



HONORS COLLEGE NEWS

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Dr. Barbara Andrew

The Power of Research According to Dean Andrew

One of the best parts about being the dean of the University Honors College at William Paterson is learning about all of the different kinds of research that students engage in here. Student research and creative performance is the hallmark of the University Honors College.

Sometimes people ask me why this research and in-depth, individual projects are so important. Students can find the prospect of a senior thesis project nerve-racking and time-consuming. Most students, once they get their project started, however, feel very differently. Your senior research project will spark your curiosity. It will engage you intellectually, and often, emotionally. It will deepen your understanding of your major.

Research strengthens your resume. You gain many professional skills from a research project. You are the project manager. You have to understand challenges and resolve them, analyze data, work together with a team to find solutions or results, and communicate effectively with others. That is an ideal list of skills to put at the top of your resume: project management, problem resolution, data analysis, team leadership and effective communication.

Research makes you a Pioneer. Your research will add new knowledge to the world, help others understand and solve problems, and, it will affect others. Many people find that they make new friends, or that their current friendships with other students grow stronger through group projects or through assisting with each other's work. Those friendships are meaningful to you as a person and may become important to you professionally.

I encourage each of you to seek out research opportunities throughout your time at William Paterson. Your energy and creativity, as well as the results of your work, not only impacts you as student; it will also make the Honors College and our community stronger.

Annual Honors Coat Drive is underway!

The annual Honors Coat drive is underway through November 15! We are accepting coats, jackets, and other outerwear that will be donated to the Father English Community Center in Paterson. There are plenty of ways students can get involved, give back to the community, and earn civic engagement credit. Donations can be dropped off at the Honors Office, in Raubinger 207, or Cotsakos College of Business Dean's Office at Valley Road. Call 973-720-3657 or email honors@wpunj.edu to arrange to have donations picked up from your campus location.

Check out the Honors Blackboard page

All Honors students have been enrolled in an Honors Blackboard page and can access it by logging into Blackboard and going to 'Organizations'. The page will be updated regularly with civic engagement opportunities, All-College Honors meetings, and other Honors College events. Please also use it to track your civic engagement credit and attendance at All-College Honors meetings.

The ALUMNI UPDATE

Meet Lauren Danridge '01

B.A. Psychology, Biology Minor
Biopsychology Honors Track



Lauren Danridge with her mentor, Dr. Hahn, at a 2018 reunion

After graduating from William Paterson University in 2001, Lauren Danridge went on to work as a lab technician at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). Danridge spent 16 years at UMDNJ, serving in various roles including Program Manager of the Department of Neurological Surgery and eventually became the Director of the

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Later, she went on to work the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI where she served as the Associate Director, ACUO (7 years). Today, she serves as the Associate Director of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Institutional Biosafety Committee, and Post-Approval Monitoring Committee at Princeton University.

Danridge credits Honors, specifically the Biopsychology Track, for putting her on her career path. While in the track, she enrolled in Emeritus Biology Professor and founding Honors Director, Dr. Martin Hahn's research lab and worked with him as a mentee to complete her thesis. She acknowledges Dr. Hahn's predominant responsibility in guiding her through research and helping her understand the contribution of academia and administration in the research oversight process, which she continues to use in her role today. Her work in Dr. Hahn's lab also opened up the opportunity to spend a semester at the University of Maine performing lab research on fruit flies.

But there is still more she is looking forward to doing in the future. She mentions her involvement in the community, especially her commitment to helping those in the early-stages of their career and collaborating with stakeholders to reduce research barriers.

As she reflects on her academic journey and successful career, she wants to tell our Honors students to do as much as they can. She says, "It's what you do with your time that matters. Don't be shy about asking for help and asking for opportunities!"

Danridge sees her time at WP and part of Honors as important aspects of her life. And her experiences here were in fact critical in shaping her career. William Paterson also happens to be the place she met her husband!

Meet Dr. Joe Spagna

Professor of Biology, and Director of the Biology Honors Track

We caught up with Dr. Joe Spagna, Professor of Biology and Director of the Biology Honors Track. Since starting at the University in 2008, Dr. Spagna has taught biology courses and worked with Dr. Robert Benno to develop the Biology track from the previous Biopsychology track in 2015. In our interview, he shared more about his own experiences and reflected on advice to give to students.

What about your work and research excites you the most? And where do you see the future of biology?

