACOB DAMELIO, ECONOMICS AND SPANISH

Primary Advisor: Dr. Christina Beaubien - S'25, Sociology, Hispanic and Liberal Studies; Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor - F'24, Economics
Second Reader: Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor - S'25, Economics; Dr. Christina Beaubien - F'24, Sociology, Hispanic and Liberal Studies

PAIGE DAVIS, BIOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Weglarz, Biology
Second Reader: Dr. Arne Christensen, Biology

CRISTINA FERRARO, NURSING

Primary Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Pappas, Nursing
Second Reader: Katelyn Shea, MPA, Admissions

AILISH FERRICK, HISTORY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Primary Advisor: Dr. Brian Conz, Geography, Planning and Sustainability
Second Reader: Dr. Erica Kelliher, History

JAMIE GOODALL, PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Princy Mennella, Psychology
Second Reader: Dr. Robin White, Biology
Third Reader: Anthony Furnelli, MBA, Marketing and Management

SARAH JANSSENS, MOVEMENT SCIENCE

Primary Advisor: Dr. Paul Cacolice, Movement Science
Second Reader: Dr. Paul Higgins, Sports Medicine and Human Performance

NATHANIEL LAWLOR, ECONOMICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Leonardo Andrade - S'25, Psychology; Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor - F'24, Economics
Second Reader: Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor - F'24, Economics; Dr. Leonardo Andrade - S'25, Psychology
Honors Reader: Dr. Jamie Rivera, Nursing

ARIANN LECOURS, MOVEMENT SCIENCE

Primary Advisor: Dr. Paul Cacolice, Movement Science
Second Reader: Corinne Ebbs, M.Ed., M.L.S., LibraryH

KAITLYN RANKINS, CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THEATRE

Primary Advisor: Eric Parness, M.F.A., Theatre
Second Reader: Dr. Kimberly Tobin, Criminal Justice
Honors Reader: Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Economics

YIRANCIS RIVERA PEREZ, NURSING

Primary Advisor: Dr. Andrew Hafner, Education
Second Reader: Dr. Susan Scott, Nursing
Honors Reader: Dr. Celeste Donovan, TRIO Student Support Services Program

SERENA ROBERTS, PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce, Psychology
Second Reader: Doug Breismeister, M.F.A., Art

SARA RUSSELL, BIOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Arne Christensen, Biology
Second Reader: Dr. Mao-Lun Weng, Biology

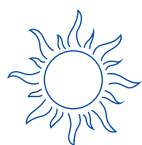
ANNABELLE YEATON, COMMUNICATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

Primary Advisor: Dr. Christopher Gullen, Communication
Second Reader: Dr. Shirley Acquah, Communication
Third Reader: Anna Boutin-Cooper, M.L.S., Library

JESSICA ZANIEWSKI, ENGLISH

Primary Advisor: Dr. Sophia Sarigianides, English
Second Reader: Dr. Noah Jefferson, Education





Alternative Spring Break



Leadership Through Service:

Honors Alternative Spring Break in Western Massachusetts



Ali Sutherland, a Westfield State University junior and Commonwealth Honors student, takes inventory of knobs at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) during his alternative spring break in mid-March (photo on left).

Westfield State University senior Lina Anter (left) talks with GSHFH Construction Manager Joe Schebel (right) about tools and measurements during her alternative spring break in the GSHFH warehouse (photo on right).



In Spring 2025, students participating in Westfield State's Alternative Spring Break had the opportunity to take their community engagement one step further through HNRS 0390: Alternative Spring Break in Western Massachusetts, a three credit service learning course offered through the Commonwealth Honors Program. Designed as an academic complement to the Alternative Spring Break program coordinated by the Office of Student Activities, Involvement, and Leadership, the course invited students to reflect deeply on their service experiences and to connect hands-on work with broader social, economic, and cultural questions shaping our region.

At the heart of the course was one of the Honors Program's core pillars: Leadership and Community Engagement. Students were encouraged to see leadership not as a title or position, but as a capacity developed through collaboration, reflection, and action. By working alongside community partners and peers, students explored how positive change happens at the local level and how individuals can leave a meaningful impact through service.

During Spring Break, students volunteered with community organizations across Western Massachusetts, including Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity. There, students supported both administrative and construction teams, contributing to active build sites, preparing materials for home repairs, assisting with recycling and inventory efforts, and completing behind-the-scenes tasks essential to Habitat's mission of affordable housing. For many students, this was their first experience with Habitat for Humanity and their first opportunity to engage so directly with housing insecurity and community development.

What distinguished the Honors course was what came next. In the weeks following Spring Break, students participated in guided reflection, positionality work, and academic research designed to help them make sense of their service. They examined questions such as: What social or economic issues shape the communities we served? How do our identities influence the way we engage in service? What responsibility do we carry after the week ends?

