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The Squirrel Squire

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Social Media /Publication Contributors

The Squirrel Squire Student Intern



Austin Sullivan

Social Media Student Intern



Abdullah Arshad

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Honors Program
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Honors Program
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Student Contributors: Isabelle Bizalion, Joseph Bonilla, Bronlyn Celatka, Luca Cordero-Slater, Levi Ekstrom, Samantha Falcone, Lauren Gray, Angela Hayes, Jessica Isabel, Paige Jelliffe, Haley Kane, Tyler King, Chelsey Matthews, Xavier Merkman, Nora Olsen, Madeline Pelak, Gwyn Smith, Madison Smith, William Smith, Autumn Tomao, and Brianna Toomey.

Faculty and Staff Contributors: Dr. Vanessa Diana, Dr. Anthony Furnelli, Dr. Frank Giuliano, Gretchen Konrad, Dr. Juliet Lee, and Dr. Mao-Lun Weng.



The Honors Program would like to thank everyone who supported *The Squirrel Squire* Newsletter. This edition highlights the Fall 2023 Honors Program accomplishments and the amazing things Honors students do to build a tight community at Westfield State University.

The Squirrel Squire Dedication



Dr. Frank Giuliano

The Honors Program recognizes Dr. Frank Giuliano as an outstanding Honors faculty member and dedicates this issue of *The Squirrel Squire* to him.

When many people think of the Honors Program, the first thing that may come to mind is "academic excellence." Indeed, the idea of interacting with students who are academically curious and eager to learn was what initially prompted me to join the Honors Advisory Council (HAC) eight years ago. I am always impressed with the breadth and depth of our Honors students' academic curiosity, whether demonstrated in a Senior Honors Project, performance in the classroom, or in some other fashion. While academic performance is a part of the Honors Program, I have come to understand that it is just one aspect of the program and arguably not even the most important aspect.

In the years since I joined HAC, I have learned what the Honors Program is really all about. Yes, academic curiosity is an integral part of the program, but that part of the program would be far less meaningful without an emphasis on community engagement, leadership, and social justice. In recent years, those aspects of the program have become a more central focus of the Honors Program and have provided Honors students with opportunities to better understand and engage with the world around them. Honors students have become more involved on campus and in their local communities, they have taken steps toward making a difference in the lives of others, and they have become increasingly aware of and acted on issues centered around equity and social justice. Highlighting community engagement and social justice along with academic curiosity has helped to attract students who envision being part of a movement to make the world a better place. This, in turn, has fostered a more diverse Honors community that is also more aware of issues beyond the borders of our college campus.

When I say I love the Honors Program, I really mean I love the students in the Honors Program. Teaching the Honors Discovery Seminar has been particularly meaningful to me on a personal level. As a first-generation college student and first-generation American from a struggling working-class family, I never considered the possibility of being in a program that always seemed "out of reach" and frankly "out of touch" to me. Now, as I interact with first-generation college students, first-generation Americans, and marginalized and disadvantaged students from a wide variety of backgrounds, it gives me great satisfaction to serve as a resource and to help them meet the challenges that I struggled with in college. Watching our students grow academically and, more importantly, emotionally and spiritually, is good for my soul. It brings me hope to know that these young people are the faces (and actions) of our future. And, of course, I love my HAC colleagues, too. I am constantly impressed by their leadership, insight, creativity, and compassion. I am very fortunate to work alongside them to continuously improve the Honors Program.

The Move







Parenzo Hall, the newly remodeled academic building makes a comeback straight into students' hearts. The newly renovated building proudly houses the new location for Westfield State's Honors Program. The Honors Program was previously located in Mod Hall. Honors students celebrated the move to the new location in Parenzo Hall 041 early in the new academic year.

The Honors Program hosted an Ice Cream Social in September; the first event held in our new location in Parenzo 041. The event flourished with success and had a large number of the newly admitted first-year Honors students. This was a great way for students to make new connections and for returning students to reconnect and explore the new location. Here are some thoughts students had on the new location:

Bronlyn Celatka, Class Of 2026 said "Parenzo Hall is now in a beautiful, newly remodeled space and I'm very happy The Honors Program can reside in such a nice facility." Another student, Angela Hayes, Class of 2026 stated "The Honors Program looks much fancier than it used to and I'm excited to use such a new area" The Honors Program team and students are excited to host events and create memories in this new location.







Homecoming

Honors Alumni are Welcomed Back to the Nest by Current Honors Students and Honors Team Members, Dr. Vanessa Diana and Gretchen Konrad



















Honors Program alumni returned to the Nest in October for Westfield State University's Homecoming Weekend festivities, which included participating in the English Department's Alumni Poetry Reading, merry-making at the tent tailgating celebration, and cheering on Owls athletic teams.