I like the puzzle solving aspect of it and the tree of life is like a really big puzzle. Essentially, in biology we are trying to do two things: get a better picture of the branches of the tree of life and improve the method by which we do it. There is a lot of creativity involved in our research, whether that is deciding what kind of data we should collect, how we collect, and what the focus of our analysis will be. Since I am not a good artist, I get to be a scientist and still use my creativity.

So far, we have been at a stage in biology where we were piling up lots of data on the genome. Now we get to use this data to tie it into traits and functions of different biological phenomenon. It's one thing to know what the genes are but we will be much better at tying the genes to function and how the expression plays out in the real world in an environmental context.

A lot of the students in your track are biology or chemistry students, so how does the Biology track enhance their learning outcomes?

I have talked to students after they have completed the track, graduated, and gone on to other things and they say that the track gives them real-life experience. You can learn in the classroom and memorize the material, but it doesn't make sense or matter until you see it play out in an experiment. It also doesn't necessarily have to be in a lab setting. The goal is for students to be in an open-ended situation where they don't know the answer but are working towards finding one. Science isn't something we just learn, it's something we do.

Some students get the side benefit of having interesting stories when they are interviewed. For example, I had one student who studied ants that could jump into the air using their jaws. When this student interviewed to be accepted into dental school, the interviewers didn't want to talk about anything except the student's project. So it definitely makes you more interesting to graduate programs and jobs.

What do you think students take away from their time in the track?

We use a lot of computing software in the lab, so a lot of students, for example, are working in computing and IT now because we use and develop so many of those skills. They also enjoy their research.

What is interesting, really, is that a lot of the student projects are still being continued by other students in



Dr. Joe Spagna

some way. So when our students make some progress and present their thesis, other students will build off that work in their thesis the next year.

Did you know early in your academic career what your interests were or did a mentor guide you?

I didn't have that much of an idea of what I wanted to do as an undergraduate student. Then there came a point that I connected with my professors who had their research going on so I got a summer research project working on plant fibers and how to make them grow. So a lot of it came from what my mentors were doing and found interesting.

What is your advice to students who are looking to join an Honors Track or who are already in one?

I would just say that what you put into the track is what you will get out. Any thesis will be challenging but don't treat it like something you have to do, but something you want to do. So pick a topic that excites you and that you would choose regardless if you were an Honors student in an Honors track.

Thank you to Dr. Spagna for his time.

Honors Students Representing on the University Board of Trustees

The William Paterson Board of Trustees has two student representative seats: one voting and one non-voting member. Currently, both seats are held by Honors students who represent student voices on university issues.

On Friday, September 22, junior, **Jason Peralta**, was sworn into the **Board of Trustees** as the non-voting member. He serves as the student representative, alongside senior and voting member, **Kourtney Scipio**, who was appointed in 2021. Jason is an **Environmental Sustainability** major in the **Global Public Health Honors Track**, while Kourtney is a **Speech Language Pathology** major completing the **Cognitive Science Honors Track**. Both are heavily involved on campus, through clubs and sports, and bring their diverse experiences and perspectives to the board.

As student representatives, they attend meetings, offer their perspectives, and are assigned to one of the board committees. Kourtney is grateful for this opportunity and says, "My college experiences has been enhanced because I get to see behind-the-scenes and how the board is continuously trying to better the university."

Reflecting on his experience so far, Jason says, "My role has opened up so many opportunities and being able to sit in during the meetings is definitely a valuable experience." For both Kourtney and Jason, this continues to be an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone, inspire change, and grow. They also note the once-in-a-lifetime connections they have been able to make with the University administration.

To students who are considering any leadership positions, they both agree: DO IT! To quote Kourtney, "This world needs great leaders and I think that starts with people who genuinely want to be good leaders."

It is always great to see our Honors students being active members in the WP community, in and out of the classroom!



Photo from the swearing-in ceremony on September 22 featuring from left to right: President, Richard Helldobler, student representative (non-voting), Jason Peralta, student representative (voting), Kourtney Scipio, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Michael A. Seeve, and Vice President for Student Development, Dr. Miki Cammarata.



Jason Peralta being sworn into the Board of Trustees by General Counsel to the University and the Board of Trustees, Melissa K. Reardon Henry .

Do you want to be featured?

Are you a student with an interesting research project or internship opportunity? Did a club you participate in host an on-campus event? Do you know any alumni we could feature? If yes, please reach out to us at honors@wpunj.edu and put "Newsletter" in the subject line.



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