

# CRIMSON & BLACK

Central  
Washington  
University  
Spring 2025



Yakima Family Builds  
College-Going Culture  
— Page 10

TV Program Builds  
Rock-Solid Fanbase  
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#### Connect with CWU



**On the Cover:** CWU Interim Director of Admissions Andres Moreno has a little fun during Wildcat Preview Day earlier this year on the Ellensburg campus. Moreno is the first member of his family to graduate from college, and he helped pave the way for his five siblings to follow him to Central. Photograph: David Dick

**Left:** Every spring, the dogwood blossoms light up across the Ellensburg campus, simultaneously signaling new beginnings and the culmination of a long year. Photograph: David Dick

## CRIMSON & BLACK

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Dear Wildcats,

As an institute of higher learning, we are called upon to teach. At the same time, we must remember that our responsibilities to our students, and to our community, require us to learn in equal measure.

While the first half of 2025 has been marked by change and uncertainty, I have been encouraged to see our university community be so willing to learn from the present so we can build a stronger future together.

With the end of another academic year upon us, we are preparing to send another cohort of CWU graduates out into the world. As the challenges of the future begin to take shape, I urge you to remember the challenges that we have already overcome, through collaboration and the curiosity that is needed in this moment.

Education gives us the tools we need to be successful, but how we use those tools depends on our ability to adapt and change our perspective when faced with situations that may seem insurmountable. This year, I have seen our students and employees adapt and persevere, and I know that the world needs your optimistic point of view now more than ever.

As you will see in this edition of *Crimson & Black*, CWU's mission to deliver a high-quality, forward-thinking education to students from all walks of life continues. The voices you will hear from in these pages belong not only to members of the CWU community, but to those whose lives we have impacted.

Without their leadership and support, we could not accomplish the monumental task before us. As we perform the work that moves the world forward, we also must heed the world around us so we can be inspired to take action. A few highlights in this edition include:

- Five siblings in the Moreno family of Yakima became first-generation graduates from CWU, and their youngest brother is currently a student here.
- Geological Sciences Lecturer Nick Zentner has created a worldwide audience on PBS and YouTube with his *Nick on the Rocks* program.
- CWU alumnus Jon Shellenberger is working to uncover long-hidden gravesites around the state, including a former Native American boarding school in the Yakima Valley.
- A look at the myriad ways in which CWU shares a bond of mutual support with the Ellensburg and Kittitas County communities.

Every day, new memories, achievements, and bold strides forward are made at CWU and in communities around the state. Thanks to the engagement of those who believe in our vision to be a model learning community of access and opportunity, we are able to provide students from all backgrounds with an exceptional higher education experience.

I look forward to working with all of you as we pursue a future where everyone can take advantage of the same opportunities to make the world a better place.

In admiration,

A. James Wohlpart  
President

### CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Central Washington University acknowledges the people who have been on this land since time immemorial. The Ellensburg campus is on lands ceded by the Pshwanapum and other bands and tribes of the Yakama Nation in the Treaty of 1855. The Yakama people remain committed stewards of this land, cherishing it and protecting it, as instructed by elders through generations. We are honored and grateful to be on their traditional lands, and give thanks to the legacy of the original people, their lives, and their descendants.

# SHAPE THE FUTURE OF CRIMSON & BLACK

Since 2019, you've received Crimson & Black in your mailbox twice a year. As we build a sustainable future for Central Washington University, we want your feedback on your magazine. We ask that you take five minutes to let us know what you enjoy about your magazine, what you would like to see more of, and if you want to continue to receive a print copy of Crimson & Black or would like to get your CWU news through a redesigned online platform.

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*CWU Anthropology alumnus  
Jon Shellenberger has established  
himself as an expert in the work  
to uncover unmarked graves  
around the state.*

# Grave Discoveries

CWU alum leading statewide effort to learn more about unmarked burial sites

By David Leder



*Volunteers use ground-penetrating radar (GPR) equipment to survey the grounds of the Roslyn Cemetery.*

**W**hen the news broke in 2021 that the remains of more than 200 children were discovered at the site of a former Native American boarding school in British Columbia, Jon Olney Shellenberger knew he had to do something.

After spending the previous 14 years as the lead archaeologist and ethnographer for the Yakama Nation, the 2004 CWU anthropology alumnus had already invested countless hours and resources into learning more about his ancestral history in the Yakima Valley.

As a descendant of boarding school survivors, Shellenberger — an enrolled Yakama tribal member — had developed a deep personal interest in piecing together the checkered history of Native American boarding schools in the U.S. and Canada. But something about the revelations from Kamloops, B.C., “lit a fire” underneath him that has only grown brighter in the two years since.

“When that news came out, it made me want to use my background and training for a bigger cause,” said Shellenberger, who served as the director of CWU’s American Indian Studies program from 2021-22 and now works as the Cultural Resources Department Director for the Cowlitz Indian Tribe.

“This boarding school issue is international, and no one knows the full story of what happened. I’m just trying to get some answers by piecing together the history, as painful and depressing as it is.”

In May 2022, almost exactly one year after the Kamloops atrocities were revealed, Shellenberger’s quest became that much more personal when the U.S. government disclosed that it had discovered more than 50 burial sites where Native American boarding schools once stood. Some of these unmarked graves were uncovered at Fort Simcoe, near his parents’ hometown of White Swan (about 30 miles southwest of Yakima), and he began to feel as though he was being personally called to do this work.

Fort Simcoe was home to one of the earliest on-reservation boarding schools in the U.S., operating from 1861 to 1922 before a church-run mission was established there. During those six decades, a military fort and Native American boarding school were located on the grounds, yet there is no evidence of a designated cemetery.

“It’s just grass, which seemed very strange to me,” Shellenberger said.

Naturally, he and other tribal historians have a lot of unanswered questions about where their ancestors were laid to rest. Where did their bodies end up? Were they moved to another location? Are there any records of their deaths or the transfer of their remains? Where were the Indians who were hung as ‘war criminals’ buried? Were they even buried at all?

“These are just a few of the questions we’re trying to find answers to,” Shellenberger said. “But so far, the records searches have been very challenging. They weren’t very well kept by the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) or the other federal agencies involved, which makes it extremely difficult to account for everyone.”

## Painful Past

Shellenberger, 44, explained that most people aren’t aware of this painful era in Native American history, and those who do know about it don’t realize that it happened right here in Central Washington, as a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

Even as an enrolled tribal member, Shellenberger didn’t comprehend what occurred at the boarding schools until he was an adult. Even though he knew many family members and friends who were survivors, it wasn’t something that was widely talked about.

That has since changed, and many survivors are willing to share their stories with him. Their accounts are heavy with physical and sexual abuse, and several survivors speak of the suspected foul play that took place at boarding schools they attended.

“We were taught that no one knows what happened to these people, and the perception is that they disappeared or that they just left,” he said. “But we now know that wasn’t true, and it’s going to be up to me and my fellow researchers to figure out what happened.”

Shellenberger recounted a story about his great-great-grandfather, Alexander Blodgett, who was sent to San Quentin Prison in the late 1800s for trying to prevent Oregon state officials from sending his children to a boarding school. Blodgett eventually lost his family and his livelihood because of a federal law that was rooted in intolerance and bigotry.

“That era shaped my family’s history, and it’s a trauma that has persisted through generations,” he said. “There are still remnants of that in how our family functions. Kids today have no idea what was done to try to move Natives out of the way.”

## Hidden History

Aside from trying to connect sporadic historical records and talking to the boarding school survivors who are still living, Shellenberger and his former CWU colleagues have been using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) technology to identify unmarked burial sites at Fort Simcoe and other non-tribal locations, including Roslyn, Lacey, Camano Island, and Hermiston, Oregon.

Making good on his commitment to uncover as much information as possible about unmarked burials in the region, Shellenberger purchased his own GPR equipment in 2021 and began using it for volunteer field research. He later put the equipment to use during a summer field school outing to Fort Simcoe with CWU faculty members Karisa Terry and Steve Hackenberger and their students.

“I’m a concerned tribal member, and I view this work as essential to preserving our past,” said Shellenberger, who also earned a master’s degree in resource management from Central in 2006. “But it’s also very interesting, and I love that I can do this important work with help from my former CWU colleagues and their students.”

In fact, he invites anyone interested in using GPR technology and preserving history to join him for a field session. And although his initial focus was to learn everything he could about what became of his ancestors during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, he makes clear that his ongoing unmarked burial research is not limited to Native American lands.

“We’re also doing this work in Roslyn to find unmarked burials for Whites, Blacks, and Italians to make sure they are protected,” Shellenberger said. “The perception is that we’re just trying to find our own kids, but that’s not true. We are trying to identify all unmarked graves.”

That altruistic approach has put Shellenberger in touch with several boarding school researchers in the U.S. and Canada, including sites in Kansas, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and British Columbia. He notes that he is just one of many scientists around North America digging into this unfortunate—and mostly hidden—past.

But given the size of this undertaking, he believes researchers from across the country must combine their resources while also soliciting volunteer help.

“This work cannot be accomplished by only a few people; it has to be all hands on deck,” Shellenberger said. “That’s my call to action for everyone. If you want to help, then please do. We would be happy to train anyone who is interested.”

## Ongoing Partnership

Although Shellenberger left the university in 2022 for a job with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, he continues to work closely with the CWU Department of Anthropology to ensure this essential project remains at the forefront.



Jon Shellenberger, left, purchased his own GPR equipment to help identify possible unmarked graves around the state.

Shellenberger's tribal heritage, and the fact that he worked for the Yakama Nation for more than a dozen years, has lent even more credibility to the anthropology department's cultural resources management efforts.

"It's just invaluable to have someone like Jon leading this work," said Hackenberger, a CWU anthropology professor who taught Shellenberger nearly 20 years ago. "He has such deep roots and so many connections within the tribal communities. To have him working alongside us and representing us is just a dream."

Longtime CWU Anthropology Professor Patrick McCutcheon concurred, noting that Shellenberger's personal experiences, combined with his elite professional acumen, continue to benefit CWU students and faculty even though he no longer works on campus.

"Jon has been an inspiration to me as I try to improve my teaching and research," he said. "I'm an anthropologist, and he's teaching me about anthropology. It's just been amazing to work with him."

McCutcheon pointed to Shellenberger's deep appreciation for the oral traditions passed down from his tribal ancestors.

"We underestimate the importance of our communication traditions," he said. "We just don't appreciate in our culture how central that oral history is to native cultures. Through his

own experiences, Jon has been able to convey to his colleagues and students just how important it actually is."

## At the Forefront

Aside from his contributions to CWU Anthropology and American Indian Studies (AIS) over the years, Shellenberger's GPR work at Fort Simcoe and other unmarked burial sites in the Northwest has the potential to be earth-shattering.

His background and expertise have put him at the forefront of an international fact-finding mission that could deliver some long-awaited resolution for native and nontribal communities across the country.

"CWU already had a lot of expertise in this area, but with Jon's new instrumentation and first-hand knowledge, we have become an expert," Hackenberger said. "Ever since the Canada discovery, we've been attracting national interest. Now, whenever someone thinks they may have discovered something underground, they contact us."

Hackenberger believes that with the many shocking revelations of the past few years, CWU must continue working closely with Shellenberger and other partners to carefully investigate the boarding-school locations and uncover what mysteries still remain underground.

"So many atrocious things happened to those Native American communities, and we are just now waking up to a horror story," he said. "But now we have the knowledge and expertise where we can actually do something about it."

For Shellenberger, the GPR work he has been engaged in over the past four years is just the beginning of a long journey to uncover the truth. He is driven by his anthropology and resource management roots, but most of all, he feels like he owes it to his people to help them find answers about their tortured past.

"If we ignore our history, we are destined to make the same mistakes," Shellenberger said. "The truth is, American history isn't friendly to many people. But that doesn't mean we should ignore it. The way I see it, if you don't recognize history for what it is, then what good are you doing? We need to face the truth, and I'm going to do everything I can to shed some light on that painful chapter in our history." ■

**If you would like to learn about GPR equipment and what it does, contact Steve Hackenberger at 509-963-3224 or email [steven.hackenberger@cwu.edu](mailto:steven.hackenberger@cwu.edu).**

A group of students and a lecturer are working with a wooden sifter at an outdoor field school site. The lecturer, Karisa Terry, is on the right, wearing a green shirt and dark pants, and is looking at the sifter. A student in a red shirt is also looking at the sifter. Other students are visible in the background, some wearing hats and sunglasses. The setting is a grassy field with trees in the background.