Students then translated these reflections into research posters presented at the university's Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (CURCA). Through this process, they practiced leadership skills that extend well beyond the classroom: critical thinking, ethical reasoning, public communication, and collaborative learning. The course emphasized that leadership development is both personal and collective, cultivated through experience, reflection, and dialogue.



Alternative Spring Break

Alternative Spring Break - cont. from p. 17

Student feedback underscored the impact of this approach. Participants described the experience as eye-opening, skill-building, and deeply motivating. Several students noted that working alongside peers from different majors and backgrounds strengthened their sense of connection to the university and to the wider community. Others shared that the course helped clarify career goals related to healthcare, social services, education, and nonprofit work.

The Honors Alternative Spring Break course reflects the program's commitment to preparing students who are not only academically accomplished, but also civically engaged and socially aware. By integrating service with scholarship, the course affirmed a central Honors belief: that every student has leadership potential, and that this potential is cultivated when learning is grounded in real-world experience and a shared commitment to community.

As the Honors Program looks ahead, courses like HNRS 0390 demonstrate how experiential learning can deepen student engagement, strengthen community partnerships, and leave a lasting impact both on campus and beyond.

Honors Students in the Spotlight Keeper of the Dream Award



This spring, Honors students Mekhi Bowen and Catrina Casting (pictured above, to the left of President Thompson), were honored with Keeper of the Dream Scholarships at Westfield State University's second annual *Keeper of the Dream Dinner*. The event celebrates individuals who carry forward the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. through service, advocacy, and community engagement.

Mekhi's and Catrina's recognition reflect core values of the Honors Program - Leadership and Social Justice. Both students have demonstrated a commitment to uplifting others and creating positive changes on campus and beyond. Whether through organizing inclusive initiatives, volunteering in the community, or advocating for equitable opportunities, they have lived these pillars in meaningful ways that inspire their peers.

Their work echoes the spirit of the Keeper of the Dream Dinner's mission to honor those who strive for justice and equality. In celebrating Mekhi and Catrina, we celebrate the kind of engaged, thoughtful leadership that strengthens our community and gives shape to a more just future.





Graduating Seniors

Commonwealth Honors Scholars



The designation of Commonwealth Honors Scholar is awarded to students who complete a minimum of four Honors courses (including at least one upper-level interdisciplinary Honors seminar) with a B or higher, maintain an overall GPA of 3.30 or higher, and complete a two-semester, six-credit, individually designed Commonwealth Honors Project.

Tara Beloli
Anandi Breen
Jason Brewster
Kayla Brooks
William Buckley
Katherine Canty
Jillian Constant
Daniel Currier
Jamie Czikowsky

Jacob Damelio
Paige Davis
Cristina Ferraro
Ailish Ferrick
Jamie Goodall
Sarah Janssens
Nathaniel Lawlor
Ariann LeCours
Samantha Martinez Ardon
Chelsey Mathews

Jessica Peitzsch
Kaitlyn Rankins
Yirancis Rivera Perez
Serena Roberts
Sara Russell
Madison Smith
Emma Towsley
Annabelle Yeaton
Jessica Zaniewski



University Honors Scholars



The designation of University Honors Scholar is awarded to students who complete a minimum of six Honors courses (including at least one upper-level interdisciplinary Honors seminar) with a B or higher and maintain an overall GPA of 3.30 or higher.

Makenna Albee
Madison Angelo
Arruda Shaun
Kilie Bazinet
Liara Beloncik
Aiden Betit
Isabelle Bizalion
Elizabeth Blais-Bennett
Mekhi Bowen
Madison Boyer
Kirsten Burek
Caitlyn Chu
Abigail Cogan
Nathan Crane
Elisha Crump
Abigail Cruz
Lexia Demers
Aidan Devine-Baillargeon

Cassandra Eyma
Katelynn Fillion
Bethany Fornal
Susannah Foster
Autumn Frailey
Emelie Frost
Iyana Gordon
Sarah Harrington
Olivia Hart
Carly Holdridge
Brian Huynh
Jessica Isbell
Madison Kuphal
Zoe Lapis
Thomas LaSpada
Austin Lourake
Emma Mattson
Anthony Messore

Delaney Parker
Madeline Pelak
Alaina Percy
Andrew Pitoniak
Matthew Pitoniak
Alexis Pratt
Tatiana Reyes
Ashley Schabacker
Anna Sellon
Madilyn Silva
Jenna Silverman
Adam Smith
Kelsey Spiller
Lydia Sullivan
Thomas Tanner
Caitlynn Thomson
Rachel Tobin
Emily Turner





Photo Forum



A Collection of Pictures and Memories from Spring 2025 Honors Events



Just Dance '25



NRHC Conference '25



Bingo '25



Murder Mystery '25



NRHC Conference '25



Bingo '25



Spring Speaker Series '25



NRHC Conference '25



Spring Speaker Series '25



Tie Dye '25



Tie Dye '25



NRHC Conference '25

