

A new lease on LIFE: Furthering education for WNC seniors

By Marrah Ste. Marie

For 10 years, LIFE@WesternCarolina has provided people 50 years old and older a chance to further their education while staying connected to their community and strengthening friendships.

LIFE offers two-hour classes once a week and follows WCU's academic calendar. The lessons don't include any assignments or tests and topics change every class.

LIFE@WesternCarolina was co-founded by former provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar and Kay Wheeler.

"Alison was new to the university, and I asked her, 'what are you going to bring to the university that's new and exciting?'" Wheeler said. "Alison said, 'I'm thinking of a senior university,' and I said yes!"

Morrison-Shetlar gathered professors and other supporters to create a managing board and announced Wheeler would be the first president.

"That original board worked so hard for six

months. We did mission, bylaws and really got things put in place," Wheeler said.

Wheeler and other board members marketed LIFE through rotary clubs, libraries and any other way they could think to reach senior citizens.

After gaining enough membership, the next step was to plan the classes. Like other WCU classes, LIFE schedules their classes for the semester before it starts.

Previous classes have covered WCU's body farm, history of NC railroads, traditional Japanese tea ceremonies, the relationship between NASCAR and moonshine, how to design homes for aging and much more.

"We've had some fun topics, and we've had some really good diversity in the topics. And that's the idea to have diversity," Kay Wheeler, co-founder of LIFE@WesternCarolina, said. "We try to have the diversity that members want to hear about."

Class topics at LIFE are participant driven. After every class, a form is given to participants to reflect on

the lesson, the speaker and to see if there are any other topics they would like to learn about. The forms are given to a curriculum committee that plans each semester's lessons.

"The bottom of that form asks if you would like to speak about anything. Because we've had some of our membership speak," Wheeler said. "Just recently one of our members spoke on music of the '60s."



A typical class is about an hour and a half of a lesson from the speaker and then a question and answer period, according to Wheeler.

Like many education programs, LIFE struggled during COVID. Classes were abruptly moved to Zoom making them less personal and interactive.

"We've still kept the Zoom option, but it doesn't give the same flavor of being in the room," Wheeler said.

One of the biggest goals of LIFE@WesternCarolina is to interact with current undergraduate students at WCU.

"We're people from the '60s. We were a very complex generation of young people and social impacts meant a great deal to us," Wheeler said. "What we see is that it's happening again. We want to support, mentor and discuss with people of the younger generation."

Participants of LIFE feel they have a lot to offer younger people. They also feel that younger people have a lot to offer them. Most importantly, members of LIFE offer a lot for each other.



Daniel Pierce talks about the lesson more with members. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

"A part of LIFE is social interaction," Wheeler said. "There's this perception that seniors can get lonely. Well, we're not getting lonely."

According to Wheeler, there are about 50-75 members this year, the largest group since the program began at WCU.

"The makeup of our students ranges from dental hygienists to nurses to lawyers, past university professors, a couple doctors, a couple nurse practitioners, a couple high school teachers, a pharmacist," Wheeler said. "We have a really diverse group."

Classes begin at 10 a.m. but members show up as early as 9 a.m. to talk before the lesson. Upon entering, there are name tags for all the members, but they are not necessary as everyone greets each other by name with a smile.

Brittany Marshall, assistant director of educational outreach, is at every class. She's helped with LIFE@WesternCarolina since 2016. She's seen how important the weekly classes can be for members.

"Several join after their spouse passes or a tragedy. It gets them out of the house," Marshall said. "One woman shared it got her out of a depression after her husband died."

Members said lessons have never disappointed. Often the lessons you expect the least from are the ones that engage the most.

Mike Gillen is the current president at LIFE. He also served as president in 2020. He felt an obligation to give back to the program as it had done so much for him.

"When you think it might be easier to stay home, you miss the most interesting lessons," Gillen said.

The question-and-answer sessions lead



President Mike Gillen talks with other LIFE members after class. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

to beneficial discussions about different topics. This is especially effective in the smaller program.

Joe Buranosky joined LIFE@WesternCarolina after moving from Florida where he was in a different LIFE program.

At the previous LIFE program, Buranosky said there was a waiting list for the large group. At WCU, the group is smaller and the discussions are more effective.

Buranosky had looked for a LIFE program when he moved in 2019. He served as president last year.

"I wanted to get involved and continue my education," Buranosky said. "It's important to continue learning."

According to Wheeler, the biggest goal next year for LIFE@WesternCarolina is to increase engagement with undergraduate WCU students.

LIFE@WesternCarolina is always looking for new members. Anyone 50 years or older can join at wcu.edu/engage/professional-enrichment/LifeAtWesternCarolina.

Letter from the editor

By Marrah Ste. Marie

Happy new year WCU! What a great time to restart and seize new opportunities. January is always a very refreshing time for us at The Western Carolinian. After a tiring semester and week of finals, our staff can finally relax before beginning it all over again. After the break, they always come back eager and better than ever and that is reflected in this edition.

If you follow our website or social media, or avidly look for our print editions you might have noticed a missing December edition. Unfortunately, we had some printing issues and were not able to distribute physical copies. However, if you read our online version, you might notice a few stories from there in this edition. We had some great stories that were still relevant that we wanted to share with our hardcopy readers. Many of these stories include updates so make sure to still check them out.

This year holds a lot of excitement for The Western Carolinian. As always, a few of our staff will be attending the regional Society of Professional Journalists conference. Yearly, we submit some of our content as well as our paper itself for consideration for the Mark of Excellence awards. Last year, The Western Carolinian was a finalist for Best-All Around Student Newspaper, we hope this year to be a winner.

As always, thank you for reading and supporting us. We improve every year, and I attribute a lot of that to a supportive audience. We hope to continue to provide thorough coverage of the area for you. We encourage you to follow us on social media and to reach out with any tips, ideas or critiques on those platforms or via email or our tipline.

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The 24/7 inspection machine: SPOT the Catabot

By Deanna Sipe



Photo by Deanna Sipe.

In June 2023 the College of Engineering added a new addition to the team that gained campus attention, SPOT the robotic dog.

The Engineering Department received \$98.8 million from state legislators to help expand the program in 2023. From those funds, \$95.3 million was authorized for a new engineering building.

Every academic year, the College of Engineering and Technology will receive \$3.5 million to support robotics, energy, controls and automation.

The Construction Management Department wanted to use some of the money on a

project that would incorporate robotics and automation. Bruce Gehrig, director of the department, immediately knew the solution.

"I was actually aware of the SPOT robot and I knew that it was used in construction, so I proposed it. Advanced technologies like SPOT is one of those things that our students get a chance to see and to work with and will learn how to actually utilize on construction sites," Gehrig said.

SPOT is a robotic dog designed by Boston Dynamics; a company created by former MIT leg lab researcher, Marc Raibert, that focuses on robotics.

The robot is full of sensors and cameras along with software for the brain that allows it to identify the environment around it. Working autonomously, the robot dog can navigate its surroundings walking up and down stairs, over obstacles and around people or walls.

"SPOT can navigate a construction site. There are lots of things we have to inspect during construction to make sure it's being built properly. SPOT can do that instead of a human," Gehrig said.

SPOT also uses sensors to detect QR codes around the Belk building that give SPOT certain tasks around the building. One of the things SPOT can do with the QR codes is pick up a book from a professor's office and bring it to them.

With all its sensors, SPOT can collect data used for construction and most importantly it can go into places that are unsafe for humans whether it be high areas, closed confined spaces or other hazardous areas.

"It's really a 24/7 inspection machine that can go out and do all these things on its own," Gehrig said.

SPOT is currently used in one special studies course, advanced construction technologies. In this class, students learn about different types of construction technologies. They also learn how to manipulate SPOT and utilize the data it collects to analyze and approve construction projects.

“A lot of people don’t know exactly all the capabilities of SPOT so we want to go out and put it on construction sites and test it in various environments and determine exactly what it can do,” Dr. Gehrig said.

Only students currently enrolled in the class are trained in how to use SPOT. There’s a goal to develop a training program where all students in the program have a chance to train.

Alexander Borrelli, an engineering technology major, is currently the only student in construction management trained to use SPOT.

From June 25-26, 2023, Borrelli traveled to Boston Dynamics with a team of six faculty

and staff members in the engineering technology department where he received in-depth certification training on how to use SPOT and how to train other students.

Borrelli’s area of study focuses on how things are made. Borrelli was able to see how the SPOT robot was designed, tested and manufactured.

“It’s been interesting to see how SPOT was manufactured,” Borrelli said.

The standard SPOT robot comes in yellow. When bringing the robot to campus, the engineering department went to the print shop and branded it to match WCU’s colors. “We added the purple and the other designs on there to reflect WCU,” Gehrig said.

Students have been very interested in SPOT and learning all about the robot dog.

“Everyone wants to see the robot dog. There’s even a few dogs on campus that have run up and been interested in SPOT. Some very happy to see him. Some very afraid to see him,” Borrelli said.