# Field Schools Show Students What Lies Beneath the Surface

By David Leder

*Anthropology Lecturer Karisa Terry, second from left, has been leading the CWU field school program since 2019.*

For the past five decades, future anthropologists and archeologists have been coming to Central Washington University to enhance their skills at one of the only field school programs on the West Coast.

During the Department of Anthropology's six-week field schools every summer, students learn about cultural resource management (CRM), perform archaeological field work, and use ground-penetrating radar (GPR) technology in Kittitas County and surrounding locations.

The courses are open to enrolled and non-enrolled CWU students, and they have been increasing in popularity in recent years.

Senior Lecturer Karisa Terry explained that field school training is required for archaeology majors who want to find a job in the field. The credits they earn at CWU often transfer directly to their own university—a perk that made CWU a popular destination during the pandemic.

“A lot of the field schools were shut down during COVID, and CWU was one of only a few universities that was still offering it,” said Terry, who has led the program since 2019. “We had students from all over the U.S. who couldn't get their field school credits anywhere else, so they decided to come here.”

The popularity of CWU's field school has continued in the years since, with students from across the country learning about the quality and variety of the program through word of mouth.

Students who complete the field school earn six credits in “Anthropological Field Experience,” learning how to

properly dig holes, document their work, create site maps, make grids, identify artifacts, take photos of their findings, and work with communities.

“We found out during the pandemic that there are a lot of students who need to fill this gap on their résumés, and that has helped enhance our reputation,” Terry said. “Anyone who has this training can get a job as a field technician, even if they haven't finished their degree yet.”

Emeritus Professor Bill Smith started the six-week field school courses in the 1970s and kept them going for more than 20 years, before handing over the reins to Professor Patrick McCutcheon. Professor Patrick Lubinski became involved in the early 2000s and the two alternated years teaching CRM in the Ellensburg area and the Cascades.

Professor Steve Hackenberger also played an active role before turning over the program to Terry in 2019, while still offering occasional help.

Terry credited Hackenberger, McCutcheon, and Lubinski—as well as former CWU American Indian Studies Director Jon Shellenberger—for helping her deliver the best possible education for her students.

“I have done a lot of field work, but I don't have the CRM background that my colleagues do,” Terry said, explaining that her expertise lies on the academic side. “They have been able to provide our students with a different context about the work we are doing, and that has been extremely valuable.” ■

*The Moreno family of Yakima boasts five first-generation college graduates. From left are Cynthia Moreno-Romero, Rodolfo Moreno, Maricruz Herrera, Andres Moreno Jr., Andres Moreno Sr., Paula Moreno, Jesus Moreno and Fernando Moreno.*



# It Starts



# With One

**First-generation graduate begins college-going tradition for his family, paving the way for his five siblings to attend CWU**

By David Leder



Authentic bags from the Morenos' home state of Guerrero, Mexico.

## All In the Family

Five siblings from the Moreno family of Yakima are first-generation college graduates from CWU. A sixth is currently working toward his degree at Central.

- Andres Moreno, 41 — Biology, Spanish ('08)
- Maricruz Herrera, 38 — Education ('10)
- Rodolfo Moreno, 34 — Law and Justice, History ('15)
- Cynthia Moreno-Romero, 31 — Social Sciences ('16)
- Jesus Moreno, 30 — Psychology, Law and Justice ('17)
- Fernando Moreno, 20 — Film Studies (currently enrolled)

**Andres Moreno Jr.** hadn't given much thought to attending college until his senior year of high school.

The eldest son of migrant farm workers moved to Washington with his parents when he was in elementary school, and he figured he would likely follow in their footsteps, picking fruit in the fields of the Yakima Valley.

But thanks to his life-changing decision to attend Central Washington University in 2003, Moreno's five brothers and sisters never had to consider what they would be doing after high school. They, too, wanted to become Wildcats.

"I saw Andres go off to college, and that helped me realize I could do it, too," said Maricruz Herrera, who followed her older brother to CWU in 2006. "I always knew I wanted to go, but seeing my brother have success at Central made it easier for me to follow him there."

Once the two eldest siblings proved that a college education was, in fact, attainable for low-income migrant families like theirs, the four others simply followed suit.

All six Moreno children eventually found their way to Ellensburg, and five of them graduated with at least one degree from CWU. The youngest, Fernando, is completing his sophomore year this spring.

"My brother and sister were the pioneers, and we all just followed their lead," said Rodolfo Moreno, the third oldest. "I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but I knew that if I went to Central, I would give myself the best opportunity for success."

By the time Cynthia Moreno-Romero and Jesus Moreno graduated from high school, they had no doubt they would be joining their older siblings in the college ranks — specifically at Central.

"Once it was my turn to go off to college, I felt like CWU was a safe option because I was familiar with the campus and had already met a number of professors," said Cynthia, who now lives in Colorado. "I liked that it was so close to home, but I also took a lot of pride in keeping our family tradition alive."

Similarly, Jesus had come to realize the many good things that would happen in his life if he pursued the next step in his education.

"Andres set the example for all of us, and when I got to high school, I already knew about all of the different scholarships that were available to me and how to apply for them," he said. "Having four older siblings go through the process before me just made it easier."

Years later, when it came time for Fernando Moreno to consider his next step, the decision to continue his education was easy. He wasn't sure at first if he would attend a four-year school or go the trade-school route. But after discussing his options with his family, he decided Central made the most sense.

"As the youngest, I wanted to go to college because everyone else had already gone," said Fernando, 20, who is pursuing a film studies degree. "I didn't know what I wanted to do at first, but I still felt like it would be the best choice for my future."

## Modest Beginnings

The Morenos immigrated to the United States from Guerrero, Mexico, in 1991 after their father, Andres Sr., had been doing seasonal work in the fields of Arizona and California for the previous 15 years.

The three eldest siblings — Andres Jr., Maricruz, and Rodolfo — and their mother, Paula, eventually made their way north and ended up settling down in Yakima, which was ripe with agricultural job opportunities.

The children remember accompanying their parents into the fields of the lower Yakima Valley, where they picked apples, pears, cherries, and more.

The Morenos didn't have much, but they were happy — and hopeful. Each of them was determined to create a better future for themselves, and they were willing to make the sacrifices required to realize those dreams.

"Given the environment we grew up in, the odds were stacked against us," said Andres Jr., who now serves as the Interim Director of Admissions at CWU. "We didn't live in the best part of town, and college didn't really seem like an option. But our parents helped us believe that we could make better lives for ourselves through hard work and perseverance. They deserve a lot of credit for our success."

The possibility of going to college didn't seem realistic to Andres until a counselor at A.C. Davis High School in Yakima showed him all of the resources available to him as a first-generation student from an underrepresented background.

"He started connecting me with resources and opportunities that would allow me to expand my education beyond high school," he said. "I remember doing internships, applying for scholarships, and taking SAT-prep classes—things I wouldn't have known about if it weren't for my counselor seeing my potential."

## Helping Hands

Those lessons eventually trickled down to his younger siblings, who each benefited from opportunities like the College Success Foundation's Achievers Scholarship.

"The Achievers Scholarship is the reason we could afford to go to college," Andres Jr. said of the program geared toward families like his. "It paid for everything for me, Maricruz, and Rodolfo."

Maricruz ended up securing another scholarship through the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) thanks to her superb academic résumé in high school. She also got accepted to the University of Washington, but in the end, she decided Central—and its renowned teacher preparation program—was where she needed to be.

"Growing up, our parents didn't take us outside of the valley very often," said Maricruz, who is now a first-grade teacher at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary in Yakima. "Seattle was unfamiliar, and it seemed so far away. But Ellensburg felt perfect because it was only 40 miles away and I could come home whenever I wanted."

Rodolfo never had any second thoughts about attending Central, and once he received the Achievers Scholarship, he knew where he belonged.

"One thing our parents taught us was to always take advantage of the opportunities that are given to you," he said. "When you have a chance to go to college and earn a degree for free, like we had, you have to do it."

The Morenos also benefited from scholarship assistance through the federal College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), which delivers higher education access to the children of farm workers. Cynthia was able to tap into additional scholarships through Washington Apple Education and SeaMar Community Health Centers.

After seeing her three older siblings go off to college, she didn't want to be the one to "break the string."

"I took a lot of pride in following the family tradition, so I did everything I could to make sure I could go to college," Cynthia said. "I didn't have some of the same scholarships as my

older siblings, and I had to find other options to get the funding I needed. But I was fortunate to have a lot of people around me who were willing to help."

## Home Away From Home

Once the Morenos eventually arrived at CWU, they knew what to expect since they had already spent so much time on campus during Andres Jr.'s college years.

Jesus remembers visiting his older brother when he was in middle school.

"I got to stay with Andres for a weekend in his dorm, and that kind of showed me what college life was all about," he said. "I really got to know the campus, and that kind of made it feel like home once it was my turn to go there."

Cynthia remembers being introduced to various campus activities during family visits, and she viewed Central as a place where she could be very involved while still having a chance to celebrate her cultural heritage.

"I became closely connected with Casa Latina and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) because it was important for me to belong to a community of people who looked like me," she said. "Having grown up in a diverse community like Yakima, I knew I wanted to have that in college, too. Being able to find my own community at CWU was very comforting to me."

Rodolfo also enjoyed the social outlets Central provided, but most of all, he remembers the professors who took time to get to know him and guide him toward a career path that suited him.

"I have always been fascinated by history, and I thought I would probably end up becoming a history teacher," he said. "But as I was thinking about which direction to go, I started taking some criminal justice classes and I got hooked. Those classes completely changed my career trajectory, and that's what inspired me to go to law school."

After taking a few years off to start a family, Rodolfo is completing his final semester at Gonzaga Law School this spring. Like his brothers and sisters, he will forever be grateful to CWU and his parents for teaching him so many valuable life lessons.

"Education is important, but so is working hard," Rodolfo said. "My dad would always tell us, 'if you don't go to school, there won't be any opportunities.' The work ethic our parents taught us—and showing us the value of education—have really helped us become the people we are today."

## Giving Back

Each of the Moreno siblings has chosen a career path that gives them personal fulfillment and also allows them to give back to their communities.

Maricruz is an elementary school teacher in Yakima; Cynthia is a director at Centro De Los Trabajadores, a labor rights organization in Denver; and Jesus is a mental health clinician with Catholic Community Services in King County. Rodolfo is working as an intern with Spokane law firm WBM and plans to be a lawyer, while Andres Jr. is entering his 17th year in the CWU Admissions department, managing a newly opened admissions office in Yakima.

Andres Jr. credits his family's deep cultural roots with helping him and his siblings become best versions of themselves, both as students and as professionals. CWU only helped bring those values closer to the surface.

"We're all pretty well grounded in our identity and our culture," he said. "For me, that is what defines the work I do at CWU. Being able to give back to my hometown in the way that I have for the past 16 years is one of the reasons I love it so much. More than anything else, I want to make an impact on this community, and help people create better lives for themselves."

Cynthia is looking to keep her family's Indigenous roots alive by opening a new coffee shop in Aurora, Colorado, called Ollin Cafetzin, which stands for "Movement Coffee" in her parents' native language of Nahuatl. She plans to open the first brick-and-mortar shop this year and eventually expand the business to Yakima.

"We want to focus on coffee, education, and cultural connections," she said. "We also wanted to incorporate the language my parents speak because it's important for us to keep our Indigenous heritage alive and share it with others."

Maricruz (three children), Rodolfo (three), Andres Jr. (two), and Cynthia (one) are also raising families, and they hope to see their kids follow their lead in pursuing higher education.

Maricruz's eldest daughter, Esmerelda, graduated from high school this spring and will be attending CWU in the fall.

"We're excited to have another Wildcat in the family," she said, adding that her late husband, Eleazar Herrera — also a former CWU student — would be proud.

"It has been tough for Esmerelda since my husband passed away eight years ago, but I'm proud that she has found a way to keep going," Maricruz said.

## Next Steps

Through all of their ups and downs over the past four decades, the Morenos are thrilled that they have been able to create a new generational outlook for their family.

They often talk with their children about the importance of going to college, just like their parents did with them, and they take every opportunity to share with others how attending CWU helped change their lives.

"I try to be that person who can demystify college for prospective students and their families," Andres Jr. said. "I use my own family story as an example of what is possible, and because I have lived it, my experiences feel more relatable to them. I try to show them that, even when life throws challenges at you, you have to keep going. When you fall down, get back up."

