



# news

FEBRUARY | 2026

## Message from the Assistant Director

### Dear Kathwari Honors Students,

I want to thank all of you first and foremost for the very warm welcome you all have given me as I've stepped into the role of Interim Assistant Director while Caitlin is on maternity leave. It has been such a joy and pleasure to work with you all on a daily basis and get to know those of you who I haven't had the chance to work with before.

The Honors Program is very dear to me. I was an Honors student when I was in undergrad here at WCSU, and after graduation I went on to serve as one of the first Kathwari Honors Fellows while I studied for my MFA. It was my experience in the Honors Program, particularly as a TA with an excellent mentor, Pano Koukopoulos, that led me to stay at WCSU as both a professor and in my role as the interim assistant director. The people in this program and the experiences it offered me genuinely changed my life. I am very grateful for the chance to give back to this excellent community.

I hope that your semesters have been off to a strong start, and that you are enjoying your classes. I'd like to encourage you to take time off from the busy life of being a hardworking student to join us for our **Honors Distress Event on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM in the Honors House Lyceum.** Our Honors Assistants have come up with a bunch of fun self-care crafts for you, including bath bomb, face and lip scrubs, and a few extra goodies I won't spoil... I hope to see many of you there!

Know you have my support and my gratitude! Very warmly yours,

*Mikayla Silkman*

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# Honors Success Stories

## KATHWARI HONORS STUDENT RAZI NAOUALI IS MAKING AN IMPACT ON CAMPUS IN HIS FIRST YEAR

Razi Naouali is in his first year at WCSU, but he is already very involved on campus as a Kathwari Honors student, a member of the men’s soccer team, an SGA senator, and now as a student ambassador in the president’s office. Naouali learned about the Honors Program at the beginning of the fall semester and decided to apply. He has appreciated his experiences so far, especially the smaller class sizes, which have allowed him to connect with fellow Honors students across different majors in a more intimate setting.

Naouali values campus community, which led him to join SGA and become a School Senator. He also serves on several SGA committees. Outside of SGA, Naouali serves as a PASS Mentor, working with students to provide mentoring around study skills and academic resources. In terms of academics, Naouali plans to be a double major in Economics and Applied Mathematics, and he has enjoyed interacting with his professors in office hours and through a work study with Professor Lumbantobing.

During the fall semester, Naouali enjoyed his experience in HON 100 – The Nature of Inquiry, where he had a chance to further engage on campus through panels with WCSU faculty members. During a panel with President Bernal and Dean Perelli, Naouali asked questions and voiced student concerns, which led to an invitation to apply for a new role in the president’s office. Naouali views his role as being a student ambassador, sharing input and ideas as well as serving as a liaison to ensure students are heard in campus decision-making. Naouali is excited to get to work and continue representing fellow students while staying involved with all of the opportunities in the Honors Program.



Read the full story [here](#).



# Honors Course Spotlight

## HONORS 298 — MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Professor Jessica Schofield teaches this course, which is presented through the framework of Model United Nations in which students develop a deeper understanding of the organization by adopting roles as representatives of member nations. It includes a semester-long simulation in which students draft policy proposals, hold negotiations, practice problem solving, and present statements and arguments in front of the class.



## HONORS 398 — HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSIC TO 1900

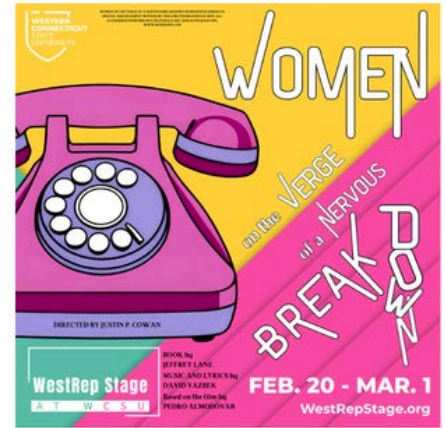
Professor Dirck Westervelt teaches this course, which helps piece together a picture of the early American music makers, including where they come from, their lives, cultures, and struggles. Students trace the pathways of music from across the Atlantic to the American shores and examine how race, class, and culture influence music and how elements are re-translated over time. During the month of February, students engaged with the history of African-American spirituals. This interactive course is for everyone, regardless of musical background, and allows students to participate in making music while they learn.



# February Snapshot

## WCSU'S PRODUCTION OF *WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN*

Congratulations to our Kathwari Honors Students on their magnificent performances in WCSU's production of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, directed by Justin P. Cowan. Shows took place from February 20- March 1.



Paul Carlantone



Olive Conover



Marisa Curti



Lucas Dylan



Reilly Gramesty



Paige Gualandi



Zola Kneeland



Azayda Lynt



Sebastian Martelle



Logan Perrault



Zachary Spreng



Mireya Trelles



Isabella Vanore



Nora Watson



## HOLIDAY HANGOUT AND VALENTINE'S DAY

Honors students stayed connected at the end of the semester and the start of a new one by attending the Honors Holiday Hangout in December and Valentine's Day Crafting event in February. Students enjoyed snacks, crafting, and games. It was a great chance to de-stress and build community.