On the College of Engineering and Technology’s Facebook page, a contest was held on Aug. 26 to give SPOT a name. From this contest, the official name of SPOT became Catabot.

Next time you are on campus and see the Catabot, the College of Engineering and Technology say do not hesitate to stop and say hello!



Photo by Deanna Sipe.

History on the streets: The power of collecting oral histories in Appalachia

Marrah Ste. Marie

“It’s a testament to the power of storytelling and of connecting and having conversations with other people,” said Sarah Steiner, a subject specialist at Hunter Library.

Steiner began collecting oral histories for an LGBTQ+ archive in 2018. The oral history archive is a collection of different subjects being interviewed about their lives and experiences in Western North Carolina.

The project began as a fun way for Steiner to escape feelings of burnout. Her plan was to become trained in conducting oral histories and interview local drag queens.

“I’ve always felt like drag performers are pillars of the queer community. They almost bring a sort of spiritual community experience that has always been really inspirational for me,” Steiner said.

Steiner began by collecting seven interviews with local drag queens when Travis Rountree, an English assistant professor, began working at WCU.

“I’ve been called the Johnny Appleseed of queer archives,” Rountree joked.

While working on his masters, Rountree worked with the Appalachian State University’s oral history archives. He then worked with the LGBTQ+ archive while getting his PhD at University of Louisville. As a part of his teaching, he brought students to the archive.

“It was really fascinating because at that moment I was like, ‘oh, y’all are uncomfortable,’ welcome to the identity of being queer and uncomfortable,” Rountree said. “It was a great moment for all of us to learn together about what it feels like to be in a queer moment.”

Rountree worked for two years as a Writing Program Director at Indiana University East. There he got a grant to start an LGBTQ+ archive which included oral histories.

When Rountree came to WCU, he and Steiner connected and discussed how to continue the oral histories.

“We got a grant to hire a student worker to help us make a website and flush it out and get more oral histories,” Steiner said.

As the archive expanded, Rountree incorporated oral histories into his English 101 classes. As students prepared to conduct interviews, the COVID pandemic hit.

“All the interviews were done by Zoom,” Rountree said. “Some were better than others. That’s the nature of oral histories– some work and some don’t.”

Steiner continued to manage the archive through the pandemic. As people returned to campus, the archive continued to grow and gained notoriety among faculty.

“I remember hearing on Blue Ridge Public Radio a feature piece about the archive here,”

said Katharine Mershon, a philosophy and religion assistant professor. “We decided it would be really fun to bring the tools Sarah has learned from the archive into my class religion, gender and sexuality.”

Mershon was the first faculty to reach out to Steiner about discussing oral histories in class.

“I prepared a little slate of interviews and I talked about how things have changed over time,” Steiner said. “The students were so into it and said they wanted to do an interviewing assignment.”

Mershon saw that conducting interviews was really beneficial for students.

“Going through this process has been a confidence builder for students. They were really scared, they got training and then they were successful,” Mershon said. “There’s also the impact of getting to hear another person’s story.”

Mershon emphasizes to students participating in interviews that it is okay to disagree with subjects but to listen to and understand the different perspectives.

“This gives students the opportunity to approach these topics that are in the cultural conversation from an academic perspective,” Mershon said. “Which I think takes some of the charge away and gives them a chance to actually approach these materials without being afraid of saying the wrong thing.”

The benefits of the interviews are shared on both sides.

“[Those interviewed] say that it’s really meaningful to share their stories. It’s cathartic to share their stories,” Steiner said.

Oral histories have formed relationships in many ways. According to Steiner, many students stay after interviews to talk to the person they interviewed for hours.

For Rountree, a connection he saw was when he collected recordings of a ballad singer in Boone. Years later he used the recordings for a lesson at NC State.

“I had a student named Isaac,” Rountree said about using the ballad singer for one class, “He came up to me after class and he said, ‘that’s my great grandfather and I have never heard his voice before.’”

The LGBTQ+ archive also led to Sylva Pride. Rountree founded Sylva Pride in 2021 and invited Steiner to serve on the board.

According to Rountree, the relationship between oral histories and pride are mutually beneficial. There are signup sheets at

Sylva Pride for people to be interviewed and older subjects that are interviewed are told about Pride and encouraged to attend.

Items from every Pride have been kept in the LGBTQ+ archive with the oral histories.

“This is not history that lives on a shelf, this is history that’s in the streets,” Rountree said.

In showing how life has changed throughout the years, the oral histories have showed the evolution of LGBTQ+ tolerance.

“I’m a middle-aged bisexual woman and back when I was a teenager and coming out- my coming out experience was terrible,” Steiner said. “It just wasn’t really culturally accepted either by the straight community or the queer community. It really existed in this liminal space where it was hard to find acceptance. It’s been incredible for me and really validating to hear that a lot of other people in my age bracket had similar experiences. And it’s been amazing to see how that’s changed.”

The results of the 2024 election have raised concerns in the LGBTQ+ community. According to Rountree, this uncertain

political climate makes projects like his even more important.

“This project saves lives, Sylva Pride saves lives, Blue Ridge Pride saves lives,” Rountree said. “We are showing folks that they are not alone, that they are worthy, that there’s people here who support them and will be there for them.”

Steiner plans to broaden the oral histories project, though she doesn’t want to lose sight of where it all started.

“I’m soon going to be expanding it to just be an oral history archive with locals who live here,” Steiner said. “Thinking about all the colors and flavors and types of different people who live here in this very interesting rural community that we have here.”

Steiner is always looking for new people to interview. Anyone interested should contact her email, sksteiner@wcu.edu.

“I would really love to hear from anybody in the region who would like to be interviewed. Young and old, any background, history, lifestyle. That would be great,” Steiner said.



Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

Catman's legacy continues

By Marie Spencer

"One word to describe Harold is legend," said Kaleb Lynch, Catman2's shelter director and close friend of the late Sims.

This legacy of Dr. Harold "Catman" Sims Jr. lives on in Western North Carolina through Catman2 and the American Museum of the House Cat.

Lynch and others have organized a tribute for Sims April 5 at the American Museum of the House Cat. The date lines up with Sims' 90th birthday and two-year anniversary of the opening of the American Museum of the House Cat in its permanent location. Anyone is invited to this tribute to celebrate Sims' life and work.

"He was full of ideas. The man's brain never stopped. And he would be constantly thinking of things and if he had an idea at like two in the morning, then he'd be up on his computer, typing a bunch of stuff about it and trying to figure out a way to make it happen tomorrow," Lynch said. "He was a very motivated individual, a free thinker, he was never one to go with the crowd."

This motivation and love of cats inspired Sims to pursue opening a cat shelter and museum after retiring from his job as a biology professor.

Sims built the building housing Catman2 by hand with Jack Nowlin, a retired contractor and friend. Sims' vision for Catman2 was very different from the traditional shelter. Sims wanted to create a space for cats to roam free, without being held in cages. The shelter contains multiple cat rooms with open access cat patios so the cats can enjoy the fresh air.

"He was very adamant about not jailing a cat, imprisoning a cat in a cage for longer than necessary for any unjust reason," Lynch said.

The shelter opened in 2002, as the first no-kill shelter in Jackson County. It is also the first cat-only shelter in Jackson County. While most cats at Catman2 are available for adoption, there are some long-term resident cats who have made a home at the shelter.

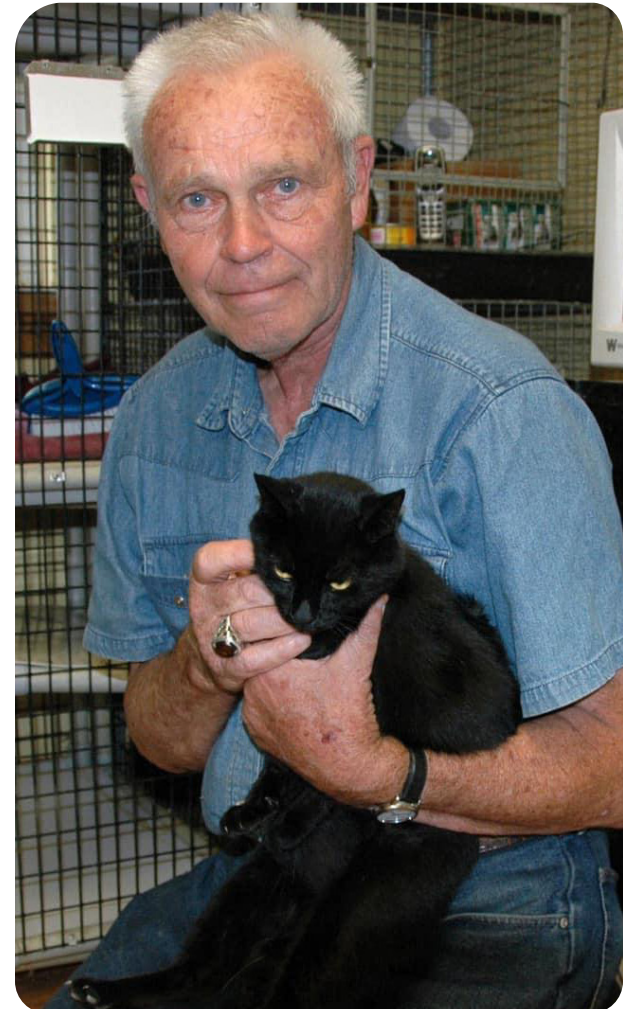
"Cats did not have many options back when he first came on the scene and built this place. So now we have quite a community of cat lovers that support this place and just have fallen in love with cats in general," Lynch said. "I just don't think that enough people know the history of this place and how lucky we are to have it."