As a way of showing their gratitude for everything CWU has done for their family, the Morenos are planning to start their own scholarship foundation to help underrepresented students from the Yakima Valley attend Central. They expect to name the first recipients of the Sembrando Futuros ("Sowing Futures") Scholarship in 2026, and then watch it grow in the years to come.

"We have always talked about starting something like this," Rodolfo said. "We all benefited so much from our college experiences, and we understand that not everyone has the opportunity to do what we did. Sometimes people just need an extra boost, and we look forward to giving them the help they need to take the next step in their education." ■

*Five of the six Moreno siblings, pictured in 2021 on the CWU campus. From left are Cynthia, Rodolfo, Maricruz, Jesus, and Andres Jr.*



# Yakima Admissions Office Creates Wealth of Opportunity

If anyone can relate to underrepresented high school students from the Yakima Valley, it's Andres Moreno ('08). CWU's Interim Director of Admissions grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in Yakima, overcoming social and economic barriers to become the first member of his family to graduate from college.

Now, Moreno is leading the university's effort to make higher education more accessible to prospective students just like him.

"I try to be that person who can demystify college for these families," said Moreno, who helped open a new admissions office in his hometown last fall. "When I'm talking to high school students and their parents, I use my story, and my parents' and siblings' stories, to help show them what is possible."

The Yakima admissions office is located near downtown and shares a space with the Yakima School District (YSD). CWU has been working closely with YSD and Yakima Valley College (YVC) over the past year to maximize opportunities for more students from the valley to obtain postsecondary credentials.

Moreno is joined in the Yakima office by Admissions Counselor Diana Borges and Financial Wellness Coach Ana Tamariz. The team hosts students from Yakima and surrounding communities, while also meeting them where they are for workshops and presentations.

"We're more than just an admissions office," Moreno said. "We visit high schools in the area every week and we encourage students to come talk to us. We also offer a lot of different resources to help families understand the services available to them, like scholarships, financial aid programs, and more."

The main concept Moreno and his team try to impart to prospective students and their families is that, no matter their circumstances, CWU has programs and people who can help them succeed.

"Having us here in their own backyard tends to make families more receptive to the idea of college," Moreno said. "We are able to connect with them better, and we can help them see that Central is the right fit."



Photo by David Leder.

*CWU Admissions Counselor Diana Borges, right, helps incoming student Evelyn Martinez find resources on her phone during an orientation night this spring at the Yakima admissions office.*

Opening the new Yakima admissions office aligns with CWU's increased recruitment focus on the Yakima Valley. The majority of Central students traditionally come from King and Pierce counties, while hundreds of prospective students less than an hour away don't always realize what opportunities are available to them at Central. These include classes offered at the CWU-Yakima center, co-located on the YVC campus.

"Last fall, we saw one of the largest classes ever from the Yakima Valley," Moreno said of the 18% of first-time-in-college students who enrolled at CWU in 2024. "We're expecting that number to grow even more next year, as more first-generation, low-income students learn about what CWU has to offer."

In addition to working closely with high schools from Yakima to Sunnyside, Moreno is also building connections with local organizations, such as the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Washington and the Rotary Club of Yakima. He's always on the lookout for fellow Wildcat alumni, like OIC Chief Executive Officer Anthony Peterson, to help expand CWU's reach.

"We have a lot of Wildcats here who are looking for ways to help," Moreno said. "We have so many great community partners, and we're excited to see things continue to grow." ■



*CWU President Jim Wohlpart and Ellensburg City Manager Heidi Behrends Cerniwey have both taken steps to help strengthen the relationship between the university and the city.*

BRIDGING THE  
GAP BETWEEN  
TOWN AND  
GOWN

CWU is slowly becoming more ingrained in the Ellensburg community — and people are noticing

By Rune Torgersen | Photo illustration by David Dick



*The relationship between CWU and the City of Ellensburg is steadily improving thanks to a more concerted effort by university officials and local residents.*

Becoming a successful “college town” is no mean feat, especially for a community the size of Ellensburg.

With one-third of the local population turning over every few years as students move in and graduate, it takes careful planning and consistent communication to ensure every resident is satisfied with the arrangement.

Dissent can bloom in the cracks of the plan, where intent meets reality and finds it wanting. Students may feel unwelcome in the broader community, and locals may feel alienated by the pomp and circumstance of a college campus, leading to division right down the middle of what should, ideally, be one cohesive community.

CWU’s Interim Chief of Staff Dania Cochran has witnessed this divide in Ellensburg’s past, and she has taken an active role in mending it for the future.

“Up until a few years ago, I felt like there was a clear divide across town right at University Way,” the Ellensburg resident of 23 years said. “I think both sides of it were missing pieces about the other, so there’s been a really intentional effort to get to know each other in the years since.”

When CWU President Jim Wohlpart took over in the summer of 2021, he brought with him a deep commitment to stewardship of place, both for the university and for the communities it serves. He started conversations about how to better integrate the “town and gown” dynamic, bringing students into the community and the community onto campus, reasoning that both parties would benefit from having a seat at the table.

“We have an impact on our local community, especially as its largest employer,” Wohlpart said. “In my past, I have experienced very strong relationships between universities and their communities, so one of the things I’ve been very interested

in here is elevating those relationships, and all the possibilities they present to our students, staff, and faculty.”

In 2022, the city and the university signed a memorandum of understanding, making CWU a partner in local economic development efforts and paving the way to the clear, even-footed communication critical to lasting success in such work.

Ellensburg City Manager Heidi Behrends Cerniwey has found CWU to be an engaged, respectful partner in these efforts, which she says came about partially as a result of pandemic-driven introspection.

“Following the pandemic, we saw an opportunity to further define what we wanted our community to be,” she said. “Having Central be a core part of our economic development planning team, among other efforts, really demonstrates their commitment to, and engagement with, that work. We’re brought to the same tables more often than not, so it’s good to know that we’re on the same page about doing what’s best for our city, our county, and the Central Washington region.”

In the years since, more crimson-and-black decór has appeared across Ellensburg’s historic downtown corridor, and more community-oriented programming has taken place on CWU’s campus, all in an effort to live into a shared vision of one community, united by resilience and creativity.

“The relationship between campus and community is reciprocal, ongoing, and mutually enhancing,” Wohlpart said. “There’s a sort of push and pull to it, with the decisions made in one place affecting every other part of the area. Thanks to the engagement of our students, staff, and faculty, and the intentionality of our outreach work, the cycle continues to spiral upwards, and we continue to find new ways to help each other be the best we can be.”

## Crossover Appeal

As well-laid and collaborative as those plans may be, they amount to very little without buy-in from community members themselves. This buy-in often manifests through interpersonal relationships and dialogue across the perceived divide between the city and the university.

Cochran, both as a former administrative liaison and in her current role as chief of staff, has become deeply ingrained in local leadership, serving on the Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors, and recently becoming president of the Ellensburg Downtown Association (EDA).

"I'm a natural relater, and building those kinds of relationships and trust is sort of a specialty of mine," she said. "I love going out into the community and engaging with all sorts of organizations working to make it a better place as a CWU liaison."

While serving in those capacities helps her connect with her fellow community leaders, Cochran knows that the most critical part of CWU's community outreach happens outside the meeting rooms.

"We participate in the local trivia nights, our kids are on the local soccer teams, and all that good stuff," she said. "Here is where we're building our lives, and the opportunity to present all the valuable ways of doing that is a great one, for both sides of the equation."

Inevitably, students, staff, and faculty tend to find their lives intertwining with the local culture simply by merit of living here.

One recent example came in October 2024, when one CWU student, three alumni, and two staff members were involved in a local production of *The Vagina Monologues*, a frequently adapted piece of fiercely feminist theater first staged in the 1990s. CWU Director of Choirs Gayla Blaisdell served as the show's director, and she relished the opportunity to work alongside local partners on such an influential production.

"This is my community, too, and I have a lot of LGBTQ friends, so I'm thrilled to be able to help create an environment that is supportive of all experiences," she said. "Getting to bring our students into the community and bridge that divide has been a big part of it, too."

Vocal performance major Aidan Beerbower joined the cast of the production, and she found it to be a valuable opportunity to collaborate creatively with people outside the normal scope of her studies.

"It was very cool to work alongside such a diverse cast of actors," she said. "I get to learn from all of them and take mental notes on how I want to shape my own approach to the art form."

Elsewhere in town, the Ellensburg Big Band features CWU music alumni from several generations, letting the small-town group punch above its weight. Bruce Herman, the band's manager, has seen the influx of talented jazz musicians make a real impact on the group's performance.



Hosting community events in downtown Ellensburg helps CWU students feel more at home.

"Ellensburg is extremely fortunate in a number of ways to have CWU in our community, and the fact that they have an excellent music department has helped foster so much incredible talent here," he said. "As a band, we're lucky to have them. Over the years, we've really benefited from having players in town who've all gone through the same program and hold themselves to the same standard of excellence."

The Ellensburg Big Band toured New Zealand in late 2024, accompanied by retired CWU Director of Jazz Studies Chris Bruya, who taught many of the group's members while they were in school. He saw firsthand how community involvement helped his former students live into their identities as alumni.

"Even though many of these people didn't play together as students, they've been able to get together and act on that same musical foundation," he said. "Together, they've discovered what it means to be a CWU Jazz alum."

## Helping One Another

In this interconnected community, matters of education become a two-way street, too. Part of President Wohlpart's vision for the Ellensburg-CWU partnership is students being able to pursue work experience locally while earning their degrees, giving them a leg up in the post-graduation job market.

"Something we're very focused on is elevating the co-curricular learning happening between our school and the city," he said. "If, for example, the EDA were looking for marketing support and brought on one of our marketing students as an intern, that student gets to put their experience on their résumé, while our partners downtown get the insight they need for their campaign."

The CWU Reading Intervention Center, hosted by the Department of Psychology, has become one such community-led training ground for School Psychology graduate students looking for a way to build professional experience.



*CWU Psychology has helped make the Reading Intervention Center a community destination.*

In September 2024, the program brought in CWU elementary education psychology alumna Dakota Williams ('23) to serve as outreach coordinator, working with local schools to identify and support students in need of reading acquisition assistance.

"I applied because it sounded like an interesting opportunity, and I really wanted to get my reading endorsement," she said. "There has been a bit of a learning curve, but learning is what I'm here to do, so it has been right up my alley."

Williams has noticed that her experience in the community as a student has supported her in her new position.

"Being familiar with Ellensburg has been a big help," she said. "Going in, I knew how the local schools were laid out, and a lot of my old professors are still here, so I have people to turn to for guidance when I need it."

The support goes the other way, too, as Behrends Cerniwey has found in meeting with sustainability classes on CWU campus to share her experiences with Ellensburg's own efforts in the field.

"I've enjoyed the invitations to come and speak to sustainability classes on campus," she said. "We have a great track record on taking care of the land that feeds us here, and being able to share that with students gives me hope for the future."

On the economic development side, CWU is working to leverage our considerable on-campus talent to bring new opportunities to the communities we serve, partially through the Department of Business and Community Services (BCS), established in 2023.

BCS Executive Director Rob Ogburn sees the department as a way to start conversations that might very well spread to other university departments in search of the expertise a specific challenge demands.

"If the resources of an institution like CWU are properly aligned with the needs of the surrounding communities, it can

really help those communities develop a vision for their future, and not feel like they're limited by circumstance," he said. "The business-related disciplines have to be combined with other fields from across our university to make that happen, but when it works, it results in some incredible ideas."

Ogburn has been working closely with city leaders to bring that alignment to CWU's partnership with the City of Ellensburg. Behrends Cerniwey believes the future is looking bright for the initiative.

"I think Central is just getting started, and there are a lot of exciting places this work could go," she said. "It's so easy to see all the positives at the beginning of a journey like this, but we're prepared for the challenges that may arise along the way and ready to collaborate in the face of adversity. That's what will make all the difference in changing the face of business in Central Washington."

## Showing Humility

At the core of this multi-pronged outreach effort lies the rock-solid belief that a rising tide lifts all ships. The City of Ellensburg provides community, recreation, and education to the Wildcats of CWU, while the university stands ready to lend our expertise and creativity to the challenges and opportunities facing the community.

"The importance of humility in this work cannot be overstated," Wohlpert said. "We have a perspective, and so do the city and the county. We want to respect all of them as we chart a course forward. We must have the self-respect to question our own process and iterate upon it when it isn't working, in order to meet the challenges set before us."

Cochran, herself a CWU alumna ('04, '12), has chosen to remain in Ellensburg just as much for the community as for the university.