# Upcoming Events

**March 2nd**  
MONDAY

## SPRING SEMINAR: DR. CHATELAIN

This event is part of our Honors Spring Seminar series. Dr. Marcia Chatelain is the Penn Presidential Compact Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and a Pulitzer-Prize winning author. **Join us in the Science Building Room 125 on Monday, March 2 at 2 pm.**

**March 5th**  
THURSDAY

## HONORS DE-STRESS

**HONORS STUDENTS:** Take a break from the stresses of the early semester and enjoy an afternoon filled with self care. Unwind by making slime, body scrubs, keychains, and bath bombs. Come relax and get creative. **Join us in the Honors House on Thursday, March 5th from 11 AM - 1 PM** and earn one Honors Engagement Point for participating!

**March 30th**  
THURSDAY

## SPRING SEMINAR: DR. HEGEL-CANTARELLA

This event is part of our Honors Spring Seminar series. WCSU Professor Dr. Christine Hegel-Cantarella is a cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on legal, economic, and environmental issues. **Join us in the Science Building Room 125 on Monday, March 30 at 2 pm.**

**April 8th**  
WEDNESDAY

## SPRING SEMINAR: LAURA LEONARD

This event is part of our Honors Spring Seminar series. Laura Leonard is the Art Bridges Project Coordinator and Curatorial Researcher at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, CT. **Join us in the VPAC Art Gallery on Wednesday, April 8. Reception at 6 pm and lecture at 7 pm.**

**April 13th**  
MONDAY

## HONORS ICE CREAM SOCIAL

**HONORS STUDENTS:** Join us in ending the semester strong with our Honors Ice Cream Social! We will have an ice cream bar with a variety of ice cream flavors and toppings. We'll also have coloring and a movie in the background. Don't miss out! **Join us in the Honors Conference Room from 1 - 3 pm.**

# 20 KATHWARI 26 SPRING SEMINARS



KATHWARI HONORS PROGRAM  
WESTERN CONNECTICUT  
STATE UNIVERSITY

## DESIGN THINKING / CREATIVE THINKING

### How to Avoid Norman Doors: Design Thinking to Solve Everyday Problems

**Dr. Pauline Assenza** leads the Entrepreneurship/ Small Business Management option in the Management Major of the Ancell School of Business at Western Connecticut State University. She is also responsible for ERIC@THEGARAGE, an Entrepreneurship, Research, Innovation, and Creativity resource center for students, faculty, staff, and the greater Danbury community.



Monday, February 23 2 pm Science Building Room 125 Midtown Campus

### Crafting the Past: How Historians Creatively, Courageously, and Critically Tell the Truth

**Dr. Marcia Chatelain** is the Penn Presidential Compact Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America*, which examines the intersection of the post-1968 civil rights struggle and the rise of the fast food industry. Her first book was *South Side Girls: Growing up in the Great Migration*.



Monday, March 2 2 pm Science Building Room 125 Midtown Campus

### Anthropology by Design: Imaginative Practices for Social Analysis

**Dr. Christine Hegel-Cantarella** is a cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on legal, economic, and environmental issues. Her current project examines the lives and livelihoods of informal recyclers in New York City in relation to recycling policy. Dr. Hegel-Cantarella also holds a B.F.A. in Theatre and over the past fifteen years has collaborated with designers and artists on creative projects to make the ethnographic encounter visible and to enliven social analysis through design speculation and materialization.



Monday, March 30 2 pm Science Building Room 125 Midtown Campus

### Creativity in Curatorial Practice

**Laura Leonard** is the Art Bridges Project Coordinator and Curatorial Researcher at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, CT, where she oversees a series of American art exhibitions created through a multi-year, multi-institutional partnership led by the Wadsworth as a part of the Art Bridges Cohort Program. Her most recent projects were co-curating *(Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art* and authoring the accompanying booklet, as well as curating *Peter Waite: Social Memory: Paintings 1987–2025* and co-authoring the exhibition catalogue.



Wednesday, April 8 6 pm Reception | 7 pm Lecture VPAC Art Gallery

### An Evening with Rhett Miller

**Rhett Miller** is an icon of Americana and contemporary songwriting. In addition to 13 albums with Old97s, he has released 10 solo albums—most recently *A lifetime of riding by night*, which he wrote and recorded just before recently undergoing and recovering from vocal cord surgery. Miller is the creator of the *Wheels Off* podcast, for which he has interviewed many of the greats of contemporary Americana music as well as authors, screenwriters, comedians, designers, and other creatives about “the messy reality of creative life.” In 2025, he received with Old97s the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Americana Music Association.



Friday, April 24

7 pm Concert, Q&A Veronica Hagman Concert Hall

Ticketed Event



A limited number of free tickets are available to the WCSU community with ID at the VPAC Box Office until March 31.