The American Museum of the House Cat was Sims' passion later in life. The museum contains over 30 years' worth of Sims' personally curated cat-related memorabilia. The museum is the largest of just two cat-themed museums in North America.

In 2017, the museum started in part of Sylva's Old School Antique Mall. When the antique mall shut down, Sims moved the museum to a larger stand-alone building. After pandemic-related setbacks, the new and current location opened in 2022.

"He loved the real cats, but that museum was his pride and joy because that was one man's collection, and he never spent a dime of anybody else's money to buy that kind of stuff," Lynch said.

Lynch does not anticipate either Catman2 or



Dr. Harold "Catman" Sims Jr. Photo courtesy of Kaleb Lynch.

the American Museum of the House Cat to experience disruptions in operations after Sims' passing.

"We have every intention of continuing his legacy of helping cats and of expanding the museum at some point," Lynch said.

In addition to creating Catman2 and the American Museum of the House Cat, Sims was the author of multiple children's books and "Cats Without Cages," a nonfiction book sharing the story of Catman2's creation.

Jackson County opens first indoor pools

By Stewart Butler

After a long time coming it's finally here, Jackson County celebrated the completion of its new aquatics facility on Saturday with a host of grand-opening festivities.

"To finally have it come about has been a really big deal for Jackson County," said Parks and Recreation Director Michael Hopkins. "We're really excited for the opportunity we have."

The opening celebration marked a major milestone for Jackson County. For more than 20 years, residents have been asking for a county pool — indoor or outdoor.

In 2019 Jackson County conducted a survey to gauge interest in a potential aquatics facility. After receiving positive feedback, the county enlisted architectural firm Clark Nexsen to draft plans for the project.

Drafts were completed and a budget was set. The following year, Jackson County voters approved a \$20 million general bond referendum, and construction plans were drawn. New Atlantic Construction broke ground in September 2022 with the goal of completing the facility by the following October. October came and went, as did several subsequent completion dates. The facility is now complete and open to the public.

The 30,000-square-foot complex features a six-lane competition pool with diving boards and a rock wall, as well as a leisure pool with a play area and amenities for children. Additional upgrades include revisions to the lobby area and parking lots, new men's and women's locker rooms, saunas and more.

The facility resembles Western Carolina University's Health and Human Sciences Building and Allen Residence Hall, which were also designed by Clark Nexsen.

"People have said, 'This looks like a five-star hotel — where do we check in,'" Hopkins said.

Sylva resident David Miner was selected to lead operations at the new facility. Before moving to the area, Miner spent time coaching and directing swim competitions in Florida.

"When I first saw the job was available it was so enticing. There's so much opportunity for the community here," Miner said.

Unlike the outdoor pools in Sylva and Cashiers, the Cullowhee facility stays open regardless of weather, offering uninterrupted pool access. Miner and Hopkins said this is a significant benefit for Jackson County residents.

"The overall health benefits of a pool are across the board," Hopkins said.

Year-round access allows for a broader range of programming than is possible at Sylva or Cashiers pools. Miner and the staff are working to make the most of the facility.

They are forming youth swim and dive teams: Pinnacle Aquatics Swimming and Pinnacle Aquatics Diving. For adults, Miner will lead a branch of U.S. Masters Swimming. He also said Smoky Mountain High School plans to relocate its team to the new facility.

Miner hopes to offer lifeguard training, learn-to-swim programs, water aerobics, Zumba, kayak rolling, scuba training and more.

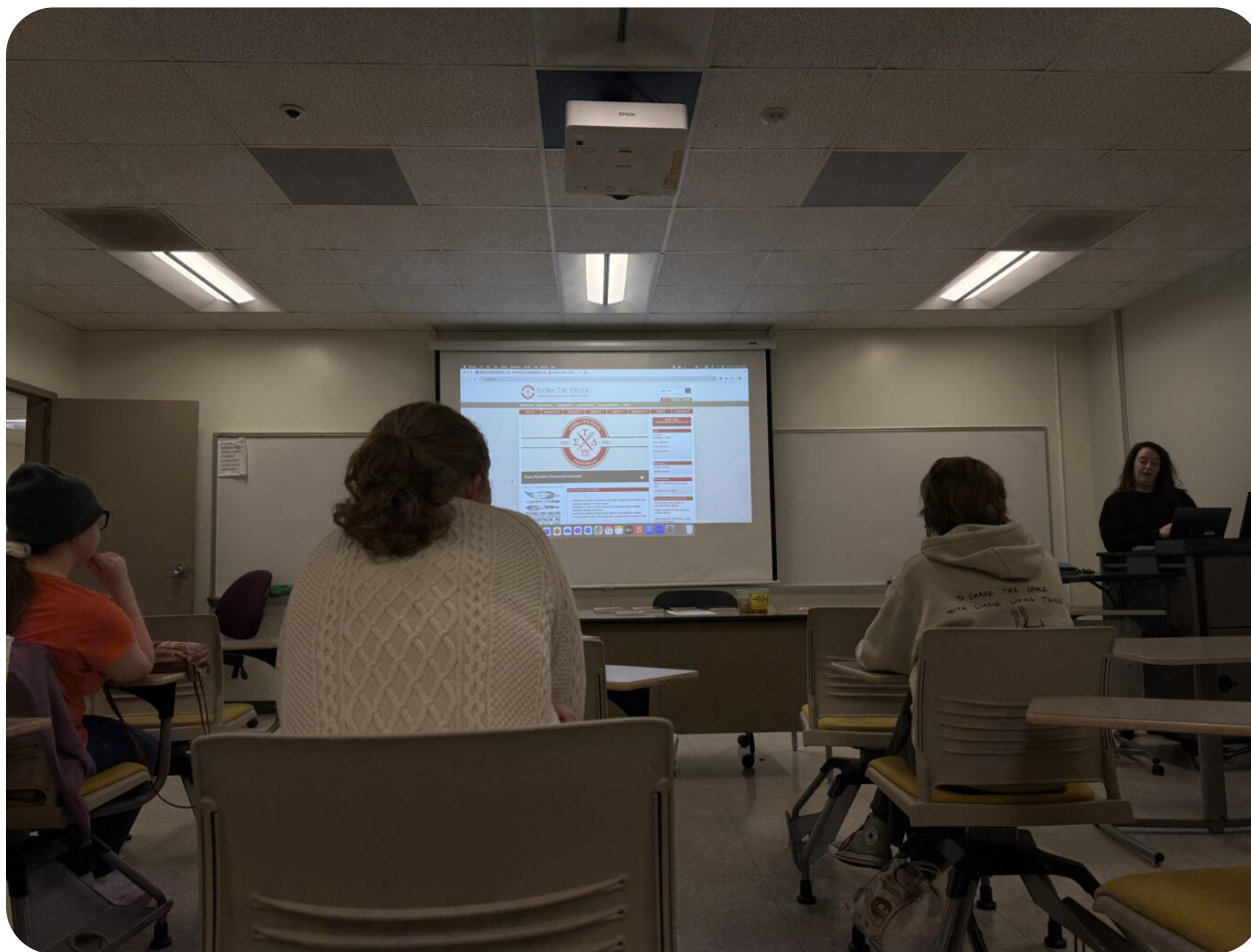
Year-round operation also increases staffing needs, particularly for lifeguards. Initial staff shortages in December delayed the opening celebration and limited hours during the holidays.

"We need four to five lifeguards for every hour that these pools are open," Miner said. "Having that many guards at any one time is challenging in this area."

More than 30 guards have been hired, but additional staff are still needed. To apply, visit jacksonnc.org.

WCU welcomes new humanities professional societies

By Quill Sanders



Prospective Sigma Tau Delta members learn about the honors society in a meeting with Emily Naser-Hall. Photo by Quill Sanders.

Two new professional societies have been started at WCU for humanities students: Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honors Society, and the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

The Sigma Theta chapter of the Sigma Tau Delta was restarted this year with Emily Naser-Hall as faculty advisor. The chapter is co-ed and open to anyone working towards a major, minor or graduate degree in English.

The society offers scholarships, publishing opportunities and networking events for its members.