"There are so many people here who care and want to see you succeed, which is maybe something I latched onto personally as one of those alumni who chose to stick around," she said. "My senses weren't overwhelmed here, and I've always known where to start if I'm looking for a specific service or resource. I know I'm not alone in that, either."

As CWU and the Ellensburg community turn to face the future, the pace of the work has been deliberate, ensuring that future generations will continue to reap the benefits of a community that stands united. In Behrends Cerniwey's eyes, the divide between town and gown is only as wide as we make it.

"Partnerships are all about people, and in this one, I don't think there are two entities involved," she said. "I think we're all one big community, with a broad variety of smaller communities helping each other out to get there. Together, we have the resilience and the goodwill to tackle whatever tomorrow throws at us." ■



## Creativity Emboldened

As part of the collaborative economic development efforts being undertaken between CWU and the City of Ellensburg, the city was designated as a Certified Creative District in 2024, highlighting the high concentration of artistic endeavors in the area.

“There’s so much to do around town; the restaurants and spaces and events are just amazing,” CWU President Jim Wohlpart said. “I’m a big fan of the First Friday Art Walk, and many of our students, staff, and faculty take those opportunities to engage with the Ellensburg culture. You get to know local business owners and develop relationships with them in a way that just wouldn’t be possible in a bigger city.”

The City of Ellensburg Creative District is unique in that it encompasses the CWU campus as well, making it one of only two Creative Districts nationwide with two well-defined quadrants as part of one cohesive whole.

The designation, awarded by ArtsWA, will help the city and the university be eligible for grant money that will fund the creative work that sets Ellensburg apart. ■



# CROSS-CULTURAL



# COLLABORATIONS

**International programs  
allow CWU students  
and faculty to expand  
their global horizons**

By Jodie Nicotra

*CWU is home to hundreds of international students every year. This year's class includes (clockwise from left): James Le (Vietnam), Francis Aminkiah (Ghana), Shinhae Hwang (South Korea), Manoela Portella (Brazil), Maho Hoshino (Japan), Reyhaneh Bagherian Shamir (Iran), and Doan Le (Vietnam).*





Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia.

**B**ack in his undergrad days, Dr. Joshua Nelson-Ichido ('08) assumed that his time at Central was just a temporary detour before he moved back to his hometown of East Wenatchee to settle down.

Little did he know that his plans would be upended when he applied to study abroad as part of his double major in Japanese and communication.

“Studying abroad fundamentally changed the way I understood everything around me, and myself,” he said. “Once you start to broaden that experience, once you start to live and exist in those contexts, you can’t put that back in the box.”

Now an assistant professor of communication at Central, Nelson-Ichido has developed one of the many faculty-directed programs that exist under the umbrella of the Office of International Studies and Programs (OISP).

Programs like Nelson-Ichido’s underline OISP’s success in building connections and long-term relationships with colleges and universities in Europe, South America, Asia, and elsewhere around the globe.

CWU currently has 75 international agreements with 59 different international partners, typically colleges and universities. Of the 24 countries that collaborate with CWU, Japan has the most, with 12 partners and 22 agreements.

OISP helps students and faculty discover opportunities around the world. The following are some recent highlights.

## TRAINING EMTs DOWN UNDER

CWU has enjoyed a mutually beneficial exchange relationship with Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia, for many years.

In 2017, Associate Director of Education Abroad Steve Cook traveled to QUT for a periodic site visit. While touring the campus facilities, he noticed their health sciences department that included, among other things, robust programs in nursing and paramedicine.

So, when the incoming director of the paramedicine program at Central, Emily Gonzalez, expressed interest in developing a faculty-directed education abroad program for paramedicine students, Cook remembered his visit.



Spanish Professor Dr. Nathalie Kasselis, foreground right, has taken CWU students to Colombia since 2021.

“Obviously, this is a discipline where it’s a little bit challenging to have study abroad experiences,” he said.

The program directors at the two institutions began talking, which soon led to a series of paired experiences. In 2018, QUT students came to Central and got to see U.S. paramedics at work, and the following year, CWU students traveled to Queensland for three weeks, learning about both urban and rural paramedicine.

“Queensland has a significant rural area, so students were out in the bush learning about paramedicine support for bush fires and things of that nature, as well as the differences between the Australian and U.S. systems,” Cook said.

Program directors have their eye on fall 2026 as the next date for Central students to visit QUT.

## REIMAGINING COLOMBIA

It’s understandable that many people still picture Colombia during the 1980s, when the country—especially the city of Medellin—was the epicenter of the drug cartel wars and home to the infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar.

Unbeknownst to most Americans, however, Medellin is now a thriving, cosmopolitan capital and a national and international center of commerce. For Dr. Nathalie Kasselis, professor of Spanish in the CWU Department of World Languages and Cultures, watching her group of visiting students discover the truth about the country was one of the best parts of her trip.

“They kept writing in their journals about how once we got back to the States, they were going to rectify this misperception,” Kasselis said.

Central’s relationship with Colombia took off during the pandemic, when Kasselis asked OISP about doing a virtual exchange with another country for her Spanish class. Cook reached out to a number of partners across Latin America and received an enthusiastic response from Camilo Sanchez from the Institución Universitaria Esumer in Medellin.

At the time, Sanchez was coordinating Esumer’s English program and was in charge of all the international initiatives. He was eager to connect with a university in an English-speaking country.

Photo courtesy of Nathalie Kasselis.



CWU Spanish Professor Dr. Nathalie Kasselis has grown to love the city of Medellin, Colombia.

The first virtual exchange took place in winter 2021 between a single CWU Spanish class and an English class at Esumer. Since then, it has grown to include almost the entire Spanish section of the department and multiple courses from each institution.

The conversations led CWU to arrange a student trip last spring to Medellin, where Sanchez had organized a linguistic, cultural and culinary program for Kasselis and the five students traveling with her. The program was a tremendous success, and Kasselis is already planning her next program for students in August 2026.

In the meantime, Sanchez had also received a grant from the Colombian government for an American faculty member to teach English at the Yamaha factory in Medellin. Kasselis traveled to Medellin last fall for two weeks and taught an intensive English course to 27 children of Yamaha employees, who ranged in age from 10 to 16.

“It was one of the highlights of my teaching career,” she said.

Kasselis wanted to put all of the Colombia-related initiatives under one umbrella, which she named the STELLA (Study, E-Learn, Language and Life Abroad) Initiative after her late colleague Stella Moreno, who originally hailed from Colombia.

“Stella was a really strong supporter of international initiatives, and she had traveled a lot. I thought this was the perfect way to honor her,” Kasselis said.

## EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCES

Given the state of Washington’s historic relationship with Japan and CWU’s popular Japanese major, it’s no surprise that most of Central’s major education abroad programs take place in Japan.

“I think Japan represents our most varied and perhaps most unique relationships,” said Nicki Kukar, executive director of OISP.

One of Central’s longest-running Japanese collaborations is the Asia University America Program (AUAP). Students from Asia University in Tokyo come to Ellensburg to study for a semester, supported by International Peer Advisors (IPAs) who help the AUAP students adjust to life in the United States and plan activities and events.

Photo courtesy of Josh Nelson-Ichido.



Communications Professor Josh Nelson-Ichido, far left, has led a number of student trips to Japan over the years.

AUAP students help educate Central students about Japanese culture so when they travel to Japan, they already have some friends.

“It’s a really neat sort of bookend, and students get a lot of support,” Cook said. “It’s a great way to have international students helping domestic students prepare and have a great experience while they’re there.”

CWU faculty have created other connections with Japan, including Nelson-Ichido’s faculty-directed program, a special section of his intercultural communication course (COMM 302) that culminates with a 15-day visit to the cities of Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Tokyo.

During that program, Nelson-Ichido plans morning excursions before turning the students loose to explore and find their way back to the hotel.

“He encouraged us to go out and wander and get lost and explore and try new things,” said Alonzo Avila, one of the students who participated in the program in fall 2024. “And that’s what I did. I tried everything I could, and the first thing I did was get a haircut in Japan.”

A junior majoring in business administration with a marketing emphasis, Avila had never traveled abroad before last year, and he had only taken one semester of Japanese. Not only did he witness the intercultural communication principles in action; he also received a boost in his ability to navigate the language and the culture.

“Even if their English level wasn’t that good, I was able to communicate with some of my Japanese, as well as with body language,” he said. “It was a very cool experience.”

After his Japan experience, Avila is now interested in starting a business-focused study abroad program in South Korea.

Nelson-Ichido finds reward in seeing his students’ perspectives expand, just as his did during his first intercultural experience nearly 20 years ago.

“I always get excited to see students having that element of ‘Whoa, wait. There’s so much more to explore in this world, and this is just one little taste of it. Now I want more,’” he said. ■



*Brady Lawrence (left), Nick Zentner, and Gary Paull make up the small but mighty team behind the award-winning TV show Nick on the Rocks.*

*Photo courtesy of Gary Paull*



# TV That Rocks

Geology Lecturer Nick Zentner's popular program has built a global community

By Rune Torgersen

Living in Ellensburg, it's easy to get used to the majestic views and dramatic landscapes that surround us. Finding deep intrigue and compelling narratives in the layers of earth and stone that make up Central Washington's landscape comes just as easily to some.

CWU Geology Lecturer Nick Zentner is one such rock hound who has made a name for himself sharing his enthusiasm for geological phenomena with people around the world.

Following a hiatus in the wake of the pandemic, Zentner's Emmy Award-winning TV show *Nick on the Rocks* was picked up by Seattle's Cascade PBS in 2024. With two seasons of the revival in circulation and more on the way, the intimate, welcoming exploration of Pacific Northwest geology continues to attract a global audience.

Viewers are drawn to the show's stunning videography, informative content, and Zentner's genuine passion for the subject. His approach comes from a lifetime of fascination with the ground beneath his feet, and a knack for finding collaborators within the community he has built.

"I feel like this is all part of my job, taking what I'm interested in and sharing it with the world," said Zentner, whose own geology journey started when he was 21, in the mountains of Montana. "People just show up out of the woodwork, and offer their talents to the production, which I'm of course always happy to accept. The community is an important part of everything I do."

*Nick on the Rocks* began as a partnership between CWU and Seattle-based KCTS-9, the local Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) affiliate, in 2016. New episodes of the program appeared on PBS through 2020 and continued to gain traction on YouTube, attracting millions of viewers over the years.

The program returned to the airwaves last year after Cascade PBS assumed full ownership rights, and just completed its second season under its new iteration. With an expanded reach, the show is reaching new and old fans alike.

"There are a lot of loyal viewers, but we also get a lot of newcomers who are excited to see their local landmark on the show," Zentner said. "For them, it's almost like having a neighbor be interviewed about an arson case, you know?"

## Lifelong Passion

After dropping out of a cartography program at the University of Wisconsin in 1983, Zentner thought he was done with school, and retreated to the wilderness to try to find his next step. As luck would have it, his next step found him first.

“I quit school because I’d run out of money, and I worked for a summer in Glacier National Park in Montana,” Zentner said. “My bunkmate there was a geology student, and thanks to the things he showed me on our hikes together, so was I, soon enough.”

Once he had earned his master’s degree in geology, Zentner went looking for a place to teach so he could share his passion with students who, like him, might not otherwise have considered a career that involved the study of rocks. Following a brief teaching stint in Ohio, he felt called back to the Pacific Northwest, and settled in Ellensburg as a geology lecturer at CWU, where he has now taught for over 30 years.

“I purposely stopped at my master’s degree because I knew that full-time academia wasn’t really my scene,” Zentner said. “I thought if I could make my day job all about my students, and my night job all about spreading the geology gospel to anyone else who might be interested, I’d be able to help bridge the divide between academic interest and the enthusiasm of the general public.”

Zentner began uploading geology videos to his YouTube channel in 2012, filming himself delivering lectures while out and about in the picturesque Central Washington landscape. Once his growing following made it clear that there was a real appetite for his approachable brand of educational content, former CWU Chief of Staff Linda Schactler had the idea to broaden the scope of the production and pitch it to local cable TV stations.

With former CWU videographer Chris Smart on board to handle the cinematography, *Nick on the Rocks* aired its first season in 2016 to an enthusiastic audience and awards buzz. After four successful eight-episode seasons, production came to a halt, along with the rest of the world, in 2020.

“It was fun working on the first four seasons just the three of us at Central, until the pandemic hit and we had to put it on pause,” Zentner said. “During that time, I found a large audience through my YouTube series, which helped scratch the itch a bit, so I wasn’t too interested in starting a bigger production again until the Seattle people came knocking.”