Alumni Spotlight

Alumni, what are YOU up to now?

"I work full time at the YMCA in Central MA, Worcester. I am the race and gender advocate."



Levi Eckstrom, 2023
Majored in Criminal Justice and Ethnic and Gender Studies
Hometown: Northbridge, MA

Lauren Gray, 2023
Majored in Criminal Justice and Psychology
Hometown: Sutton, MA



"I am getting my MSW while interning at Sevenhills Foundation and working as a universal banker."

"I work full-time for Spectrum Health at a Correctional Recovery Academy in the Shirley Medium Correctional Institution."



Autumn Tomao, 2023
Majored in Criminal Justice and Psychology
Hometown: Shirley, MA

Samantha Falcone, 2022
Majored in Biology
Hometown: Wilbraham, MA



"I am working as a research assistant in an evolutionary biology lab at Brown University."

"I am a graduate student at Westfield State University in the Mental Health Counseling Program."



Nora Olsen, 2022
Majored in Psychology
Hometown: Wilbraham, MA

Honors Student Exhibiting Talent

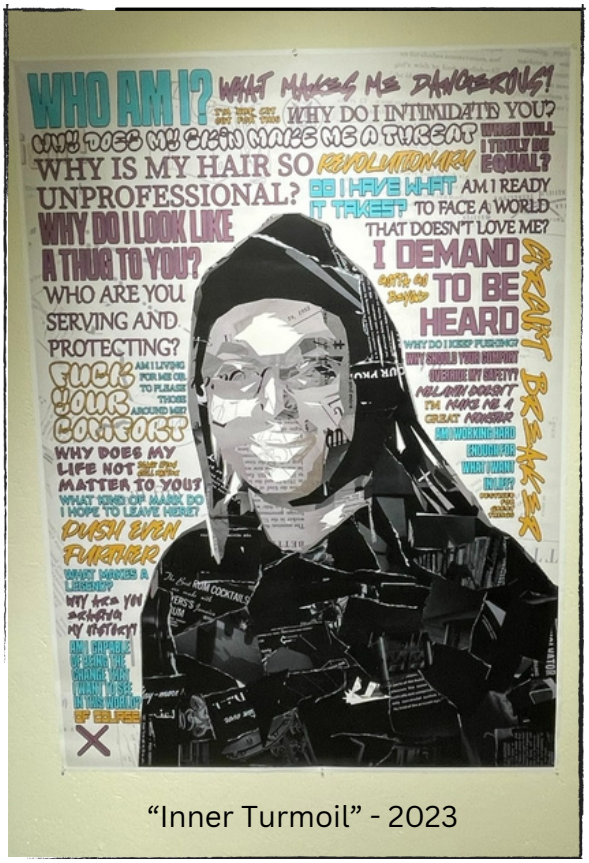
“Inner Turmoil”

The Miracle Machine, a collaboration featuring five visual artists and led by Dr. Imo Imeh, professor of Art and Art History at Westfield State, was showcased at the New Africa’s House Augusta Savage Gallery at UMass Amherst in Fall 2023. The collaboration, at which I exhibited my piece titled “Inner Turmoil”, served as a black male think tank, discussing themes such as safety, belonging, and creativity. I was so honored to be a part of that journey.

I live in a world where having my hood up makes me a criminal, and raising my voice makes me a threat. My brain is plagued with so many questions that shouldn’t even hold space. “Inner Turmoil” was conceptualized as something that would allow me to release these thoughts that continued to weigh me down.

The size of my “Inner Turmoil” piece was intentional, standing at 4 feet wide and over 5 feet long. What I had to say was important, and I needed the viewer to know that. Printed on vinyl, the flatness of the physical sheet directly contradicts the layering of the image, adding another direct source of conflict or turmoil. The variety of typefaces and color creates a feeling of sporadic and isolated thoughts, further cementing this idea. I also included more ambiguous questions, written in blue. These questions serve as a reminder that my identity as a young black man is also conflicting with my life as a college student, lost at a crossroads of potential paths and decisions.

My life is unique, but many of the experiences that I have had as a black man in America are far too common. I made sure when designing this piece that it would resonate with other black men that may have asked these same questions at some point in their lives.



“Inner Turmoil” - 2023



Xavier Merkman, 2026
Majoring in Art, Concentration in Graphic Design
Hometown: Springfield, MA

Honors Food Donation



Gwyn Smith, 2024
Majoring in Political Science
Hometown: Pittsfield, MA









In the Fall 2022 semester, I attended the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) meeting with Dr. Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Westfield State Honors Program Chair. Honors Program directors from the CHP consortium met to discuss a variety of Honors topics. I was not sure what to expect at the meeting. At one point, the facilitators asked student reps if we had x amount of dollars to spend on an Honors related event, what would we do? At first, I wasn't sure and then it struck me. As someone who is passionate about community service, I wanted to create a way to incorporate my love for community service with my involvement in the Honors Program. I proposed the idea to do a community service food packaging event. One year after the idea was proposed, the event took place.