Sigma Tau Delta requires that members

Have completed at least 45 credit hours
Are an English major, minor or graduate student

- Have completed at least six hours of English credit or nine hours of graduate

work at WCU

- Have a GPA of 3.0 in both English courses and cumulative GPA
- Pay a one-time induction fee

Dr. Naser-Hall is excited to bring back and grow the organization at WCU.

“Because so many members of the society have graduated, almost everyone involved now is a new member, which means that we can work on building the society to reflect student interests,” she said. “I’m excited to help our new members create a truly student-led organization that demonstrates to the rest of the WCU community the amazing work that English Studies students are doing.”

More information on Sigma Tau Delta’s international society can be found on english.org, or by getting in touch with Dr. Naser-Hall.

The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) was started earlier this year by co-presidents Rhiannon Eason and Jack Kelly.

AIGA aims to connect designers and creatives across the nation. Kelly and Eason are also clear with their goals for their chapter at WCU.

“One of Rhiannon and I’s main goals going into this was establishing a space for incoming graphic design students to connect with upperclassmen before the entrance portfolio submission, so students feel confident during the program’s acceptance process,” Kelly said. “Seeing that come to fruition with

our upcoming portfolio review has been very exciting for me.”

The co-presidents are gracious be able to start the AIGA on campus and have expressed their commitment to providing a bridge between all graphic design students at WCU.

“The graphic design program at WCU doesn’t overlap much between each academic level. First years don’t interact with second years, second years don’t interact with third years, et cetera,” Eason said. “We wanted this club to be a place for designers of all levels and majors to meet and build a community together, and we have definitely achieved that. I’m very proud of what the AIGA student

group at WCU is doing and am very hopeful for its future.”

The WCU AIGA chapter hosts biweekly meetings 6 p.m. Mondays that can range from maker nights, open critiques and workshops. The society offers professional Zoom meetings, an exclusive job portal and networking opportunities.

AIGA is open to all majors and years at WCU. The requirements to join are:

- A \$50 yearly membership fee
- A desire to connect with other creatives on campus

“One of the most satisfying and exciting aspects of founding the organization has been seeing the enthusiasm from all the designers and artists about the chapter,” Kelly said. “When you go to a meeting, you can feel a sense of community and many of our members are enthusiastic to get as involved as they can.”

More information about AIGA can be found on aiga.org. For WCU-specific information, email Jack Kelly at jikelly1@catamount.wcu.edu, Rhiannon Eason at reason1@catamount.wcu.edu, or find AIGA on social media.



WCU Students participate in AIGA's "Make a Monster Night" at the October meeting. Photo courtesy of American Institute of Graphic Arts.

Laundry thief terrorizes Judaculla Residence Hall

By Hannah Butler



Judaculla pants thief poster on YikYak. Poster by Kincaid Moore.

No shirt, no shoes, no...pants?

Students in Judaculla Residence Hall have complained that expensive clothing items, mainly men's pants and jackets, are being stolen from the laundry room when left unattended.

The issue is nothing new for residents of Judaculla, as thefts have been going on since September. WCU Snapchat stories were buzzing with complaints and warnings about the apparent "Judaculla Pants Thief," even going as far as to photoshop spirited "wanted" posters for the culprit.

In the laundry room, it's not uncommon to

hear chatter about the thefts while washing your clothes.

"Consider me Liam Neesen in Taken and call my stolen clothing Liam Neesen's daughter in Taken," joked Ryan Nadeau, a sophomore Judaculla resident.

The problem has sparked unrest amongst Judaculla residents. Nadeau has filed police reports on the issue, but to no avail.

"Me and a few others filed police reports, but there's not much they can do because of the absence of cameras in the laundry room," Nadeau said. "I'm assuming they're either selling them or keeping them in a little

collection somewhere. To be honest, I think they get a kick out of it and since they've gotten away with it so many times, they're just going to keep doing it."

Chief of the University Police Department, Steve Lillard, plans to do what he can to help residents.

"We have seen an uptick in the number of thefts from laundry rooms in Judaculla residence hall," Lillard said. "I have requested that my staff do extra foot patrols in that building during the evening hours. I have also requested my programming coordinator to reach out to the staff of Judaculla to see if we can partner on some crime prevention programs."

Some students have begun to keep a watchful eye out for suspicious looking figures while in the laundry room. During stake outs to protect clothing, students have expressed that they have been taking note of who enters and leaves the room, as well as anyone who acts suspicious.

Elijah Carpenter, a freshman resident at Judaculla, began monitoring the laundry room after having two pairs of Wrangler pants and a pair of athletic shorts go missing.

"I did two lifts today just to try and escape from the thief," Carpenter said, "I schedule my times around when I have free time to just sit."

Tanner Ball, a sophomore resident at

Judaculla, revealed that \$175 worth of his clothing has gone missing.

“A lot of it was my workout gear, which is Young LA. That’s the brand I like. I had four or five shirts taken, probably four or five tank tops, my really nice sweatpants, my cargo pants, my shorts and all kinds of stuff. Like, barely anything left,” Ball said.

Many students wonder why cameras have not been placed in the residence hall’s laundry room after so many complaints have been made.

According to Lillard, cameras being installed in the laundry room hasn’t been

requested, however it is possible if enough students request.

“My office has not been contacted regarding the addition of cameras in those locations. If students are passionate about this proposal, I would suggest they speak to the staff of the residence hall about their recommendation. That would be a good starting point for us to discuss the feasibility of cameras and the impact it would have on the residents,” Lillard said.

Should the culprit of these thefts be caught, the punishment for the crimes would vary. Theft such as this is in most incidents, considered larceny, according to North

Carolina General Statute 14-72. Should the Judaculla Pants Thief be caught, they would also be referred to student affairs, as the crimes violate the student code of conduct.

“We take all crime seriously at WCU and we encourage anyone who has been a victim to please report the behavior to the police,” said Lillard. “If anyone has any information related to these crimes or any other incidents that have taken place on campus, please call (828)227-8911 so that we may address the actions of those involved.”

When asked about the incidents, Residential Living declined an interview and to comment.



Judaculla laundry room. Photo by Hannah Butler.

HOMEBASE set to expand

By Sam Scroggins

Eight years ago, WCU and Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina collaborated to create HOMEBASE. The program originally supported students who had aged out of foster care or were otherwise independent. Over time it has evolved into a resource that provides a range of services to suit community needs. HOMEBASE now serves as a food pantry, a place to live or simply a place to hang out.

According to Associate Director Sydney Young, some residents live in the building year-round in exchange for volunteering and working at the front desk.

Based on data from the HOMEBASE annual

report, the number of individual services provided increased by about 25% from 2023 to 2024. HOMEBASE provided roughly 15,000 individual services in 2023 and roughly 20,000 in 2024. Housing services saw a notable increase in the last year.

"Our housing went from 1,800 nights in 2023 to 2,100 nights in 2024," Young said.

Because of WCU Policy 96 and other housing challenges, many students came to HOMEBASE seeking accommodations. Some could not afford an apartment, and others were waitlisted for residence halls. Unfortunately, HOMEBASE did not have enough space for everyone. Young said

HOMEBASE had to turn away more than 10 students seeking permanent housing because of a lack of space.

HOMEBASE is working to resolve the issue. After receiving a grant from Dogwood Health Trust, HOMEBASE plans to partner with the construction management department to convert a nearby home into year-round housing.

Construction Management professor Christopher Cox said they chose to help with the project after HOMEBASE director Jim Dean reached out to them directly. The department works with the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning to help the WCU community with projects when necessary.

"Many of our students have either been helped directly by HOMEBASE ministry or know someone who has," Cox said when asked why his department helped with this project specifically.

Construction Management students used laser imaging technology and computer modeling to create three potential options for Dean to use in conversation with the architect and donors.

"Going forward, the students will provide project support to the HOMEBASE Team in the contractor selection and project cost and schedule management," Cox said.

Young says that when HOMEBASE finishes the expansion, they will be able to offer year-round housing for seven more students.



Photo Marrah Ste. Marie.

While the new house will primarily cater to students who have aged out of foster care and those from Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, it will still offer services to anyone in need.

Young hopes the project will be completed by August 2025.

During winter break HOMEBASE prepared for an increase in students needing housing. Many students are unable to return home for the holidays or have nowhere else to go. HOMEBASE housed 12 students during winter break.

The downstairs dining room was transformed into a sleeping area. Each student was given a mattress, comforter, sheet set, pillow and room divider. They set up mini rooms around the tables using the dividers.

HOMEBASE also provides winter clothing, a necessity as the temperature drops. Those who need anything from HOMEBASE are encouraged to visit and talk with the staff.

HOMEBASE is located next to Cullowhee Baptist Church, directly across from the steam plant.



Property HOMEBASE plans to expand into. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

Mountain Heritage Center captures history with George Masa exhibit

By Max Poku-Kankam

An exhibit about George Masa, a Japanese immigrant who photographed and mapped Western North Carolina from 1915-1933, opened in the Mountain Heritage Center. The exhibit opened Jan. 17 and will stay open until Aug. 15.