## A New Beginning

In 2023, Cascade PBS reached out to Zentner to express interest in continuing *Nick on the Rocks*, and, in the process, taking over the show’s production from CWU. He hesitated at the idea, unsure if PBS had a videographer capable of capturing the same wonder the first four seasons had created.



Zentner received a Silver Creator Award from YouTube for hitting over 100,000 subscribers on his channel, @GeologyNick.

“I told them that I wouldn’t do it unless they found this magic person who’s young and talented and hardworking and willing to hike a fair amount with a bunch of camera gear on his back so we can get the shots we need,” Zentner said. “They found that person in Brady Lawrence.”

Lawrence’s background as a Seattle-area freelance videographer put him in a perfect position to deliver what Zentner was looking for.

“Nick was looking for someone who could do it all, and also be willing to go on longer hikes to hard-to-reach places,” Lawrence said. “That’s sort of my specialty, so we hit it off right away.”

The partnership has proven to be a perfect fit, with Lawrence’s experience in capturing international cross-country bike races complementing the need for longer excursions into the Washington wilderness.

“Honestly, it was great from the start,” he said. “The first four seasons had this very specific energy and feel to them, so we had a lot of conversations about how to honor that and carry it forward, while also changing it up and making it a bit more dynamic. Nick was really receptive to that right off the bat.”

Growing up in North Carolina, Lawrence had always envisioned himself producing narrative films in Los Angeles, until he, like Zentner, stumbled upon the great outdoors along the way.

His skill in capturing scale and intimacy in one continuous shot has elevated the show’s visual vocabulary, Zentner said. But, as the team has discovered, you’re not always going to be able to please everyone.

Following an unenthusiastic comment on Zentner’s YouTube channel, Lawrence has been finding creative ways to position him within his surroundings, to show the audience he’s really there on location.

“Someone in a comment section thought a particular section was green screen, which really took (Zentner) aback,” Lawrence said. “Since then, we’ve tried to work in more segments of walking and talking, to really show off the surroundings. I’ve been working those into bigger reveals as Nick walks around a curve to a stunning vista or something along those lines, which has been working great. I don’t know if there’s a technical term for them, but Nick has taken to calling them ‘do-si-dos,’ and we try to find an opportunity for them in every episode now.”

Zentner explained that the shot starts out normally, and then the camera keeps zooming out until the music swells and suddenly he’s just a dot on a small cliff inside a massive gorge, all in one take.

“Those moments are quite effective, and rather than upstage what I’m doing, they really add to the sense of awe and wonder we’re trying to convey,” Zentner said.

Along with the new drone-enabled camera tricks, Lawrence’s experience in documentary filmmaking has brought new planning elements to the team’s workflow, leading to more concise storytelling to fit the show’s seven-minute format.

Zentner develops talking points to pair with specific points of interest ahead of time, letting sight and sound synchronize better along the way.

“It’s a nice way to have a really polished, concise story, with great visuals to match,” Lawrence said. “We’ve since been able to add a few talking points so we know what to film ahead of time, which has served to tighten up our workflow while still letting Nick do some of the improvising that the fans like.”

## Engaged Community

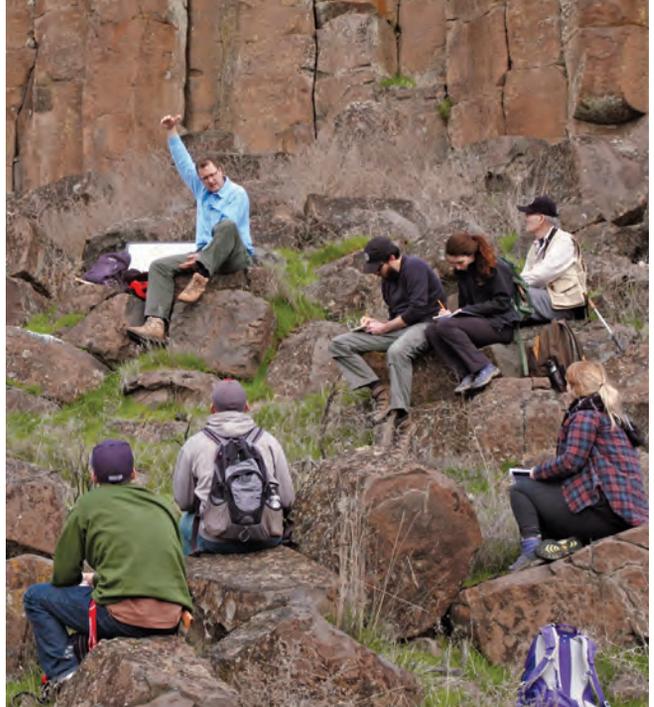
In addition to Zentner and Lawrence, the *Nick on the Rocks* team features field producer Gary Paull, who first discovered Zentner’s work on YouTube during the pandemic. His @GeologyNick channel currently features 75 live-streamed lectures, plus an extensive collection of footage taken in the field.

“I’ve got a real fascination with the landscapes that are around me, and the more you learn, the more you want to know,” Paull said. “The stories out there are endless, and Nick’s great at telling them.”

After seeing some of Paull’s annotated photos online, Zentner reached out to him on the *Nick on the Rocks* community Facebook page, asking him if he would be interested in using the photos in his video lectures. Paull was happy to oblige.

“I’d been working on those for a long time, so it was pretty cool to see Nick use them in his lectures,” Paull said. “Being able to combine my pretty pictures with my experiences walking through the landscapes they depict has been a real joy.”

In the summer of 2024, Paull started joining the hikes to film *Nick on the Rocks* season 6 as a field producer, offering insight and advice along the way. Paull’s own background as a geology major at the University of Washington in the 1970s, along with



*Zentner’s classes frequently take place in the midst of the very geology being discussed.*

his career in the U.S. Forest Service, has made him a great fit for the team.

“When we’re out there together, I’m talking geology with Gary, Gary’s talking film stuff with Brady, and that way we’re all speaking the same language,” Zentner said. “Gary and I like to go out and scout locations for the YouTube channel when we’re not filming for *Nick on the Rocks*, and it’s great to be able to brainstorm specific shots right there on site.”

The community around *Nick on the Rocks* has grown to include members across the globe, with viewers traveling from as far away as the Netherlands to engage with fellow rock hounds at Zentner’s annual free lecture series in downtown Ellensburg.

During that time, hundreds of geological hobbyists and professionals alike descend upon Central Washington, planning field trips and forging connections with one another based on their shared love for the field—and for the way Zentner presents it.

“Real friendships have developed within the community,” Paull said. “It goes beyond the geology itself, too, with people meeting up in different parts of the country and going on their own field trips independently of the show. It’s a really wholesome thing to be a part of.”

Zentner is grateful for the opportunity to share his love of geology with such a large audience—an honor he does not take for granted.

“There’s been some broad recognition that this isn’t just some pet project of mine, but rather something that resonates with people,” he said. “I’m so grateful to CWU for helping to create this program, and to my new partners in Seattle for bringing it back to life. There’s so much to see here in the Pacific Northwest, so it has been pretty intentionally focused on this region. Even with all the money in the world, this is where I’d want to be, and what I want to film.” ■



*FlexIT program graduate Kevin Lomax now works for CWU Computer Support Services as a student tech liaison.*

# FlexIT Helps Self-Driven Learners Thrive

Go-at-your-own-pace program celebrates  
10 years of meeting students where they are

By Savannah Tranchell



CWU FlexIT alumnus Jason Berry is now the president of Horizon Air. He credits the program for helping him take the next step in his career.

**In 2013, Jason Berry had a director-level job in the aviation industry and more than a decade of experience in cargo and operations.**

**What he didn't have was a college degree.**

"I had young kids, and I wanted to set an example," Berry said. "I saw how important school was, how it important it is to get that education, and how it really helps in your career."

So he went back to school, completing an associate's degree at South Seattle College. The academic schedule of firm deadlines and regular testing was a challenge to balance with his three young children and a job that required a lot of travel. He knew he wanted to complete his bachelor's, but how?

"I knew that to get to the next level, a bachelor's degree was required, but I didn't know how to do that," he said.

That's when Berry ('15) met Senior Lecturer Liz Fountain and learned about CWU's FlexIT program, a unique, competency-based program built to help students just like Berry finish their degrees while balancing the demands of careers and family.

In just six months, Berry finished his bachelor's in information technology administration and management, an accomplishment that proved to be a game-changer for his academic and professional life.

Today, Berry is executive vice president of cargo for Alaska Airlines and president of Horizon Air. After graduating from CWU, he went on to earn a Master of Business Administration.

"It's hard to believe that I started as a ramp agent in the 1990s and, now, here I am," he said. "But that unlocking of my potential wouldn't have happened without the FlexIT program and CWU."

## Learning While Working

Berry was one of the first students to go through FlexIT, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

Fountain was among the faculty who launched the program, which is the first of its kind in Washington state-supported institutions.

"At that time, competency-based education was really just in the for-profit academic sector, and a lot of the programs focused on certifications," Fountain said. "But we need a way to help people who have some college, but no degree, to finish. These students have been working in the industry, they have great skill-sets, they know what they're doing. And then they come into higher education and have to sit in class for 10 weeks at a time. That doesn't take their competencies into consideration."

FlexIT began with just a bachelor's degree, and after four years expanded to include a master's track in two specializations: retail and administrative management.

Just as Fountain and her colleagues had hoped 10 years ago, the program is now filling a major gap across the industry. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the number of students who have "some college, no credential" increased to 41.9 million in 2022. These students have valuable work and life experience but, like Berry, require more flexibility than a traditional four-year program offers.

"There's a huge need in upskilling and reskilling the workforce, but these students can't stop working to go to school, and their organizations don't want them to. The companies can't afford for people to take two to four years to go to school," Fountain said. "Online education has matured so much, and we understand now that you can learn without seat time. We're learning how we can support students in showing what they already know and moving them from that to the finish line of where they need to be."

## Set Your Own Pace

Since FlexIT launched in 2015, just over 400 students have graduated from the program: 165 undergrads and 241 graduate students. There are typically about 100 students enrolled at any time, but the flexibility of the format means some may be dipping in and out each quarter depending on life's demands.

FlexIT is especially popular with active-duty military members, who are able to take time off when they are called overseas, and then pick back up when they return.

Another benefit is that the program is entirely online and self-paced. Students pay a flat rate for either half-time or full-

time enrollment, and can complete as many courses each quarter as they want. Rather than individual course instructors, students are assigned a faculty content coach who meets with them regularly to track their progress.

Rather than the faceless, mass-produced method created by some for-profit institutions, FlexIT is highly personalized.

“You get a very intimate experience, a lot of one-on-one time with your advisor,” Berry said. “It’s so different than courses with a basic knowledge and skill assessment.”

In each class, the student works with the content coach to create papers and projects that demonstrate competence in the subject. Students with a lot of professional background can get through a course in a few weeks. On a subject they aren’t as familiar with, they can go slower to absorb the information.

Austin Faith (’25) finished his master’s degree in IT management through FlexIT this spring. He is now working in Bellevue as the corporate IT operations manager at PACCAR Inc., a global heavy-duty truck manufacturer.

He knew a master’s degree would open up new career opportunities, but he needed a program that would allow him to balance his demanding job and two young children.

“It’s not for the weak-hearted. It takes a lot of self-discipline,” Faith said. “I maintain a busy day-to-day schedule, which is what’s perfect about FlexIT—it’s extremely flexible. I can neglect it for a couple days if I need to and then step right back in.”

As a part-time student in the program, Faith was able to manage one to two classes per quarter, and it took him two years to get through the program at that speed. Other students take advantage of the flexibility to stack up classes during slow times.

Kevin Lomax (’24) finished his master’s in cybersecurity management while working for CWU’s Network Infrastructure Services as a residential network student apprentice. Now he works in the Computer Support Services department as a student tech liaison and teaches in the IT Management department.

Lomax said he appreciated how the FlexIT program allowed him to juggle work and school at the same time. He explained that students like him will get as much out of the program as they’re willing to put in.

“When work is slow, I could go through classes much quicker, which is a good cost savings if you’re willing to put in the extra effort,” Lomax said.

## Meeting Market Demands

As FlexIT begins its second decade, the future is all about scaling up and adjusting to market needs and changing technology. The program already offers specializations in data analytics and cybersecurity and is building out its coursework in artificial intelligence.



Photo courtesy of Austin Faith.

*Austin Faith completed his CWU degree this spring and is already working as an IT operations manager for PACCAR Inc. in Bellevue.*

“Every organization is an IT organization. It doesn’t really matter if you’re in education, corporate, biotech, health care—you have an IT infrastructure that supports your organization, and you need people who know how to manage it,” Fountain said. “You used to need people to manage hardware and check the cabling, but now what you need are people who understand how AI is being used to develop organizational capacities, or potential threats to cybersecurity.”

