

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

HONORS COLLEGE NEWS

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<https://www.wpunj.edu/honors>



Honors College hosts Research Day 2025

Ten seniors, from different majors and representing four of the eleven Honors Tracks, presented their research and creative projects on Monday, December 1 in the Library Auditorium. In addition, over 100 first year Honors students presented the research they conducted in their Honors 1000 Research Seminars. The senior projects were a culmination of students' personal interests, academic experiences, and career goals. The faculty and staff members who contributed to their success and helped advise them as they wrote their Honors theses were also recognized for their dedication and hard work.

Fall 2025 senior presenters and their thesis advisors include:

— Biology Track —

Ruma Parvin

Advisors: Dr. Emily Monroe, Dr. David Gilley, and Dr. Kelley R. Healey

Thesis Title: *Assessing triazole susceptibilities and PDR1 mutations within a series of Candida glabrata vulvovaginal candidiasis isolates*

Adon Roy

Advisors: Dr. Emily Monroe, Dr. David Gilley, and Dr. Carey Waldburger

Thesis Title: *Overexpression and Function Analysis of a Karenia brevis caspase-3-like gene in E. coli Lacking the N-terminal Helicase Domains*

—Clinical Psy & Neuropsych Track —

Matthew DiGirolamo

Advisor: Dr. Bruce Diamond

Thesis Title: *Concussions and Cognitive Decline in Baseball Players*

— Humanities Track —

Luke Fournier

Advisor: Dr. K. Molly O'Donnell

Thesis Title: *The Steroid Era*

Madison Kneuppel

Advisor: Dr. K. Molly O'Donnell

Thesis Title: *Book Bans: A real page turner!*

Dania Mustafa

Advisor: Dr. K. Molly O'Donnell

Thesis Title: *Tatreez: A Living Tradition*

Valentino Eytomioluwa Okanlawon

Advisor: Dr. K. Molly O'Donnell

Thesis Title: *My Staircase Wit, My Esprit d'Escalier*

— Music Track —

Niamh Morrison

Advisor: Dr. Christopher Herbert

Thesis Title: *Gretchen Parlato: Expanding the Jazz Vocal Tradition*

Anders Pedersen

Advisor: Dr. Christopher Herbert

Thesis Title: *Love Thy Neighbor: Liner Notes for an Album About the Unconsidered Underbelly of New York City*

Owen Walter

Advisor: Dr. Christopher Herbert

Thesis Title: *Documenting a Regional Legacy: Tracing the Collaboration of Hank Marr and Rusty Bryant, 1954-1968*

**Congratulations to all
of the outstanding students
and faculty members
who participated
in Honors Research Day!**

A Message from Dean Andrew



Dr. Barbara Andrew

What a fantastic semester! Honors College students exhibited exceptional skill presenting their research, as you can see from the descriptions of their work in this newsletter.

Honors alumna, **Ruth Basta**, won a prestigious scholarship for her master's degree work in Nursing. Honors College Advisory Council members made significant contributions, supporting our students by sharing their expertise regarding graduate school and career preparation.

As we get ready to celebrate the holiday season, I am particularly grateful to celebrate you, the Honors College community, for all your brilliant academic accomplishments and your compassionate civic-minded generosity.



Over 100 Honors first year students presented their research on Monday, 12/1 in the UC Ballrooms. See page 2 for more information about the exciting research seminars that students were enrolled in during their first semester in the Honors College.

**Check inside to read ➡
about exciting news and events
from the Fall 2025 semester!**

First Year Honors students present during Honors Research Day

Over 100 first-year students enrolled in Honors 1000 Research Seminar courses gave presentations on Honors Research Day on Monday, December 1st in the UC Ballrooms. Faculty who teach the Honors research seminars introduced the students to college-level research and assisted them with creating their first research presentations related to their specific course section topics. This research is a fundamental part of being in the Honors College at William Paterson University, and experiences like this allow students to feel confident as they prepare to enter into the Honors research or creative track of their choosing. A special thank you to all of the faculty and staff who supported the students through their research.