On October 23, 2023, I facilitated a food packing event funded by a CHP grant. We teamed up with the organization End Hunger New England. The event brought in 30 volunteers, representing four schools, Westfield State, Fitchburg State, Berkshire Community College, and North Shore Community College. Our group packaged 10,000 meals within 2 hours. The meals that we packaged were rice and beans which will provide needed nutrition for families. Representatives from End Hunger New England said that this was one of the fastest and most efficient events of this kind that they have ever seen.

We came together as a group and the results of our service was distributed throughout multiple communities. The meals were divided up among six different pantries within the Westfield, Springfield, Pittsfield, and Fitchburg communities. This was a successful event which also allowed students to work collaboratively, socialize with new friends, and enjoy snacks and refreshments at the end of the day. I encourage all Honors students to share their passions and ideas with the program during their time here at Westfield State.

Honors in the Classroom

Honors Discovery Seminar 101

Course Description:
A (1 credit) first-year seminar to foster the successful transition of new Honors Program students into their college lives, with the support of current Honors Program peer mentors to help them understand university resources, expectations, and policies; identify faculty, staff, and student groups whose interests align with their goals; and provide opportunities for social engagement on campus outside of class time. Through experiential learning, with an emphasis on maximizing the use of campus resources and enhancing self-awareness through deep reflection, this course actively engages students in their Westfield State experience, while fostering personal and professional growth in a dynamic and inclusive classroom environment. - Dr. Frank Giuliano





HNRS 301 - Social Media: Problem or Progress?

Why I chose to teach this course:
I selected a topic that would be current, interdisciplinary in nature, and interesting to my students. I also choose a topic that would generate in-class discussion. Social media checked off all of these boxes. As a marketing professor, I constantly consider macro-trends in technology and society. To that end, I knew social media provided us with enough relevant examples to analyze both sides of the main question, is it a problem or progress? Throughout the course, we considered complex issues around privacy, information, politics, health\wellness, and war\peace. - Dr. Anthony Furnelli



HNRS 301 - Telling Stories Written in Your DNA

Course Description:
This course offers students the opportunity to explore the complexity of genetics, with a focus on its societal implications and social justice dimensions. Students grasp the fundamental concepts of genetics and DNA, unraveling how this knowledge influences our identities, history, ancestry, and well-being. The course scrutinizes themes such as ethical issues associated with gene editing, the impact of genetic research on marginalized communities, and the complex interplay between genetics and personal privacy. - - Dr. Mao-Lun Weng



Honors Students Abroad

Isabelle Bizalion, 2025
Majoring in
Art and English with a Writing Concentration
Studied Abroad in Italy
Spring 2023 Semester
Hometown: Sheffield, MA





Sunset on the Arno River



The Strada on which I lived



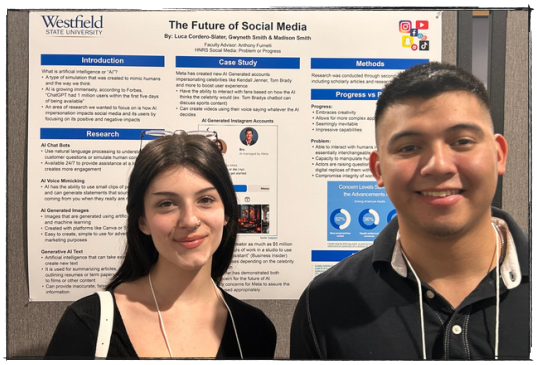
Inside Duomo, looking up in Brunelleschi's Dome

It's a different world, older. Where time travelers from the future gape in awe of the dead's work. The dead; more creative and productive with so much less. New pokes its way through the old cobblestone, with bright flashing signs of known brands, but they remain quieted and even still, sometimes silenced, in their modified tinier spaces than the future has, in foundations hundreds and hundreds of years old. People flock to the redone facades of monuments unaware of their moderness for their cheeses with the locals photobombing – still trying to go about their mundane routines that seem romantic and dream-like to those from the future. Reality; regardless of the world or the time, your anxieties and jealousies follow you, your nail biting and sleep talking, waking up sweating and sometimes screaming follow you, your addiction to your phone and your feigning for companionship follow you. But there's a new element of challenge, of rebirth, how to navigate a new planet and demand simple things like a coffee. Even to speak; a baby's very first word, usually being grazie pronounced incorrectly by ignoring the emphasis on the accentless 'e'. How to dress to pass as a local or to rediscover a public personality that won't get you ripped off or mugged. This humble relearning of once subconscious breaths, consume and overcloud the bigger anxieties about pollution and war, about paying for the next semester, because trying to find a bathroom rather than a bagno doesn't leave enough room for anything else. Grazie a Dio for that.