Masa was a vital part of the conservation and newfound love for the Smoky Mountains. Masa and his friend, writer Horace Kephart used their work to help turn the Smoky Mountains into a national park.

"Masa captured photographs that beautifully depicted the Smoky Mountains, and used these images to convince philanthropists, politicians, and local community leaders to preserve the area," the Appalachian Mountain Club website said.

Peter Koch, an education associate with

the Mountain Heritage Center, helped with curating the Masa exhibit.

"We've always been aware of George Masa," Koch said. "There was recently a new book and new research into his life, and it was a great opportunity to do some good treatment to his career."

Nearly all of the photos used in the exhibit were donated to the Mountain Heritage Center by Alice and Bill Hart. The couple spent years searching for Masa's photos in auctions and online sites. Many of the photos were also authenticated by the couple.

In addition to the Harts, Paul Bonesteel also dedicated years to researching and understanding George Masa.

Bonesteel has researched Masa's life for

25 years. In the process he shared his knowledge through different mediums. In 2002, he created a documentary called "The Mystery of George Masa." In September 2024, Bonesteel worked with author Janet McCue to publish a biography about Masa, "George Masa a Life Reimagined."

"I think [Bonesteel] finds him enigmatic," said Koch. "There was a lot less known about Masa's story."

In addition to the photos Masa took, he mapped many areas of the Smoky Mountains. The maps he made helped create a significant portion of the southern Appalachian Trail.

The exhibit shows off the influence and the beauty of Masa's photos, which helped grow public widespread appreciation of the Great Smoky Mountains.

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Strands: Love is in the air

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2025 BINGO CARD

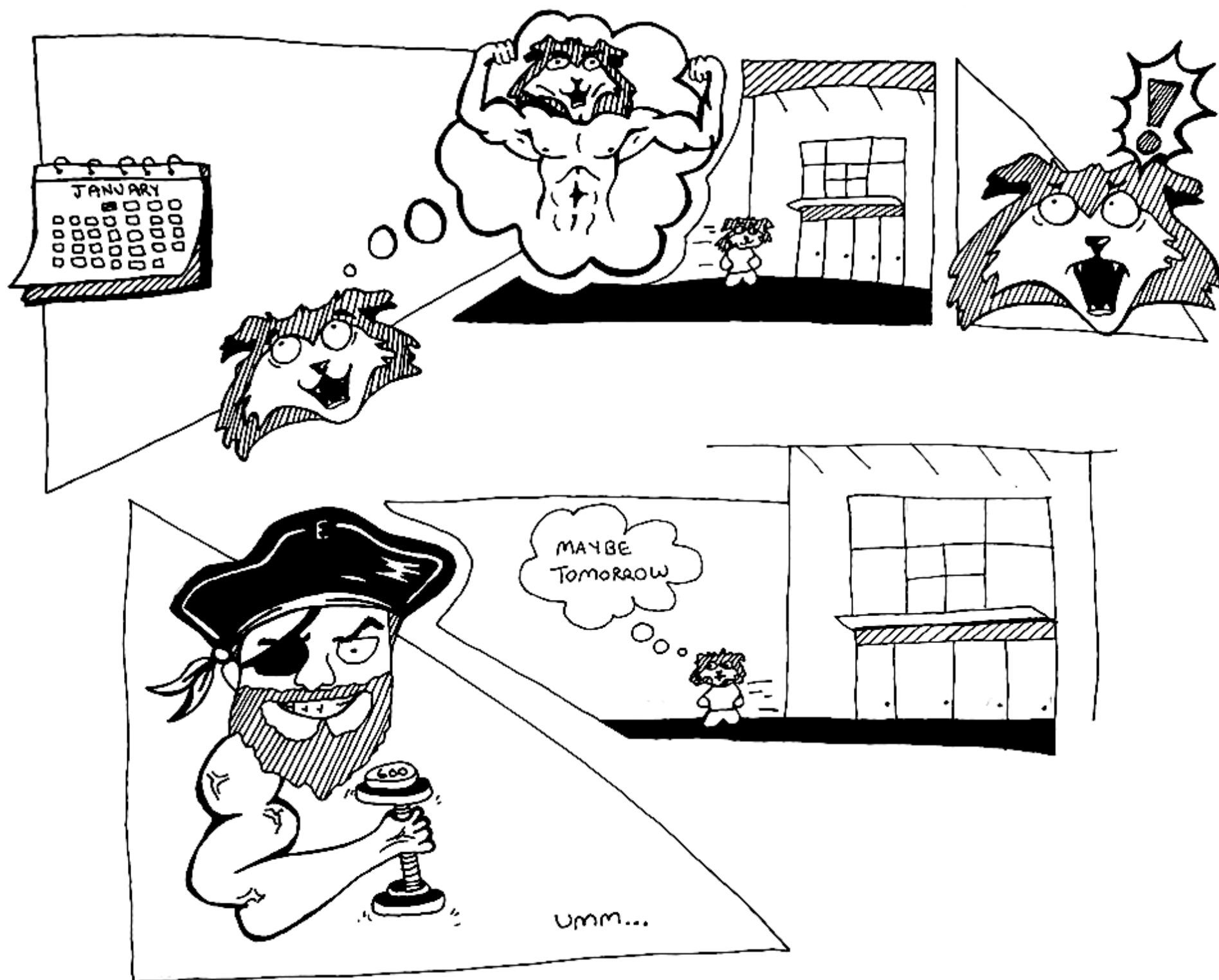
<p>Taylor Swift releases Reputation (Taylor’s version)</p> <p>- Deanna</p>	<p>Wendy Williams releases a biopic</p> <p>-Kassi</p>	<p>Kendrick Lamar and Drake beef resurfaces</p> <p>-Quill</p>	<p>World War III starts</p> <p>-Callie</p>	<p>Jason Baldoni and Blake Livey becomes Amber Heard and Johnny Depp case pt. 2</p> <p>-Leah</p>
<p>Trisha Paytas wins an award for her Broadway musical</p> <p>-Leah</p>	<p>Jojo Siwa canceled for promoting a crypto scheme</p> <p>-Max</p>	<p>Catamount football wins NCAA title</p> <p>-Stewart</p>	<p>Tom Holland and Zendaya’s engagement is revealed to be a publicity stunt</p> <p>-Marie</p>	<p>Wicked gets snubbed at the Oscars</p> <p>-Cora</p>
<p>A star collapses or dies</p> <p>-Hannah</p>	<p>Scooter crash on WCU campus</p> <p>-Kassi</p>	<p>FREE SPACE</p>	<p>Doja Cat turns to God</p> <p>-Kassi</p>	<p>Ariana Grande cheats on Ethan Slater with Cynthia Erivo</p> <p>-Sam</p>
<p>Sabrina Carpenter starts dating a woman</p> <p>-Marrah</p>	<p>Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift’s relationship revealed to be a PR stunt</p> <p>-Marrah</p>	<p>Mr.Beast gets canceled</p> <p>-Cora</p>	<p>Sabrina Carpenter and Pete Davidson start dating</p> <p>-Skylar</p>	<p>Timothee Chalamet and Kylie Jenner breakup</p> <p>-Leah</p>
<p>Chappell Roan releases new album</p> <p>-Leah</p>	<p>Ariana Grande and Ethan Slater get engaged</p> <p>-Kassi</p>	<p>AI gains sentence</p> <p>-Quill</p>	<p>Kendall Jenner has a baby</p> <p>-Kassi</p>	<p>Brittany Spears returns to music</p> <p>-Leah</p>



Entertainment Answer Keys

6	9	3	1	8	7	4	5	2
1	8	2	5	9	4	6	7	3
4	7	5	2	3	6	9	1	8
8	5	7	3	1	9	2	4	6
9	4	1	8	6	2	7	3	5
2	3	6	7	4	5	1	8	9
7	1	8	9	2	3	5	6	4
3	2	4	6	5	1	8	9	7
5	6	9	4	7	8	3	2	1

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Putting money where your mouth is: Investing in the C3 Introduction to Communication requirement

By Mackenzie Atkinson

Every WCU student has to take an introductory communication course or have transfer credits equivalent to the course to graduate. The Introduction to Communication course, commonly known as COMM 201, is one of the most offered classes at the university, offering 40 sections of the course a semester.

The course aims to introduce students to fundamental forms of communication that they will use throughout college.

“We want students to be able to orally express their viewpoints,” Russell said. “Being able to argue rationally and deliver presentations competently. Being able to speak well with others is essential to thinking,” said Vincent Russell, the Communication Department Liberal Studies Program Coordinator and assistant professor.

The skills taught in the course also aim to teach students to communicate effectively once students graduate and enter the workforce.

“There is a broader, sort of, civic social purpose for that as well which is that those same skills that help student succeed in class are also ones that help for the workplace, managing conflict with team members, being able to give presentations in the workplace sometimes applies,” Russell said.