Navigating Social Identity: Researching Belonging



Taught by:

Dr. Elizabeth Harkins, Professor

Department of Special Education, Professional Counseling, and Disability Studies

This course provided an intensive, interdisciplinary focus on Social Identity Theory (SIT). Students engaged with diverse perspectives to analyze SIT's practical relevance to complex societal issues. The students conducted original research where they applied this theoretical framework to investigate a pressing interdisciplinary issue of their choice.

Ethical Frontiers of AI

Taught by:

Dr. Peter Mandik, Professor

Department of History, Liberal Studies, and Philosophy

In this section, students researched the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI Ethics)—the ethical development and application of AI across all sectors of society and culture. Students investigated AI Ethics through multiple lenses such as philosophy, law, art, music, media studies, education, rehabilitation, sport, and computer science.



AI and Your Career



Taught by:

Dr. Jacob Felson, Professor

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice

Students conducted research on the likely effects of AI on their chosen careers, which included music performance, music education, elementary education, business and forensic psychology.

Civic Literacy as a Core Education Element

Taught by:

Mr. Neil Grimes, Education & Curriculum Materials Librarian, Cheng Library

Mr. Gary Marks, Reference & Outreach Librarian, Cheng Library

Student research was broadly focused on the topic of Civic Literacy. Civic Literacy knowledge disparities based on socioeconomic factors or educational experiences were explored in students' projects. Students also investigated social media correlations with civic literacy and civic literacy knowledge among specific student populations like student athletes.

*Innovating Health: Carbohydrates*

Taught by:

Dr. Nishikant Satam, Professor, Department of Chemistry

Carbohydrates are the body's main energy source, supporting brain function, speech and language processing, and athletic recovery. Good carbs like whole grains and fruits provide steady energy, while bad carbs such as sugary foods cause crashes and poor health. Choosing

quality carbs helps maintain focus, communication, and performance. These presentations focused on the students' findings about the role of carbohydrates in health and daily function.

Contemporary Global Health Topics in Nursing

Taught by:

Ms. Nancy Weiner, Assistant Director, Access & Information Services, Cheng Library

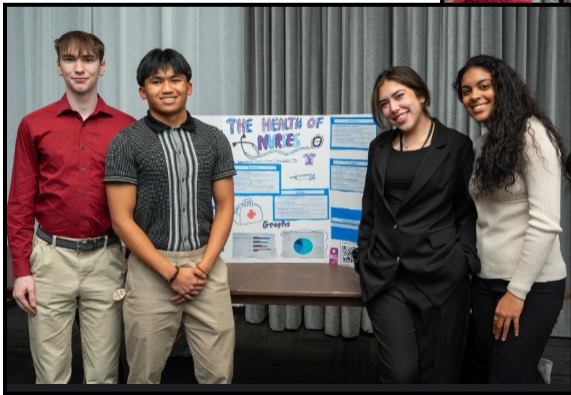
Ms. Linda Salvesen, Systems Librarian, Cheng Library

This seminar explored pressing global health challenges through the lens of nursing practice and examined how nurses navigate complex issues in a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. Topics included the global nursing shortage, telemedicine, sleep deprivation, cosmetic nursing, pandemic response, and the mental and physical well-being of nursing students and professionals.





RESEARCH DAY 2025



All first year Honors students enroll in a section of Honors 1000 during their first semester at William Paterson. This one semester course exposes students to seminar-style learning, and provides them with an opportunity to experience guided research. At the conclusion of the semester, students share their work with the campus community during Honors Research Day.



Research Reflections

Three recent alums who are currently in graduate school at William Paterson served on a "Research Reflections" panel during Honors Research Day. Anna Segelken, '24; Kourtney Scipio, '24; and Diana Zuta, '25, shared how the skills they developed through undergraduate research continue to support their success in graduate school. The panelists also reflected on how their Honors research experiences compare to the expectations of graduate-level research. The session concluded with questions from current Honors students who are interested in preparing for applying to graduate school.

Student Spotlight

Honors senior turns passion into a project



Valentino Okanlawon displays several of his original designs during his senior thesis presentation.

Valentino E. Okanlawon was one of the senior presenters at Honors Research Day on December 1st. A computer science major, Valentino, who is enrolled in the Honors Humanities Track, presented his thesis project, *My Staircase Wit, My Esprit d'Escalier*. His thesis involved creating four garments and a belt that reflected his emotions.