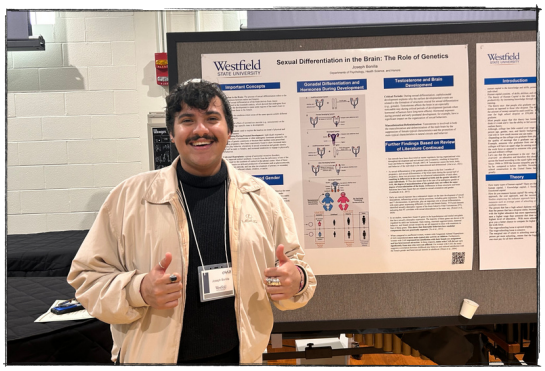
The Italians are real. They kick pigeons. The ways of the road are an aggressive communism: people, bicycles and anything with a motor are all equal, senza rights of ways and priorities, it's a personal decision of how big of a risk you'll take and how late are you really?? They show up so late unapologetically because there's no reason to rush. Dolce far niente: the sweetness of doing nothing. Unless you're driving down a one way strada flocked by tourists, then in that case, it's a timed game.

CURCA Celebration

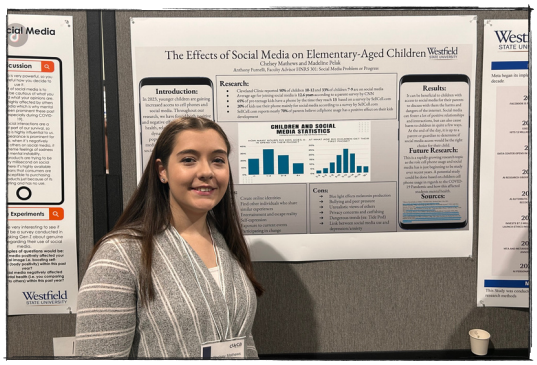
Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity



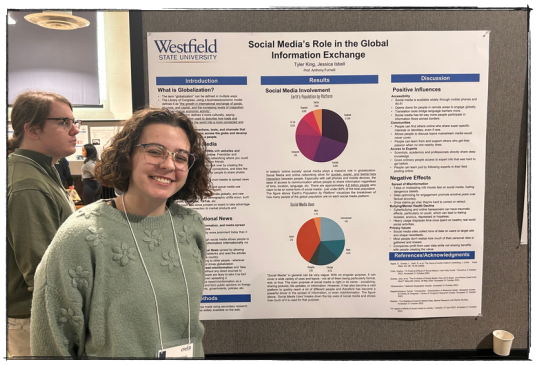
Madison Smith, Luca Cordero-Slater, and Gwyn Smith (not pictured)
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Anthony Furnelli
Title: The Future of Social Media



Joseph Bonilla
Title: Sexual Differentiation in the Brain: The Role of Genetics



Chelsey Matthew and Madeline Pelak (not pictured)
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Anthony Furnelli
Title: The Effects of Social Media on Elementary-Aged Children



Jessica Isbell and Tyler King (not pictured)
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Anthony Furnelli
Title: Social Media's Role in the Global Information Exchange

Senior Honors Project Presentations



Paige Jelliffe ‘24
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Raker
Title: Effects of Gun Violence on School Communities
Pictured: Paige Jelliffe

The significance of this study is to identify how increased gun violence in school communities has impacted the decision-making process to become a teacher. After an interview process, the results analyzed and potential mitigations plans were explored and suggested.



Haley Kane ‘24
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce
Title: ADHD and Anxiety in Children
Pictured: Dr. Ciano-Boyce, Haley Kane, and Dr. Laurie Risler

Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder and Anxiety are very common in elementary school aged children. This project will explore how these diagnoses impact children during the school day and what strategies educators can use to ensure they will be successful.



William Smith ‘24
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Megan Kennedy
Title: LGBTQ+ Children’s Literature in the Classroom: A Review and Guide for Educators
Pictured: Will Smith and Dr. Kennedy

A review of current research within the genre of LGBTQ+ children’s literature and examples of teachers utilizing it in the classroom. Along with the creation of a guide for reviewing LGBTQ+ children’s books which was used to review books.



Brianna Toomey ‘24
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kimberly Berman
Title: The Search for Novel Antibiotics in Soil Samples from Westfield, MA
Pictured: Brianna Toomey and Dr. Berman

Rising antibiotic resistance and the current soil crisis aids in the rapid spreading on infectious disease by making current antibiotics ineffective towards evolving pathogens. This research uses extraction and isolation methods to find novel antibiotics in the local soil environment to provide new ways to find treatments towards infection.