A common problem is the COMM



Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

201 sections filling up very quickly. Currently there are six full time professors that teach the course in person and seven adjunct professors who teach the course online.

In fall 2023, WCU had 2,082 incoming

freshmen compared to the previous semester of 1,913 for fall 2022 semester. Most of those 2,000 students are required to take COMM 201 but there were only 875 seats offered during the 2023 fall semester.

A solution raised to solve the demand

issue is to raise the course caps, number of students in the classes. Currently the cap for the course is 25 students which follows the upper limits of communication discipline guidelines.

The National Communication Association recommends that performance based communication classes should not have a student to teacher ratio more than 25:1 with the preferred being 15:1.

The introductory course, like every 100 or 200 level courses, serves as a gateway for students to be introduced to the communication discipline and potentially pick up a communication major or minor.

Grace Cheshire, a human communication instructor, has exclusively taught the introductory course up until this semester.

“We try to get to those students within the first year before they marry themselves to their degree in case a communication major would be a good benefit, or a communication minor,” Cheshire said.

Since the push for communication classes to go online, the department has seen a significant drop in communication majors declared. From fall of 2016 to fall of 2023, there was a 74.6% drop in number of majors declared.

Despite the drop in declared majors, the COMM 201 class remains in high demand every semester. For instructors that are hired to teach the course exclusively the workload cast becomes repetitive and demanding.

“There are both benefits and challenges [to teaching COMM 201],” Cheshire said. “The benefit is that you only have to prep for one class, you’re teaching the same thing... One of the hard parts for us that teach 201 is that we know our students don’t necessarily choose

to be there. It wears on you after a while to feel a lot of passion about the subject and to realize not everyone shares the same passion as I do.”

Russell believes, along with general communication discipline standards, that larger class limit the effectiveness of a class.

Full time instructors’ pay is based on how many classes they teach a semester, not the number of students. Meaning, when class limits are increased, work for instructors increases with no adjustment in compensation.

Ten students do not seem like much of an increase until the course curriculum is taken into consideration.

COMM 201 classes cover topics like perception, self and identity, gender and culture, mediated communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication and conflict management among others.

“I think the biggest challenge in teaching 201 is it is a lot to cover in one semester,” Cheshire said. “So, when you really try and sit down and look at that when you’re planning a semester it’s impossible.”

“It may seem small but when you look at full time instructors are teaching eight to 10 additional students which is eight to 10 additional speeches, eight to 10 additional papers to grade. It adds up,” Russell said.



Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

Undergraduate research changes: Funding, APG and NCUR

By Marie Spencer

Changes in Academic Proposal Grants have impacted the National Conference on Undergraduate Research funding and maximum grant awards.

The National Conference on Undergraduate Research is an annual interdisciplinary conference held to showcase undergraduate research. Any undergraduate student with an original research paper or project is able to submit an application for NCUR.

The 2025 NCUR abstract submission closed on Dec. 6. Information about the 2026 NCUR is not yet available.

“The National Conference on Undergraduate Research is the largest undergraduate research conference in the country, and it brings together students from all over the US and all disciplines. It’s a really good experience for students to go through the entire process of presenting,” said Dr. Brian Railsback, professor of English Studies and founding Dean of the Brinson Honors College.

WCU has funded students to travel to NCUR for well over a decade. In previous years, the Brinson Honors College and Office of Research Administration handled the logistics of travel, lodging and funding for NCUR. As the founding Dean of BHC, Railsback attended 16 NCURs with WCU students.

WCU will still fund a limited number of students attending this conference. Now, any

group travel to the conference will be handled by the department involved or sponsoring a group of students. Individuals attending the conference with no affiliation with a department are responsible for planning logistics themselves.

“By implementing this new process, we can improve efficiency and streamline operations,” said WCU’s NCUR website on these changes.

Despite these changes, NCUR funding is still available for interested students through APGs. ORA now oversees all funding allocation and sets aside \$25,000 each year specifically for NCUR travel. The number of students ORA can support depends on multiple factors including the location of the conference.

“Last academic year (2023-24) we were able to fully support 11 students (all expenses paid) to disseminate their research at this national conference,” said Suzanne Melton, Research Programs Coordinator at ORA.

The 2024 NCUR was held in Long Beach, CA. With increased travel costs, less students were able to receive funding. The 2025 NCUR will be held in Pittsburg, PA from April 7-9. The closer location means more students are likely to receive funding.

NCUR travel funding is now handled as a subsection of the Academic Project Grants. Individual students can receive up to \$1250 as support specifically for NCUR travel

from an APG. Some departments may have additional funding support available for students, according to WCU’s NCUR website.

APGs are also available for students to travel to other conferences or conduct undergraduate research. The budget for these APGs is separated from the budget for NCUR, so more students have the opportunity to explore undergraduate research.

“The grant provides funding support that can be used to purchase equipment, materials, and supplies to conduct research, or travel to disseminate research at local, regional, and national conferences,” Melton said.

This year, APGs have increased the maximum available funding support for individuals and groups. Individual students can now receive up to \$750, instead of \$500. Groups can receive up to \$2000.

“The only qualification for access is that the student/group of student applicants must be undergraduate student(s) working with a faculty sponsor/mentor on an undergraduate research project,” Melton said.

Students do have to apply for an APG and be accepted in order to use this funding. APGs are not limited to specific disciplines. The next APG proposal deadline is Feb. 20.

To apply for an APG, undergraduate students or faculty sponsors need to submit a proposal on the APG submission portal available on their website. Individual students need a



NCUR 2024 in Long Beach, CA. Photo credit to Council on Undergraduate Research

faculty member to write a letter of support to accompany their proposal. More information about the submission process is available on the APG website.

Proposals are evaluated by the APG review committee.

“Each proposal is reviewed and considered by a faculty review committee that is made up of one representative from each college. Majority vote determines awarding. This committee’s aims to fund projects from across disciplines that meet the CUR definition of undergraduate research and creative inquiry,” Melton said.

CUR, the Council on Undergraduate Research, is the organization that creates many undergraduate research conferences including NCUR. Their definition of undergraduate research is “an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline.”

These changes are aimed at encouraging

student participation in undergraduate research.

“Western Carolina University has established itself as a national leader in undergraduate research working annually to support students in kick starting, sustaining, and disseminating research, scholarship, and creative activities from across all disciplines,” said WCU’s undergraduate research website.

“If you’re thinking of graduate school or you’re looking ahead to a career, evidence of undergraduate research shows that you are willing to take the extra mile, that you aren’t just there for classes. It’s one of the few markers that shows academic achievement outside of just grades,” Railsback said.

Railsback had an influential position in establishing WCU’s Office of National and International Awards as the founding director. ONIA provides additional funding and support for students pursuing undergraduate research through various scholarships and fellowships. ONIA and APGs operate independently, both

are resources for students interested in completing undergraduate research or attending conferences like NCUR.

When creating ONIA, Railsback spent time talking with Harvard’s Fellowship Office, one of the most successful Fellowship Offices.

“They have all these incredible awards that their students are getting. They’re very successful. And the reason why the director told me, is because they have a very robust undergraduate research program, and I would say that Western does not,” Railsback said. “We were a little disappointed. There was going to be a task force to look into research at Western and I think some of us thought they would look at undergraduate research, but for reasons that I don’t know, that didn’t happen.”

While some think that WCU still needs improvement in support of undergraduate research, changes like the recent one to APGs and NCUR funding may show that WCU is heading in the right direction.

Schools in the UNC System testing for dangerous chemicals in older academic buildings

By Max Poku-Kankam

In 1888, WCU first began as Cullowhee Academy, one teacher training 100 students how to be “competent teachers.” By 1929, the school grew into Western Carolina Teachers College. Finally, 38 years later in 1967, WCU was recognized as a university by North Carolina state legislature.

Through the evolution of the school, many buildings were erected and demolished. Like many UNC schools, WCU still hosts

many historic buildings including the Moore building built in 1924.

However, universities in North Carolina have started finding polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, inside of caulking in historic buildings.

PCBs are man-made chemicals that were used in manufacturing from 1929 until they were banned in 1979 for having a wide range of toxicity. Caulking with PCBs has been

found primarily in buildings from the 1950s to the 1970s according to the EPA.

“These chemicals can affect your nervous system,” said Mickey Henson, an assistant professor of construction management at the College of Engineering and Technology.

Henson was an environmental regulator with the state of North Carolina and has been a civil and environmental consultant in several countries.

“It reminds me of asbestos. These things have been used in construction for many years,” said Henson.

UNC schools began testing for PCBs in their buildings more frequently since North Carolina State University closed Poe Hall. According to NCSU’s website, Poe Hall was closed in November 2023 because of the presence of PCBs in its caulking.

WCU most recently tested for PCBs in the Moore building in fall of 2021 before beginning the building’s renovation.

“Testing is done regularly for things like this,” said Jon Maddy, the director of Safety and Risk Management.