During last spring's Honors Research Week, when he was over halfway finished with a sports related thesis project, he found himself to be completely inspired by another student's presentation, and decided to pivot and produce a more creative and memorable thesis. Building on his interest and experience in fashion design, Valentino came up with the idea to complete an Honors thesis project that translated the personal grief that he felt from the loss of a friend, into the intentional design of a four piece capsule in black-washed Japanese Sashiko Denim that reflected human nature, changing seasons, and his own changing mind.

As he sketched the denim pieces, he initially envisioned them in all black, but changed his mind during the creative process to add a wash that he felt mirrored the feelings he had experienced when he attended his friend's funeral; feelings of the grief slowly washing away. Once the sketches were finalized, he went through a rigorous process with the manufacturer, until they were able to accurately capture his vision.

Valentino feels that he owes a lot to the Honors College, especially to Humanities Track Director, Dr. Molly O'Donnell, for her guidance, encouragement, and support, especially after he decided to start over on a completely different thesis topic with only six months to go before graduation.

Valentino said that one of the things he was taught while growing up in a Christian household was that everyone can be a creator.

"Regardless of one's religion, I hope everyone sees the value of doing creative work," he said. "Whether your creative work is journaling, podcasting, business ventures, charity work, or having a clothing line like mine, it is so important to keep a healthy ratio of creation vs. consumption."

Valentino is graduating in January 2026 and has ambitious goals for the future that include a corporate job related to IT, continuing to push out new clothing, and developing his own business related to AI.

Faculty Spotlight

Honors 1000 instructor recognized by the State of New Jersey

Congratulations to Neil Grimes, an Honors 1000 Research Seminar professor for five years, who was recognized for his work with the *Real Men Read* program at William Paterson. Grimes, who serves as Education and Curriculum Materials Librarian in the David and Lorraine Cheng Library, was recognized by the State of New Jersey on State Employee Recognition Day earlier this semester.

In his first year at William Paterson University, Professor Grimes started the *Real Men Read* program after being inspired by the program, which originated in the Chicago Public Schools in 2006. William Paterson University is the only university in the country with a *Real Men Read* program, and since its establishment in March of 2020, participants have read to over 6,000 students at preschools and elementary schools that are a part of the College of Education's Professional Development Schools network across Northern New Jersey.

"Literacy research says that boys typically struggle with reading, and that 9 in 10 early childhood and elementary teachers are women, so there's not a lot of men that read to young kids, young boys especially," said Professor Grimes. "This program has a positive effect on the children, but also the

administrators, faculty, staff, and students who participate. It's a powerful experience for our community, especially for our students, to engage in male mentorship and show kids that reading really can be fun."

In 2024, the program received a Library of Congress Literacy Award in the "Emerging Strategies" category, as it serves as a model that other universities and libraries can adopt to engage in literacy outreach with students as they learn to read and engage in reading.

Congratulations to Professor Grimes for this well-deserved honor and for all your hard work!



Neil Grimes, Education & Curriculum Materials Librarian

Alumni Spotlight

Former Honors College student awarded prestigious scholarship

Ruth Basta, a 2023 WP Honors College alum and a current graduate student here at William Paterson was recently awarded the Dr. Maureen Sullivan Foley Memorial Scholarship at the 2025 New Jersey League for Nursing (NJLN) Recognition and Scholarship Awards event. This \$10,000 scholarship will aid her as she pursues her graduate degree. Ruth is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Nursing in Adult Gerontology Nurse Practitioner in Primary Care. She is one of two Masters of Nursing (MSN) students in New Jersey who received this honor this year. As an undergraduate she completed the Nursing Honors Track, and presented her thesis, *An Exploration of Mindfulness Interventions & Burnout in Bedside Registered Nurses*. She credits her time in the Honors College with helping prepare her for postgraduate studies.

"Completing a research track gave me the skills and experience to feel confident writing literature reviews in the classes that I am currently taking," said Ruth, who also told us that the decision to come back to William Paterson for graduate school was an easy one. "William Paterson is home, and it's been so nice to have classes with professors who taught in my previous classes."