While the faculty adjust the curriculum to meet the changing IT landscape, Elizabeth Henry, academic program manager for IT Management, and Luke Williams, competency-based education program coordinator, are looking for ways to expand FlexIT’s learning modality across the university.

One need is to deliver all of the general education program requirements via the FlexIT model. This would allow undergraduate students who haven’t finished required coursework—such as English 101—to complete it in the flex format. Students currently have to complete that coursework through traditional online or in-person classes.

Henry and her colleagues are also looking to grow their partnerships with major industries in Washington, especially those which offer tuition reimbursement programs.

“That would be a win-win for us,” Henry said. “We’re providing an educational program that allows employees to gain an undergraduate or graduate degree, and the employees get to use the tuition reimbursement benefit.”

Of course, the flex model isn’t for everyone. Students who excel in the program are those who are self-driven and don’t require the social interaction of a traditional classroom. With that in mind, the FlexIT staff conducts a thorough assessment of all applicants to verify they will be successful in the format.

“We just want to see students succeed,” Williams said. “It’s a labor of love—helping these students, figuring out how we can get more of the benefit from this program. That’s our mission.” ■

# THE GAME BEHIND THE GAME



**CWU Sport Management program gives students a leg up in diverse, competitive—and growing—industry**

By Tara Roberts

It's a great time to be in the sport management industry.

Now more than ever, Americans are investing in experiences. Consumer spending on travel and live events, including sporting events, increased by nearly 30% in 2023, according to a Washington Post analysis. A 2024 report from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association found more people were participating in sports, fitness, and outdoor activities, too.

People are drawn to sports because they want to connect with others and be part of a team, according to David Rolfe, undergraduate program coordinator for CWU Sport Management.

Sport management professionals like the ones being trained at CWU are motivated to make those experiences as memorable as they can for the fans.

"Being part of an experience is powerful, it's meaningful, it's exciting, it's really fun," Rolfe said. "I think that working in a field where the true idea of it, at its core, is enjoyment and fun and excitement is appealing to people."

The CWU Department of Sport and Movement Studies launched the Sport Management program in 2017, and it continues to evolve. As of 2024, students can choose from six specializations. The program also partners with the College of Business for a sport business minor.

This level of variety opens the door to a wide range of careers. Program graduates might train athletes, engage fans on social media, coordinate merchandise licensing, plan activities at a summer camp, analyze player statistics, or ensure everything runs smoothly on gameday.

"The industry is so much wider than you probably would ever imagine," Rolfe said.

## Wealth of Opportunities

For many in the profession, it's an amazing feeling to say your office is a football stadium, basketball arena, or NASCAR track, said Sean Dahlin, who coordinates the Sport and Athletic Administration master's program at Central. But these jobs are gratifying in deeper ways, too.

"If you're working with the athletes directly, you're helping them grow and build all these character-building values that they're going to use for the rest of their lives," Dahlin said. "On the office side, you're wanting to build experiences that the fans are never going to forget."

While the industry is growing, it's also highly competitive, Dahlin explained. CWU faculty members are invested in preparing students for the spectrum of career possibilities ahead of them.

Beyond-the-classroom experiences are what set CWU's program apart, Rolfe added. Offering an incredible education to students is especially meaningful to him as a Central alum (he earned his bachelor's in recreation management in 2005).

"We have to do good work because it's the right thing to do. We demand excellence of our students, and because of that, they

produce," he said. "We consistently have students getting jobs, getting internships, getting opportunities. The track record is pretty exciting."

Quynzie Tucker, a senior from Yakima and president of the Sport Management Association student club, said the program has made her excited about her education and her future. She has interned with the CWU volleyball team and the athletic department's compliance director, coached a club team, and visited professionals in Seattle and Las Vegas.

"We have so many opportunities to be hands-on," she said.

## Building Skills, Networks

The program requires undergraduates to complete 320 internship hours with CWU Athletics, in the Ellensburg community, or across the country.

"That's going to go on your résumé, and it's going to give you those skills and that experience that you'll need to be a high-level candidate for jobs or graduate school," Dahlin said, noting that many sport management undergrads continue on to the master's program.

Students also have abundant opportunities to build their professional networks.

"The connections that our professors have, as well as where our alumni have gone, have opened up doors for us to talk to those people and have immediate connections as soon as we graduate," Tucker said.

A program-sponsored trip every winter alternates between the Pacific Northwest and other locales. In January, a group of students traveled to Phoenix, where they met with Central alumni who work for pro sports teams, college programs, and even a Marriott resort.

The program partners with the Seattle Storm of the WNBA to host an annual spring career fair where students connect with regional employers for job and internship opportunities—then enjoy a basketball game from a luxury suite in Climate Pledge Arena.

Every November, Central's Northwest Center for Sport brings industry representatives to campus with the Northwest Sport Management Summit, where alumni and other professionals discuss their careers and what's going in their respective fields during a panel-style forum. They also take time to meet with students, who get to ask questions and gather insights about the profession.

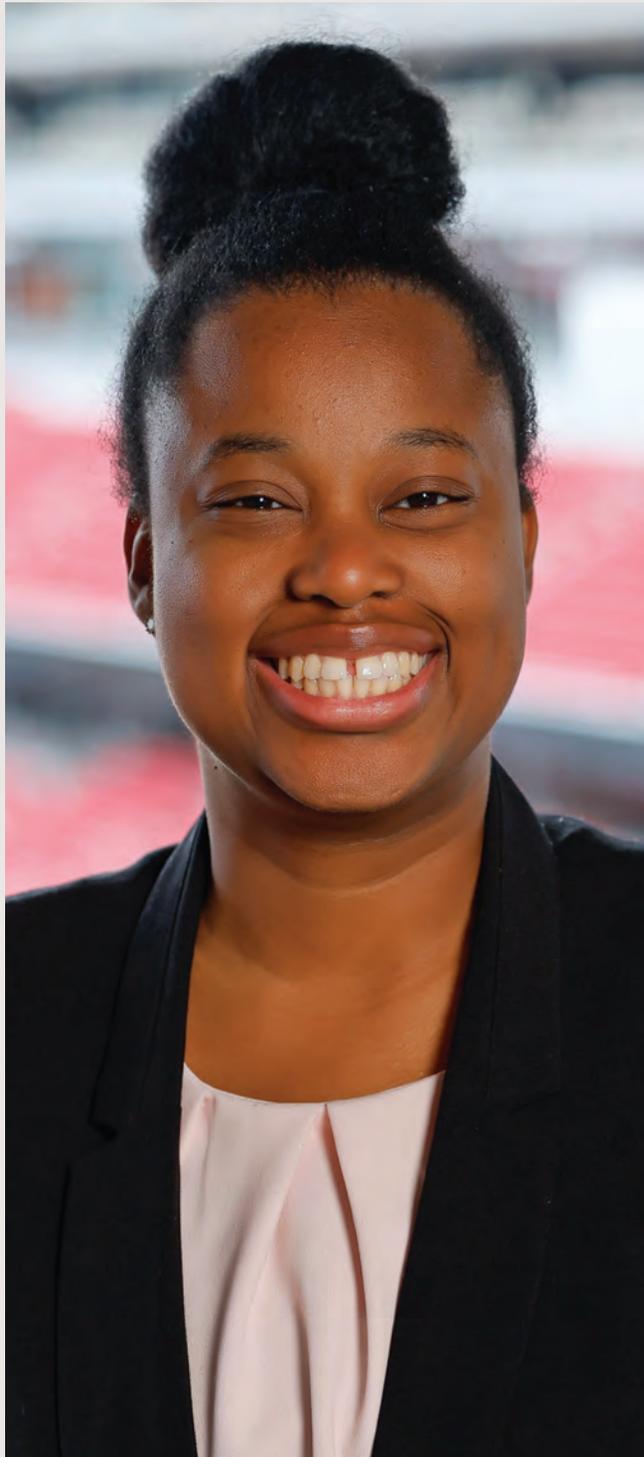
Beyond building a professional network, connecting with alumni inspires students to dream big for their futures in an industry that is constantly growing and evolving.

"When they see that our alums are thriving in different places, that's the biggest difference-maker for us," Dahlin said. "They're like, 'Oh, yeah, I can do that too, and I know that I can thrive as well.'" ■

*CWU Sport Management program team members Sean Dahlin (left), Levi Jennings, Lily Haughee, and Meadow Evenson explore T-Mobile Field before CWU Night at the Mariners in April.*

# Finding Their Footing

*Recent CWU Sport Management program graduates have gone on to build successful careers doing what they love to do.*



## Leading By Example

As an early leader in CWU's Sport Management Association (SMA) student club, Linae Myhand left a legacy at her alma mater.

Myhand ('21) transferred to Central in 2018 from Highline College, where she played basketball. She started as a marketing major and sport business minor, then decided to continue her studies as an economics major.

That extra year on campus allowed Myhand to invest in SMA.

The club was new, and she'd served as director of communications during her second year, before becoming president during her third year. She had previously gained professional experience working with the Seattle Storm of the WNBA, and she was eager to help her peers expand their experiences and networks.

"I was blessed with great professors and advisors who have always supported me and encouraged my career aspirations. They continuously challenged me to step out of my comfort zone," she said. "I learned I could be another person that's encouraging my classmates to never remain complacent, and I could also lead by example."

In 2020, she helped organize a club trip to Indianapolis, where students attended the Sport Management Worldwide Football Career Conference and met professionals from the Indiana Pacers and NCAA. They returned to Ellensburg invigorated about the sport management field.

When the pandemic interrupted normal operations in 2020, Myhand helped the SMA bring in monthly virtual guest speakers to keep students engaged.

She now works for the San Francisco 49ers in season-ticket member services. She's also become one of the many program alumni who regularly network with Central students, including an appearance at the 2023 Northwest Sport Management Summit.

As the third of eight siblings, Myhand values leaving a legacy for others: "I always want to try to give back. I want things to be better for the group coming after me than it was for myself." ■

Photo courtesy of Linae Myhand.

*Sport Management graduate Linae Myhand now works for the San Francisco 49ers.*



Kevin Bodle, second from left, is now an athletics academic advisor at Fresno State University.

## From Mentee to Mentor

A devastating knee injury ended Kevin Bodle's high school football career during his senior season in Orting, Washington.

But his coach and athletic director, Marty Parkhurst, pointed him in another direction.

"He sat me down and said, 'Kevin, look, your life's not over. It's really just starting,'" Bodle said.

Bodle ('20, '22) became Parkhurst's teaching assistant, which inspired him to pursue a career in sports beyond the field.

He was drawn to Central's small-town environment, and he initially minored in sport business. After he finished his core classes, he was excited to learn the university was launching a sport management major.

As one of the program's first enrollees, Bodle sought opportunities to gain experience and build connections, co-founding the Sport Management Association and interning with the Wildcat football team.

When he decided to focus on helping student-athletes, his advisor connected him with the assistant athletic director for academic success. Bodle interned as a tutor and academic coach as an undergraduate, then continued as a graduate assistant for academic success while earning his master's.

His mentors encouraged him throughout his job search, and he has since found a perfect fit as an athletics academic advisor at Fresno State University.

"The biggest thing I love about the job is the amount of impact that you have on the students' lives," Bodle said. "My primary purpose is making sure that our student-athletes are eligible to compete with the NCAA. But the second component, which is equally important, is helping our student-athletes figure out what they want to do with their life and their career."

The job has been a full-circle experience for Bodle. Like the mentors who have guided him throughout his life, he now helps today's student-athletes have life-changing moments of their own. ■



Braden Castro has always wanted to work in professional sports and recently landed with the Seattle Mariners.

## Living the Dream

Growing up in Sammamish, Braden Castro ('23) swam and played baseball, golf, soccer, and basketball—but he wasn't sure how to turn his love of sports into a career.

As a sophomore at CWU, he took Sport Management 101 and found the path he had been dreaming of.

"Taking that class opened my eyes to exactly how possible it actually is," Castro said.

He switched his major to sport management and chose the sport business specialization after learning about the multitude of job options that exist behind the scenes of sports organizations.

When he joined the team of students working with the CWU Alumni Association to sell tickets for CWU Night at the Mariners, he discovered he had a knack for sales. He made over 800 calls, which was the most that year. When Central students toured T-Mobile Park before the game, he had the chance to meet people on the Mariners' sales team.