Moore was built in 1924 and was closed in 2012 due to excessive mold. When the renovation plan for Moore began in 2021, a



Photos by Cora Haste.

company called Terracon was used to test for hazardous materials in the building.

“You always want to have some type of third-party testing, so you don’t have any conflicts of interest,” Maddy said.

Terracon found traces of PCBs in light switches and fixtures throughout the Moore building, according to the Moore building renovation plan.

“They were in what is called the light ballast,” said Maddy. “PCBs were used in industrial applications and transformers as oil because they were a nonflammable product.”

Old buildings are tested for hazardous materials before they are renovated to understand what dangers or concerns could be encountered along the way.

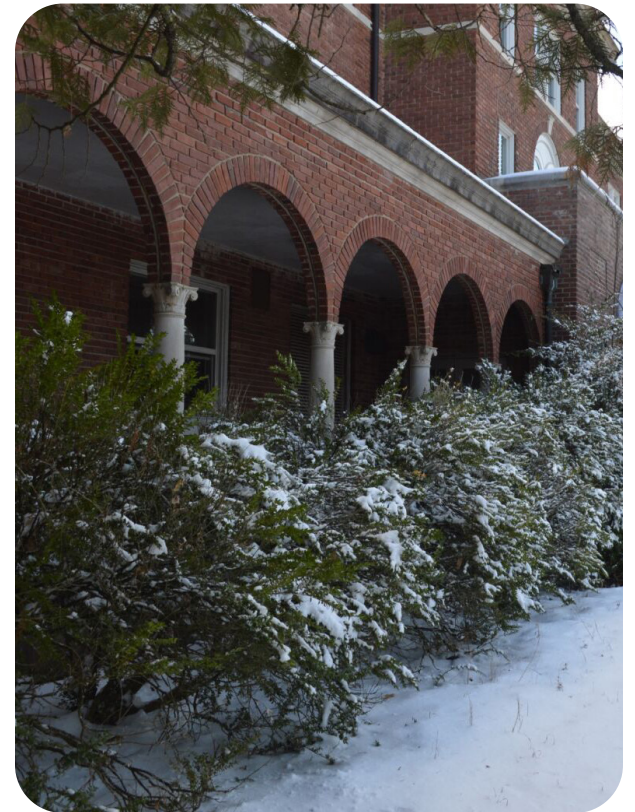
Testing for these buildings is done before they get renovated to see what type of dangers are inside of these buildings, like PCBs.

“I think that, in general, PCBs are something to be concerned about,” said Maddy. “That’s the reason we have these surveys done.”

Since the closing of Poe Hall, other UNC schools such as UNC Charlotte, NC A&T, UNC Asheville and UNC Pembroke, have started testing for PCBs in buildings built before 1979.

UNC Charlotte and NC A&T showed no signs of PCB in their reports. UNC Asheville and UNC Pembroke found traces in one of their buildings.

NC State, UNC Chapel Hill and East Carolina University have records of testing before the closing of Poe Hall.



Photos by Cora Haste.

Looking back: Joyner Building in the snow

By Marie Spencer

In the Joyner Building’s nearly 70 years of history, Western Carolina University expanded from the Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School to today’s public university.

Joyner was one of the earliest buildings built on WCU’s campus. The building was constructed in 1913. The building was named after James Yadkin Joyner, the North Carolina Superintendent of Education.

Joyner was a central part of WCU as it was located between Moore and Davies Hall, two of the first dorms. The building was

multipurpose, as Joyner held a variety of spaces throughout its long legacy on campus. Until Hunter Library opened in 1953, the campus library was found in Joyner. At different times, Joyner housed classrooms, offices, the bookstore, the post office and a gymnasium.

In 1981, Joyner was destroyed in a fire and was not rebuilt. The Joyner Plaza now marks where the building used to stand.

Source: <https://www.wcu.edu/celebrate125/history.html>



Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Hunter Library.

Student Worker Spotlight



Alexander Hoffman

What is club swim?

WCU Club Swim is an opportunity for students to exercise, meet new people, and become more active in the community through fundraising and social events. The club also offers numerous opportunities to compete throughout the year at schools like the University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, Clemson, and more.

What does club swim aim to do?

The clubs aim to provide students with an outlet for relieving stress, traveling to other colleges, and staying healthy throughout the school year.

How did you get interested in your club?

I became interested in Club swim because I was looking for athletic, competitive, and with a great

What is your job and how do you do it?

I am a tour guide for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions! Basically, a few times a week (2-5 usually) I spend about two hours walking groups of prospective students, and sometimes groups of 50 5th graders, across campus, stopping at 12 stops across campus, to help students decide if they'd like to attend WCU!(we also tell lots of bad jokes). I also work two Saturdays a semester at Open House, usually from 3am-6pm, as another opportunity to help students decide if Western is their future home. During the afternoon of Open House, you can always find me and Ayden Davis dancing around like we have gotten way more sleep than we did!

How did you find your way to Western?

I'm from Canton, NC; I live about 30-40 minutes away, which means my school system came here quite a few times on field trips, which is something that kept WCU in my thoughts. When I was looking at colleges more seriously in mid-highschool (shoutout Haywood Early College) I was actually on an engineering track, and was planning on going to the Wolfpack in Raleigh for industrial engineering, a major that was only at two public universities. I eventually decided (in year 4 of 5 at my early college), to switch to business, broadening my horizons, and allowing me to apply to WCU, App, and a private college in Tennessee, and I decided, based on the student body, cost, and location, that the Whee would be my home.

community, which the swim team checks all of those boxes.

How can someone get involved with your club?

Anybody can become involved with the club by visiting Reid Pool any Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday at 7:30 or by contacting our Instagram page (swim_club_wcu). We welcome both experienced swimmers looking to compete again, and brand-new swimmers hoping to learn alike.

What events can we look forward to in the future?

The WCU Swim Club has and will continue to compete throughout the southeast and will be hosting various social events and fundraisers throughout the year. In the past we've done

What are your personal interests?

I absolutely LOVE watching WCU sports, especially basketball. The environment is incredibly fun and incredible, and you can usually spot me near the front on our team's side at every home game! I also spend a lot of time outside of work/class doing my interview series Chats With Cats, for our broadcasting club (shoutout Whee-TV). In the interviews, I have sat down with over 40 of our student athletes and talked to them about not only being an athlete, but also the facts of being a student as well.

What is your favorite aspect of WCU?

I have a few things that I absolutely love about WCU, but my favorite part has got to be the people. The friends I have made are basically a second family, and that comes with the territory of being a smaller school, but it allows for a greater sense of connection. Other than that, I also absolutely and almost equally love the location/view, and am amazed by different views from the same places on a pretty much daily basis. It is an amazing place with amazing people.

What advice do you have for students?

My advice to especially new students is to join something on campus. Whether it is a job with a big community (like enTOURage) or Greek life or a club, get involved in some way. It can seem difficult or scary sometimes to talk to people and make new friends, but I found it much easier and less scary when I got involved here at WCU.

Club Spotlight



Swim Club

percentage nights at Innovation Brewing, pumpkin patches at Darnell Farms, competed at meets on other college campuses, and attended or hosted a variety of other events.

Staff Spotlight



Dr. Chris Cooper

What sparked your interest in cheerleading?

I'm 21 now, and I've been cheering since I was 4, so it's always just been a natural thing to do! I've only taken one year off from cheering, and it was only because of injury. I just remember hating it and being so eager to be back.

What do you like most about cheerleading at WCU?

Flying and being able to learn and do so many skills and tricks in the air has always been the best part of cheerleading for me. I love the adrenaline rush I get when trying something new, being scared, and then actually doing it and perfecting it!

What makes your sport unique?

Cheerleading routines are known for their sharp, precise movements, often synchronized with a team. A lot of what we do is mental.

How did you get into teaching?

I long thought that I'd be interested in teaching, but after a stint as an education major in college I concluded that I'd rather teach at the college level. At that point, the path seemed pretty clear—get a PhD, research, get teaching experience and cross my fingers that it would all work out well and I'd end up in a place where I was happy. And somehow, it did.

What are your research interests?

I've written about a variety of topics within American politics, but the majority of my work focuses on state politics, elections, and southern politics.

What is your favorite aspect of WCU?

I love working at an institution that values and rewards quality teaching—the students

Sometimes, mental blocks can get in the way of what we want to do and know we can do. That can be hard on us mentally, and I feel like that makes us strong athletes. We learn to control our bodies and make them do what we want them to do. For example, we learn to “defy gravity” by teaching our bodies to flip over, spin, and float while making it look effortless!

What do you hope your team accomplishes this year?

I hope one of our competing teams is able to win a title at nationals in Daytona in April! We truly do work so hard, and the sport is so demanding of our bodies, time, and our minds!

What is next for you after WCU?