Congratulations, Ruth! We are so proud of you and excited to see all that you continue to achieve!



Ruth Basta, William Paterson Honors College Alum, receives her scholarship at the New Jersey League for Nursing Recognition & Scholarship Event.

HONORS ANNUAL COAT DRIVE

The 19th Annual Honors Coat Drive is a wrap!

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our campus community, the 2025 Honors Coat Drive was a tremendous success! This year, Honors collected over 360 coats along with hundreds of scarves, hats, gloves, mittens, and socks, all to be distributed to individuals and families in need through our community partners, *Paterson Cares* and the *Father English Community Center* in Paterson.



Honors students sorted and bagged coats and other donations.



Honors students loaded coat drive donations along with members of the Paterson Cares organization.

The Honors College and Honors Club would like to extend a special thank you to the following individuals and departments for their efforts and assistance in making the Coat Drive successful! In addition, thank you to everyone who donated anonymously at various collections boxes around campus!

Individuals who contributed

Barbara	Andrew
Susan	Astarita
Gamin	Bartle
Michael	Blizzard
Liz	Brown
Crystal	Cameron
Lauren	Cedeno
Helenah	Comia
Hannah	Comia
Wren	DiGisi
Brian	Fanning
Paul & Deborah	Harkins
President	Helldobler
Jamal	Khan
Madison	Knueppel
Patrick	Noonan
AJ	Parise
Jan	Pinkston
Erin	Roberts
Ciara	Salazar
Kourtney	Scipio
Rory	Stansfield
Sherry	Washington

Students who conducted their own mini-coat drives

Students who helped with processing, loading, and adult "care packages"

Jasmin	Ali
Anish	Bhatta
Crystal	Cameron
Aida	Carter
Erin	Collins
Sean	Creamer
Rianne Francine	Dagoro
Julia	Dennehy
Meliza	Figueroa-Galva
Yanibel	Gomez
Dyabid	Gurung
Jenna	Iannarella
Abby	Ige
Azer	Jalahej
Jamal	Khan
Amrit	Lamichhane
Leone	Lopez
Alexandra	Mouzakiti
Tanisha	Nunez
Thays	Paiva-Dealmeida
AJ	Parise
Wyatt	Space
Rama	Twal
Susana	Veras

And also to:

- WP Colleges and Departments that hosted collection boxes:
 - Dean's Office – Costakos College of Business
 - Dean's Office – College of Education
 - College of Adult and Professional Studies
 - Gloria S. Williams Advisement Center
 - The Office of the Registrar
 - The Office of Parent and Family Relations
- Dean Sharma for allowing Honors to use the College of Science & Health vans for CE events
- The Student Government Association for providing partial funding for various events
- Our Community Partners
 - Children's Day Preschool
 - Father English Community Center
 - Paterson Cares

The entire WP Campus Community for supporting us throughout the years!

*Mini-Coat Drives****Students who went above and beyond for the Coat Drive***

Hosting a mini-coat drive is a wonderful opportunity for Honors students to lead in their local community by collecting coats at their place of employment, former schools, or through a local organization they are involved with in their hometown. Students who run their own mini-coat drive form strong relationships by partnering with other members of their community through their efforts to collect items for those in need. Student report that a lot of hard work is involved, but the outcome is worth it.

This year four students conducted their own mini-coat drives and added their donations to the Honors Coat Drive. Students who take on this project are responsible for outlining and implementing their project, transporting the donations to the Honors College, and then reflecting on the experience. We are so grateful for the following students who participated this year.



Jordan David

Jordan David, a senior Biology major in the Biology track, has been running her own mini-coat drive for the last three years and knew that she wanted to participate again during her senior year. Every year, this civic engagement project brings to mind larger social justice issues for Jordan, and it is her hope that the items she collects make a difference in the life of the people who receive them, no matter how small.

Jordan collects coats annually at her place of employment, Holsten's Brookdale Confectionary in Bloomfield, NJ and is incredibly proud of and grateful for the community there for supporting her mini-coat drive for the last four years.