Castro's talent and enthusiasm made him a fierce competitor in the National Collegiate Sports Sales Competition, in which students are rated on their skills in role-play sales calls. He was one of 64 students from around the country invited to attend the 2023 finals in Atlanta. Along the way, he met fellow sport management students and networked with professionals from dozens of sports organizations.

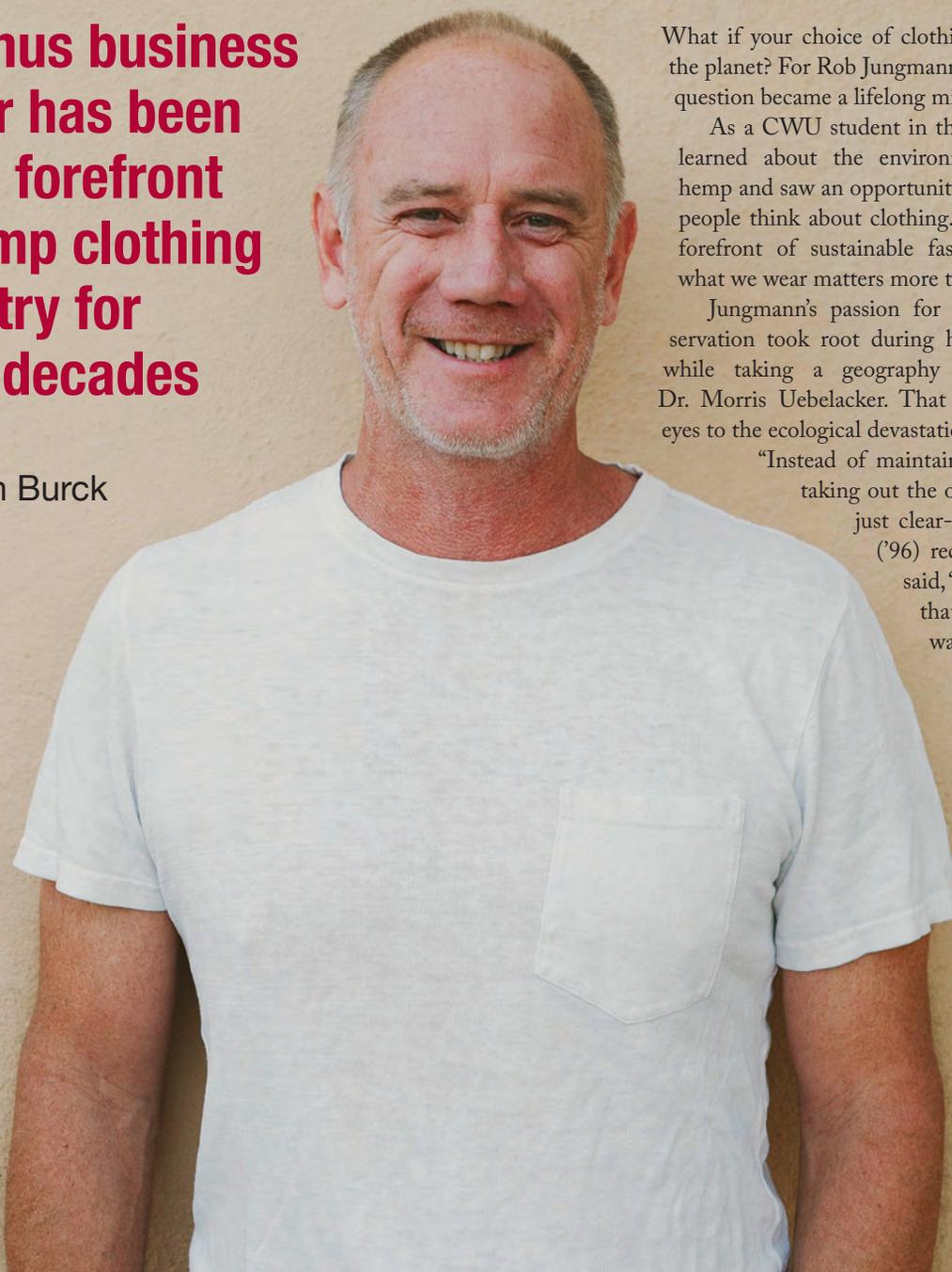
After graduation, Castro applied for a job on the Mariners sales team and kicked off his dream of a sport business career in February 2024. As a sales consultant, he primarily works with K-12 schools to set up ticket-sales fundraisers, plan community outings, and schedule activities like singing the national anthem at a game.

"This past year, I've learned so much, I've grown in so many different ways—in selling, in professional maturity," he said. "I've loved every second." ■

# THE FABRIC OF CHANGE

**Alumnus business owner has been at the forefront of hemp clothing industry for three decades**

By Robin Burck



What if your choice of clothing could help save the planet? For Rob Jungmann, the answer to that question became a lifelong mission.

As a CWU student in the 1990s, Jungmann learned about the environmental benefits of hemp and saw an opportunity to change the way people think about clothing. Today, he is at the forefront of sustainable fashion, proving that what we wear matters more than we think.

Jungmann's passion for environmental conservation took root during his time at Central while taking a geography course taught by Dr. Morris Uebelacker. That course opened his eyes to the ecological devastation of deforestation.

"Instead of maintaining the forest and taking out the old growth, we were just clear-cutting," Jungmann ('96) recalls. "My professor said, 'We could substitute that with hemp.' That was my 'aha' moment."



CWU alumnus Rob Jungmann (opposite page) has owned three successful hemp clothing businesses since 1993. Above is a promotional photo for his current company, Jungmaven.

In 1993, while still a student, Jungmann founded Manastash, an outdoor apparel brand that incorporated hemp into its designs. He started experimenting with hemp fabrics, sewing garments in the attic and dyeing them in the bathtub at his roommate's mother's home.

"There were no mainstream stores that wanted Manastash in the '90s because of a lack of understanding about hemp," he explains. "Trying to create a clothing line when nobody else is working with these fabrics is difficult. It takes a lot of time and a lot of mistakes to get it right. Luckily, a fabric company in Seattle, American Hemp Mercantiles, took me under their wing and let me play around with materials."

Jungmann's designs quickly caught on across the country, even landing an order from Music Television (MTV) for 1,500 Chenga Wallets for a spring break event.

"At the time, I thought it was game over, as we built the wallets and the order was cancelled once they were completed," he says. "But, looking back, it was the catalyst that got us off the ground."

Manastash eventually took off, particularly in Japan, where customers embraced the brand's eco-friendly ethos and outdoor aesthetic.

Jungmann immersed himself in this international business venture, even taking language courses at CWU to build new relationships and staying after class to work with his professor to better understand Japanese culture.

"We brought business partners from Japan out to Ellensburg and took them river rafting, rock climbing, hiking up Manastash, and camping," Jungmann says. "We showed them our lifestyle and built a relationship based off what we did every day."

Those early connections led to the company opening retail stores in Sapporo, Tokyo, Sendai, Kyoto, Fukuoka and Osaka — which became known as the "Chenga Tribe."

In 2005, Jungmann sold Manastash to a Japanese company while he embarked on a five-year surf trip in Central America. During this time, he still owned and operated a second hemp clothing company he had started called Two Jupiters, which manufactured blank T-shirts for companies like Manastash and the band Phish.

"While living in Costa Rica, the T-shirts I wore every day were holding up incredibly well in the harsh climate," he says. "That's when I knew this is the product to get people excited about hemp. In business, and in life, you look for something that isn't working, or something that you feel like could be improved upon, and you just try to make it better. That is how you make change."

With that epiphany, he launched a new brand called Jungmaven, a combination of his last name and a personality identified in the book *The Tipping Point* by Malcom Gladwell called the "maven," described as the ultimate trendsetter. Together, the company name means "young trendsetter."

Jungmann says studying communications alongside business at Central helped him develop an interest in storytelling, uncovering the truth, and finding the direction a project or initiative was going. These revelations gave him an unexpected advantage in the business world.

"We always look ahead to see where the market is going — not just today, but years from now," he says. "You always try to take a pulse of what's not just around you but happening across the nation and around the world."

The Jungmaven brand gained traction as sustainability took center stage in global conversations, and it has built a massive following around the world.

While the company's products were gaining in popularity and leading to many positive outcomes in the industry, working with hemp still presented challenges.

"Hemp was still illegal in the U.S., which was ridiculous given its environmental benefits," Jungmann says. "It gobbles up CO2 like no other plant, it's incredible for the soil, and everything about it just seemed ludicrous — that this natural resource was not allowed to be grown in the States. So I took it upon myself to fix that and I did that by making something that I liked and wanted to wear. I figured that if I liked it, there was a good chance that other people would, too."

Seeking to become a catalyst for change, Jungmaven launched the Hemp 2020 campaign to raise awareness around the positive environmental opportunities of farming industrial hemp.

"These hemp T-shirts that held up incredibly well seemed like the one product that could get out to the masses that would really change people's minds about hemp," Jungmann said. "Our campaign was to 'get everyone in a hemp T-shirt by 2020,' and people really got behind that."

In 2018, the Agriculture Improvement Act, also known as the Farm Bill, authorized the production of hemp in the U.S.

Seven years later, Jungmaven is in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Japan, with an upcoming tradeshow in Paris to debut a new heathered fleece fabric and hemp wool fleece, both completely new products.

"It's been a wild ride," Jungmann reflects. "I have met some really amazing, incredible people along the way, and I continue to as well." ■



Film Studies alumni Julian Smart and Sierra Sarino are now enjoying successful video careers in the Bay Area.

## Future Comes Into Focus for Filmmaking Couple

By Rune Torgersen

As an Ellensburg native, going to CWU had been on Julian Smart's mind from an early age, right alongside filmmaking.

"I grew up making films with my friends, just running around with a camera and filming whatever we saw," the 2019 CWU Film Studies alumnus said. "Having the opportunity to learn about the equipment and the process from my dad was huge, too."

Fellow Film Studies alum and now-wife Sierra Sarino found her way into the field through inspiration from an iconic film franchise.

"I knew I wanted to do film the first time I saw the behind-the-scenes footage of *The Lord of the Rings*," she said. "Everyone looked like they were having a great time, and I was drawn to the technical aspects of it as well."

Sierra ('18) grew up in Kent and was looking at film schools in California and Hawaii, but she ultimately decided on CWU after receiving some advice from former Department Chair John Ward.

Her decision to enroll at Central came down to a desire to stay closer to home, and the ability to connect more deeply with her instructors via CWU's relatively small class sizes.

"The instructors at Central were really pivotal for me," she said. "There's something really special in the ability to connect with them, and it would have been a completely different experience if I didn't have that access."

Julian's experience with the program mirrored his wife's. While he was happy to be able to talk to his professors at eye level about their shared passion for film, what caught him off-guard was the ready availability of the tools of the trade.

"It was amazing how quickly we were able to get started and get our hands on some professional-grade equipment," he said. "In my first year at CWU, I had the opportunity to work on multiple sets, which was kind of a pivotal moment for me. Being able to taste every aspect of film production in a professional



### Schlanger Named State Art Educator of the Year

Art and Design Professor and Department Chair Gregg Schlanger was named the Higher Education Art Educator of the Year by the Washington Art Education Association (WAEA) last fall. The WAEA praised Schlanger's work to increase collaboration between teachers and teaching students alike. He regularly tours the state to support the ESD Regional Art Shows and the OSPI High School Superintendent's Art Show.



### BCS Executive Director Joins State's New Economic Panel

CWU's Executive Director of Business and Community Services Rob Ogburn has been named to a new state-level working group designed to spur statewide economic development and bring high-paying manufacturing jobs to the Northwest. The group was created last fall to increase statewide and regional collaboration and help the state take advantage of funding from the federal CHIPS and Science Act.

setting, and then being able to bring that with me into my classes, was really helpful, and it let me make the most of both sides of the program.”

Julian and Sierra met through the film program and eventually got married in March of last year. All the while, they have built on the successful film careers they began at CWU, where they both honed their skills and developed their portfolios.

For Julian, his work with *Hype* magazine was a treasured source of experience during his college career.

“By the time I graduated, I felt like I already had a couple of years of experience under my belt, thanks to my work with *Hype*, as well as student media,” he said. “Sierra and I always enjoyed working together when a project came up, too.”

Sierra found working on the Student Fashion Show to be an invigorating way to merge her cinematography expertise with an in-person event, shooting video on site and then incorporating it into the background of the Apparel, Textiles, and Merchandising department’s annual creative showcase.