After I graduate, I will be going to dental hygiene school to be a dental hygienist, but my biggest dream is to be a pediatric dentist, so I do plan on going back to school at some point in my life.

are why I got into this profession, and why I stay. And the views of the mountains outside of my office window don't hurt.

What are your personal interests?

I enjoy spending with my family and spending time outdoors—often at the same time. I'm a fairly active mountain biker, a more infrequent than I'd like kayaker, and a reluctant runner.

What advice do you have for students?

Study abroad. I didn't study abroad in college and it's only regret from those four years. I always assumed I'd have time to spend abroad when I got older, but it turns out that getting older often comes with things like families, mortgages and jobs—all good things to be sure, but things that make it difficult to spend extended periods of time in another country.

Athlete Spotlight



Lindsey Imul-Mendoza

February Arts & Entertainment Calendar

By Marie Spencer

Jackson County Farmers Market – 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Feb. 1

Browse goods from local farmers and artisans every Saturday in Bridge Park. More information at <https://jacksoncountyfarmersmarket.org/>.

Boredom Busters – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 1

All ages are welcome to stop by the Jackson County Public Library every Saturday for fun activities including art projects and games. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events/boredom-busters-7>.

Haywood Ice Fest Weekend – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Feb. 1-2

Enjoy a weekend of fun activities including live ice carving, an ice-skating rink and a market featuring local artisans. Events are held at various locations in Haywood County. More information at <https://visithaywood.com/things-to-do/visit-haywood-ice-fest-weekend/>.

Music Bingo with Ambitious Entertainment – 7 p.m. Feb. 3

Join Lazy Hiker Brewing in Sylva to play music bingo. More information at <https://www.facebook.com/>

ARTageous – 4 p.m. Feb. 4

Join the Jackson County Public Library to create a different fun project and learn new

art skills every Tuesday. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events>.

Let's Get Japaneseee: Celebrating Setsubun – 6 p.m. Feb. 4

Join the Jackson County Public Library to celebrate Setsubun, a Japanese festival honoring the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Participants will celebrate by making crafts, throwing beans and eating Ehomaki. Please register by calling the Jackson County Public Library at 828-586-2016 or visiting <https://fontanalib.org/events/lets-get-japaneseee-celebrating-setsubun>.

Puppy Love at Innovation Station – 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Feb. 4

Paint a unique pup-inspired pottery piece at Innovation Station in Dillsboro. Pieces will be available to pick up the following week? Please purchase a ticket for a specific item at <https://www.artwagonmobilestudio.com/product/puppy-love-innovation-station/116?cs=true&cst=custom>.

Trivia Night – 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Feb. 4

Challenge yourself in free trivia every Tuesday at Lazy Hiker Brewing in Sylva. Groups or solo participants welcome.

Galentine's Day Party – 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Feb. 8

Join Southern Bliss Boutique to celebrate Galentine's day with permanent jewelry,

luxury inspired handbags and more. More information at <https://business.mountainlovers.com/events/details/galentine-s-day-party-70898>.

Valentine's Pet Photoshoot – noon to 4 p.m. Feb. 8

Get a professional Valentine's Day themed photo of your pet at Innovation Station in Dillsboro. More information at <https://www.facebook.com/events/597407349903353>

Ballet Hispánico – 7:30 p.m. Feb. 12

Renowned Latino dance organization, Ballet Hispánico is visiting WCU to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. The performance will be held in the Bardo Arts Center and last approximately two hours. Tickets and more information are available at <https://wcuarts.universitytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=1521>.

Boeing Boeing – 7:30 p.m. Feb. 12-16

WCU's School of Stage and Screen is performing the play Boeing Boeing in the Bardo Arts Center. Tickets and more information are available at <https://wcuarts.universitytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=1491>

The Great Outhouse Races – 3 p.m. Feb. 15

Have you ever wondered what racing homemade outhouses on skis looks like? The Great Sapphire Outhouse Race is the perfect chance to find out. The race is held

at Sapphire Valley Ski Area. Check-in will start at 1:30 p.m. To register to enter or volunteer, please call 828-743-1163. The last day to register is Feb. 12.

Sylva Naturalist Club: The Forest Unseen – 6:30-8 p.m. Feb. 13

Join the Sylva Naturalist Club in reading *The Forest Unseen* this year. While reading the novel, club members will connect with nature and share personal nature observations. Meetings are every second Tuesday of the month at the Jackson County Public Library. Email aduggins@bmtrust.org to sign up.

Sylva Stitchers – 6 p.m. Feb. 13 and 27

All are welcome to join fellow stitchers in working on your favorite needle craft, learn new skills or teach beginners to improve. The event is held every second and fourth Thursday of the month in The Story Time Room at the Jackson County Public Library. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events/sylva-stitchers-2>.

Great Backyard Bird Count Walk – 9 a.m. to noon Feb. 15

Become part of a global science project by counting birds along the Jackson County

Greenway. Participants will meet at the greenway trailhead at 9 a.m. to begin the walk, which will be two miles or less. Binoculars will be available for participants if needed. Please register for the event at <https://www.mainspringconserves.org/events/great-backyard-bird-count-walk/>.

Solstice: A Winter Circus Experience – 7:30-9:30 p.m. Feb. 27

Join the Bardo Arts Center to experience an eight-act acrobatic adventure that blends poetry and circus. Tickets and more information are available at <https://wcuarts.universitytickets.com/w/event>.

A guide to the perfect New Year's resolution

By Cora Haste

In the excitement of a new year comes a recycled desire to make changes. Resolutions to exercise more, spend less time on your phone, to stop texting that toxic guy float through your head. It seems these hopes and dreams usually come crashing down by Jan. 31.

Why keep setting these goals, making these resolutions? What is it about a new year that encourages us to make changes?

People seem to really enjoy a new beginning, a fresh start. We see it online each month as people speak into the universe requesting that the next month be better than the last. Sunday resets help us start fresh on Monday.

It is only natural that we would want a fresh start on Jan. 1.

There are a million self-help books that teach us how to change our lives. But maybe the change we need this year isn't a drastic one. People often focus on bold declarations to be better, to uproot their bad habits and become the best version of themselves.

I think the best version of us is the version that tries a little more every day. To exercise more, you don't have to wake up at 4 a.m. and run five miles, sure you could do that, but you could also go on a short walk or take the stairs rather than the elevator. To reduce your screen time, start small. Replace doomscrolling with a hobby that brings

you joy. Create small, realistic changes that ground you and bring you joy.

We are wired to love a fresh start and a blank slate so take advantage of that excitement but when it wears off remind yourself that small changes toward good are better than nothing at all.

"It is easy to get bogged down trying to find the optimal plan for change: the fastest way to lose weight, the best program to build muscle, the perfect idea for a side hustle. We are so focused on figuring out the best approach that we never get around to taking action. As Voltaire once wrote, 'The best is the enemy of the good.'"

James Clear, *Atomic Habits*

Moore building to be renovated for student use

By Quill Sanders



The historic Moore building. Photo by Max Poku-Kankam.

The historic Moore Building is being modernized with plans to become a new hub for student activity as soon as Spring 2025.

Atop the hill of upper campus situated behind Brown Hall, Moore has served many roles since its opening in 1924. While it originally served as a women's residence hall, it later became a dining hall, a men's residence hall, an infirmary and the home of health and human services until the building was vacated in 2011.

In 2020, WCU asked Jenkins Peer Architects (JPA) to provide plans for the refurbishment of the building. The main goals of the project were to make Moore an active learning environment, be adaptable in the future and honor the building's history while still modernizing the space.

"It takes us away from the center of campus,

which I don't love, but we'll bring life back to that part of campus," says Dr. Annette Debo of the English Department.

The project was put on hold in 2022 due to escalating construction costs stemming from the pandemic, however the renovation has since resumed with federal funding.

The goal is to modernize the building by keeping the historic exterior and gutting the interior to create spaces for students to gather and learn. Faculty has been allowed to choose technology and furniture in the classrooms, making the Moore renovation a largely involved project. WCU hopes to make the renovation a project for all of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Despite the building's age, professional analysis of the building shows that it's in good structural condition. Unfortunately, the

JPA report states that Moore's windows, roof and the plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and fire protection (PME/FP) systems will need to be demolished and replaced. Beyond those improvements, only minor repairs will need to be done to the building.

The biggest undertakings for this project will be expanding the current parking lots, creating 70 new parking spaces, and clearing the building of harmful materials such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), lead, mold and asbestos.

Once the building is refurbished, it will serve as a home to the Criminal Justice and English programs as well as Undergraduate Research, International Programs and Services and the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning.

The plan is to have small, medium and large sized classrooms for both academic departments in order to maintain typical class sizes. The original parlor will be turned into new lounges designed for students.

"These old buildings were not built for students to have room to gather," Debo said, "We have really emphasized that in the renovation, so that there is a lot of student space."

The renovation of the Moore building may start a domino effect on campus. Once the Criminal Justice and English vacate Belk and Coulter respectively, new departments will have new spaces and opportunities.