She began participating in the annual Honors Coat Drive back as a first year student, with her older sister Jessica David, '24 and her friend, Isabel Nemeth, '24 who used to run her own mini-coat drives. It is incredibly inspiring to see how consistent Jordan has been with her participation and how she has kept up with this family tradition.

Bethany Soto, a first year Elementary Education major, was eager to run her own mini-coat drive this year after seeing her older sister do the same during her time in the WP Honors College. She collected coats from her former elementary school she attended when she was a child and was blown away by the outcome.

"I learned when asked, my community was more than willing to show up and provide for others, which is amazing," said Bethany, who considers herself lucky to have grown up in a place where most people have the clothes they need to make winter bearable. As an Elementary Education major, she believes that educating young children about civic engagement is crucial. "It's good for children to be aware of the impact of giving to those who are less fortunate."

Bethany is already excited about participating in the 2026 Honors Coat Drive, and believes that the skills she learned this year will help her to be even more successful next year.



Bethany Soto (Right) with Honors Graduate Assistant, Kourtney Scipio

Student-led mini coat drives (continued from previous page)



Ramiah Palmer (right) with Honors GA, Kourtney Scipio

Ramiah Palmer, a first year management major, hosted her own mini-coat drive within her community. She was motivated to do so by her desire to “be the good that you want to see in the world.” Completing this civic engagement project was a valuable learning experience. It required Ramiah to fine-tune her leadership skills, as well as other valuable tools such as time-management and communication. In addition, spreading the word about the coat drive, and also scheduling a time to pick up the coats for the members of her community required organization and determination. She also learned that, even though many people in her community may not have been able to donate monetarily, they had no issue donating coats and other winter clothing items that they no longer needed.

Through her work, Ramiah demonstrated that the foundation of civic engagement is having a desire to help others and a passion to help solve problems.

Angela Marcucilli, a senior Nursing major in the Nursing Honors Track, has made participating in civic engagement a major part of her college experience. As the president of the Honors Club and an Honors Peer Leader, Angie is very familiar with what it takes to promote and run a successful civic engagement event, and this is also true of her mini-coat drive.

This is Angie’s second year in a row running her own mini-coat drive. She credits this experience with allowing her to “form new connections with other members in her community who have a similar passion for helping others.”

As a nursing major, Angie believes that participating in civic engagement projects such as these has enhanced her overall education experience by ensuring that she will have the knowledge to provide culturally competent care as a healthcare provider.



Pictured (left) Angela Marcucilli with Honors Office Assistant, Helenah Comia.

With a little help from our friends...



Pictured are (top from left) Helenah Comia and Kourtney Scipio with some generous employees from WP facilities; Honors Club VP Danielle Cariaga and Honors Club President Angela Marcucilli with Eva Reyes, Director, Parent and Family Relations; Dean Amy Ginsberg with Kourtney Scipio; Kourtney Scipio and Rory Stansfield with Honors alums, Helenah Comia and Hannah Comia; Honors Club VP Danielle Cariaga, Honors Club President, Angela Marcucilli, George Kavak from the Registrar’s Office, and Susan Astarita, Assistant Vice-President, Registration Services.

We’re already collecting items for the 20th Annual Coat Drive in 2026! Be sure to keep us in mind when you’re doing your spring cleaning!

Finishing strong: students participate in late fall semester events

Students get advice about graduate school

Over 100 Honors students logged in to attend a “Graduate Pathways” event hosted by the Honors College in mid-November. The participants had the opportunity to explore the range of professional and intellectual paths that graduate education can open—both within and beyond academia. Several panelists discussed how pursuing graduate school helped them achieve their goals before taking questions from the audience.

Honors College Advisory Council members who served as panelists included **John Deluca**, PhD, Senior Vice-President for Research and Training at Kessler Foundation, and **James Van Wyck**, PhD, Assistant Dean for Professional Development at Princeton University. Other panelists included: **Genevieve Allotey-Pappoe**, PhD, Assistant Professor of Musicology and Ethnomusicology, Brown University; **Khadija Joss**, PhD, Vice President of Philanthropic Relations, Bank of America Private Bank; and **Charlotte Werbe**, PhD, Sales & Growth Strategy Leader, Unlimited Outcomes.