“Going out to different locations and putting together a variety of packages for them gave me some real breadth of experience,” she said. “Seeing it all culminate in the fashion show itself, and getting to film that for posterity with our video packages playing in the background, was a fun, layered experience of my work taking on a life of its own.”

To round out their time at CWU, film majors are tasked with putting together a professional-grade short film that will be screened for their classmates and mentors at a year-end film festival. Sierra has fond memories of the event, and the collaboration with her peers that led up to the big day.

“When we were doing our senior films, everyone treated it as a professional project, with professional roles on set,” she said. “Getting to call myself ‘cinematographer’ for a couple of projects and really feel like I was shooting it myself and making it my own, that was pretty empowering. The fact that I got to do it with some of my best friends was amazing, too.”

Following graduation, Julian and Sierra ran a small Ellensburg film business called Media Pending for about a year, until an opportunity at DigiPen led Julian to move to Redmond. Sierra joined him on the west side, and ever since, the two

up-and-coming filmmakers have followed the work, branching out into a variety of businesses before settling in San Francisco in 2022.

“One thing I took away from film school is that there are many more ways to be in the film business than just working in Hollywood,” said Julian, who now works as the multimedia manager at the University of San Francisco. “There are so many creative applications for the medium. I enjoy marketing and producing creative content that serves an end goal, so I’ve really enjoyed my career so far. Being in San Francisco, there are so many incredibly creative people around.”

As Julian and Sierra settle into their lives as professional filmmakers in the Bay Area, they know they have a bright future ahead.

“Having found our footing, it’s nice to look a few years ahead and see that we’ll be able to continue doing the kind of creative work that we love,” said Sierra, who is currently using her talents as Senior Video Director at drone manufacturer Skydio. “Whether it’s marketing or documentary work—or something we don’t even see coming—I know we’re prepared for whatever lies ahead.” ■



Julian and Sierra working on a project in The Redwood National Park in California.

Photo courtesy of Julian Smart.



### Math Professor Receives Distinguished Teaching Award

Math Professor Jean Marie Linhart earned the Distinguished Teaching Award from the Pacific Northwest Section of the Mathematical Association of America after discovering that a fresh approach to testing and a deeper understanding of her students led to higher pass rates and better performance. Linhart has found that Mastery Based Testing shifts the focus toward continued learning.



### Police Chief Appointed to International Board of Directors

CWU Police Chief Jason Berthon-Koch ('07, '22) was named to the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators Board of Directors in late 2024. The longtime head of CWU Police and Public Safety was appointed as the director of the Mountain Pacific region, which covers campus police administrators at hospital, university, and corporate campuses across seven states.

# CWU Football Alum Proud To Stand Up for the Underdog

By David Leder

Anthony Blue has always had a big heart for the little guy.

Dating back to when he was growing up in Los Angeles in the early 1990s, Blue has felt a calling to advocate for people with developmental disabilities.

“One of my best friends growing up was a kid named David, who was autistic,” said Blue, a former CWU football player who now lives in Selah. “He was getting picked on one day, and I felt like someone needed to stand up for him. From that moment on, we became good friends.”

Blue ('11, '13) went on to become a Special Olympics coach during high school, and he eventually landed a job with an agency in Ellensburg that supports people with developmental disabilities. That experience led him to where he is today, serving as a quality assurance unit manager for the state Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).

Little did he know that his life experiences, combined with his CWU education, would lead to his current role with the Washington Department of Social and Health Services.

“I never really saw myself in this type of role, but I’m really glad I accepted the challenge because it’s been a great opportunity for me to learn how the whole system works,” said Blue, who earned three degrees from CWU: bachelor’s in sociology and bachelor’s in law and justice, and a master’s in physical education (athletic administration).

“It can be easy to get lost in one specific problem, and it’s often hard to see that when we make decisions, they can affect a lot of different people,” he continued. “We can’t lose focus on why we are here, which is serving people with developmental disabilities. The ‘why’ in this job is the most important thing.”



Photo by David Leder.

Anthony Blue

Blue manages a team of seven specialists who support case managers on both sides of the state, ensuring DDA teams are complying with state laws and regulations. His staff develops resources that help people understand how the system works, while also performing audits and overseeing federal compliance.

“I have seen firsthand how important it is for people to have advocates working on their behalf,” Blue said. “It’s a huge responsibility, and we have a huge impact on people’s lives. That’s a wonderful feeling; I just wish I had more of a chance to interact with the people we are serving.”

One of Blue’s CWU teammates, Aaron Gilbert, also works as a quality assurance manager at DDA, and the two remain in close contact. He also keeps in touch with a number of former coaches, peers, and professors who helped him build a foundation for success.

Most of all, he thanked his wife, Mary, for pushing him to be the best version of himself.

“If I say I want to do something, she believes I can do it,” said Blue, who has two sons, ages 14 and 9. “I’ve had a lot of amazing people stand behind me over the years, but she has been my biggest supporter.” ■



## Business Student Presents AI Work at National Competition

CWU sophomore business student Morgan Holman was named a finalist in the Red Bull Basement competition last fall and presented her work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The international innovation competition is centered around disruptive business ideas powered by emerging AI technology. Holman’s idea revolved around an AI assistant specifically designed for the needs of college students. Her idea was among the top 10 nationwide to be selected.



## Former CWU Rugby Star Joins Olympic Training Program

Former CWU rugby standout Tessa Hann ('24) joined USA Rugby’s Olympic training program last fall as the Women’s Eagles Sevens program rebuilds for the 2028 Olympic Games. Prior to her selection, the former CWU team captain and two-time All-American played for the under-23 national team for the past two years. Hann was one of eight players selected from an elite pool of 22 after a series of training camps.

# Accounting Alumna Now Doing the People's Work

By David Leder

Deb Manjarrez has always been interested in politics, but until last year, she hadn't thought much about running for the state House of Representatives.

Her calculations changed, however, when the Washington State Redistricting Commission created an open seat by redrawing the boundaries for the 14th Legislative District, sending her Republican colleague Chris Corry to the 15th District.

"They had to twist my arm because politics can be a combat sport," said Manjarrez, a 1983 CWU alumna who served as chair of the Yakima County Republican Central Committee for four years before throwing her name into the hat for the 2024 election cycle. "But I have built a lot of close relationships throughout the Yakima Valley over the years, and I felt like I would be able to represent their needs well."

Manjarrez was elected in November 2024 and now serves one of the state's largest districts, spanning parts of four counties — Yakima, Klickitat, Benton, and Franklin. Having just completed her first legislative session, she admits that she's still learning all the ins-and-outs of being a state lawmaker.

But if her first few months in Olympia are any indication, she feels like she's up to the challenge.

"It's definitely been a learning experience," Manjarrez said. "I got to serve on three committees, and I'm beginning to learn how the whole process works. My biggest takeaway was that we have a great caucus that really cares about the people of this state. We're a really good team."

Manjarrez is a fourth-generation farmer and lifelong resident of Wapato, a small agricultural community about 10 miles south-east of Yakima. She and her husband, Mark ('85), grow apples through their business, M&M Orchards, and she also owns a Yakima accounting firm with her daughter, Katherine Michelle De Leon ('13), called Manjarrez and De Leon P.S.

Even back in high school, Manjarrez had her sights set on becoming an accountant. She knew she didn't have to go far from home to get a quality education, so she decided to make the short trek up to Ellensburg.

She always planned on returning to the Yakima Valley, and having CWU so close to home made her decision that much easier. Years later, her daughter followed a similar path.

"I never thought my daughter would follow in my footsteps and get her accounting degree from Central," said Manjarrez, who started the business in 1998 and welcomed De Leon as a

partner in 2018. "Everything has worked out really well for us. We love serving other small business owners in the valley, and I'm very proud of what we have built."

After more than 25 years as a business owner — plus 10 years as the chairman of the Wapato Chamber of Commerce and eight years with the Yakima County Republican Central Committee — Manjarrez decided that the timing was perfect for her to represent the 14th District. After only a few months on the job, she hopes to be around for a while.

"I want to take this job as far as I can," she said. "As long as I can be effective, I plan to keep running." ■



Rep. Deb Manjarrez

Photo courtesy of Deb Manjarrez.



Mónica Medrano



Tishra Beeson

## Two CWU Representatives Selected for HACU Cohort

Two representatives from CWU were selected for the 2024-25 cohort of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), which invites Hispanic leaders from institutions across the country to participate in its annual Leadership Academy. Eastside University Centers Regional Director Mónica Medrano and Health Sciences Department Chair Tishra Beeson are currently engaged in a variety of leadership development activities.

## Crimson & Black Receives Best of District Honors

*Crimson & Black* magazine was honored by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) as the Best of District VIII Award winner for 2024.

The Best of District VIII Awards celebrate the best work in educational advancement in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada region. *Crimson & Black* was recognized in the Magazines Alumni/General Interest category for four-year colleges and universities.



# Following Her Creativity Wherever It Leads

By Kimberly Smith

When CWU Associate Professor of English Maya Jewell Zeller applied for a fellowship at the University of Oxford in 2024, she proposed spending her time in England finishing a poetry manuscript and conducting research for a novel.

However, after renting a cottage close to the rural settings that inspired poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and Lewis Carroll — author of children’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* — Zeller found her mind pulled in unexpected directions.

In addition to writing new passages for her novel and connecting with other fellows at Oxford’s St. Edmund Hall, Zeller became inspired to revise her upcoming memoir-in-essays, *Raised by Ferns*, which will be published by Porphyry Press next year.

“I ended up taking a lot of notes toward sections of my memoir that were about parenting and whimsy and play,” she said. “Being on location there and close to that ancestry of texts just took me in that direction.”

Zeller explained that the freedom to follow creative diversions is one of the primary benefits for artists in academia who are afforded opportunities like the Oxford Fellowship.

“When you bring together scholars from various institutions in a place where none of them are bound to their home institutions’ daily schedules, the conversations that can happen are pretty incredible,” she said. “I was able to take off all those parameters and just let myself follow wherever my creative mind went.”

Zeller considers poetry to be her primary genre, but at this point in her career, she doesn’t let genre expectations constrain her. While teaching high school English prior to earning her Master of Fine Arts in creative writing/poetry from Eastern Washington University in 2007, she discovered a passion for experimental and hybrid forms that has stayed with her.

“I found myself drawn to teaching all genres, and I also found myself really drawn to those genres that are the weirdos,” she said. “These hybrid genres that don’t have categories are where I found myself the most excited.”

After becoming a mother, Zeller found that the concentration of language, music, and image that drew her to poetry were no longer enough to say everything she wanted to say, so she began writing prose poems, micro-essays, and longer fiction and nonfiction.

CWU English Professor Maya Zeller is building a name for herself in international poetry circles. Her latest book, “*Raised by Ferns*,” will be published next year.



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*Maybe I'm the woman in the painting by Wood who once said,  
"All the good ideas I've ever had came to me  
while I was milking a cow." It was the artist, not the woman,  
but sometimes I think of the deceptively simple window  
and its dark interior and how there's no way to know what's inside.*

From "All Morning I Watch God Build Her Nest" (2023)

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She also learned to be flexible with her writing process, working whenever and wherever she could. Many of the essays in *Raised by Ferns* started as voice recordings made during the long drives that became part of her life when she began teaching at CWU in 2016.

More recently, Zeller has reserved occasional Fridays to focus on her creative and scholarly projects, such as her co-authored textbook, *Advanced Poetry: A Writer's Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2024), and her upcoming lyrical field guide, *The Wonder of Mushrooms* (AdventureKEEN, 2025).

"What will inevitably happen during that session is that I will inspire myself to do something else," she said. "I will depart from the process that I told myself I'm working on and then come back to that process. I don't usually write new things by making space for them; they kind of have to happen."

As a memoir-in-essays, *Raised by Ferns* contains a complete narrative arc, while also touching on topics including the environment, motherhood, childhood, academia, the limitations of the American educational system, and more.

In writing the book, one of her goals was to "be more capacious about a human life," showing the many aspects it can contain. She hopes to help her students be their full selves in their writing, too, especially those who might struggle to have their voices heard beyond the page.

"As an extreme introvert, I know that writing is a specific discipline in which introverts can actually express a lot," she said. "If I can help a student feel validated and have permission to be the exact weird creature that they are, then I will have achieved all of my teaching goals."

Even outside the creative writing classroom, Zeller believes it's important for people to be able to encounter diverse voices and find new ways to express themselves.

"We really need public libraries, and we need to not ban books," she said. "Access to weirdos, right? If you don't find your weirdos, then you just keep it to yourself." ■



Maya Jewell Zeller



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