Saadia El Karfi Azzarone, Princeton University Grad Futures WP Honors Fellow, organized and led the discussion.



Helping the community

The Honors College partnered with “Paterson Cares” to provide dozens of care packages that included hats, gloves, and socks that were distributed to unhoused individuals in Paterson in early December.



Preschool visit

In early December, Honors students visited Children’s Day Preschool (CDP) in Passaic. During the visit, students spent the morning reading with children, participating in classroom activities, and touring the facility. They also met with members of the CDP administrative team to learn more about working in a nonprofit preschool setting. The Honors College has partnered with CDP for many years on civic engagement initiatives that support the school’s mission of serving low-income children and their families.

NYC Museum Trips



Honors sponsored a bus trip to the Guggenheim Museum on 11/8/25. The trip was led by faculty members, Nicholas Hirshon, Linda Salvesen, and Laura Di Summa.



Honors sponsored a bus trip to the Tenement Museum on 11/15/25. The trip was led by faculty members, Tj Gundling and K. Molly O’Donnell.



Honors College hosts Winter Reception



Pictured from left (Abby (Debel) Morris, Barbara Andrew, Jan Pinkston, and Lily (Fritsch) Humphreys.

edged by Honors **Dean Barbara Andrew** and University **President Richard Helldobler** for their leadership and commitment to civic engagement.



Honors Dean, Barbara Andrew, interviewed two Honors College alumni during the reception.

The Honors College Winter Reception was held on Tuesday, December 9, in Ballroom C. This annual end-of-semester event celebrated the success of the Honors Coat Drive and recognized the many students, staff, and community members whose efforts made it possible. Students who organized their own mini-coat drives were individually acknowl-

During this year's reception, we welcomed back Honors College alumni **Abigail (Debel) Morris '18** and **Lily (Fritsch) Humphreys '18**. Both former students went on to earn their graduate degrees through William Paterson University's

Speech Language Pathology program, graduating in 2021. During a special interview with Dean Andrew, Morris and

Humphreys reflected on their time at William Paterson and discussed their professional journeys. They also shared insights

on their favorite civic engagement experiences, what inspired them to become involved in leadership as undergraduates, and how the Honors College helped build their confidence and capacity to lead. The conversation also highlighted skills they learned in Honors that they continue to use in their careers, challenges they have faced, and strategies for balancing professional goals with personal well-being.

At the conclusion of the event, current Honors students had the opportunity to introduce themselves and receive an Honors College special edition sticker.

Congratulations!

Four Honors students were recognized during the reception for organizing mini-coat drives in their community. Pictured with University President Richard Helldobler are (from left) Angela Marcucilli, Ramiah Palmer, and Bethany Soto (not present for photo, Jordan David).



Honors Advisory Council member, Julie Minicozzi, congratulates her niece, Bethany Soto.



Save the Date!

Spring 2026 Honors Research Week

April 20-24, 2026

Showcasing the work of more than
70 Honors College seniors

Watch for more details this spring!



Honors College Track Directors

Dr. Barbara Andrew
Independent

Dr. Bruce Diamond
Clinical Psychology
and Neuropsychology

Dr. Lisa Foley
Nursing

Dr. David Gilley
(Interim) Biology

Dr. Christopher Herbert
Music

Dr. Amy Learmonth
Cognitive Science

Dr. John Malindretos
Business

Dr. K. Molly O'Donnell
Humanities

Dr. Marianne Sullivan
Global Public Health

Dr. Danielle Wallace
Social Sciences

Dr. Martha Witt
Performing and Literary Arts

William Paterson University Honors College

Barbara Andrew
Dean

Elizabeth Harkins
Honors College Fellow

Kourtney Scipio
Graduate Assistant

Helenah Comia
Office Assistant

Jan Pinkston
Associate Director

Rory Stansfield
Office Assistant

**Angie Marcucilli, Preston Nieuwenhuis, Thays Paiva-Dealmeida,
Rory Stansfield, Owen Walter, and Sarah Weissberg**
Honors Peer Leaders

WP Honors College Newsletter Editors:
Barbara Andrew, Jan Pinkston, Rory Stansfield