

Worcester State University

2023

DONOR IMPACT

STATEMENT



SUPPORTING THE WHOLE STUDENT

Donor-supported initiatives make it possible for Worcester State students to succeed throughout their educational journey.

pipeline to college
academic enrichment
health and well-being
experiential learning

Thank you for supporting student success

We know that student success in college can depend on many factors outside the classroom. In this issue, we focus on the donor-supported initiatives that make it possible for Worcester State to support the whole student, starting from the **pipeline to college**, and continuing through **health and well-being**, **academic enrichment**, and **experiential learning** opportunities.

COVER PHOTO: Undergraduate student researcher Aspen Zheng '24 and Dr. Jennifer Hood-DeGrenier, Biology Department chair, are the recipients of the first summer research grant from the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. Photo by Matt Wright '10

We're building a culture of wellness, resilience, and connection to support the whole student



On May 13, 2023, the DCU Center in downtown Worcester was filled to the rafters with more than 1,000 undergraduate students and the parents, family, friends, faculty, and peers who supported them throughout their time as Worcester State students. The day was the culmination of successes, setbacks, and everything in between. Including a pandemic. With rapt attention, the audience listened as commencement speaker and alumna Dr. Kristen Lee '96 remarked on their resilience and reiterated the importance of making mental health a priority. "Resilience relies on connection. Resilience happens within community." Dr. Kris's commencement address was interrupted several times with hearty applause illuminating the truth of her words. Working toward a culture that embraces wellness in every dimension has never been more important or impactful.

Taking a holistic approach to student support is increasingly important at educational institutions across the country. Higher education data demonstrate that supporting the social, emotional, academic, and financial pillars of students' higher education experience pays dividends throughout their post-collegiate life. While scholarship support continues to be paramount to retention, addressing the basic, fundamental needs of our students with a solid foundation of support will maximize their potential and ensure their overall success as well-rounded citizens.

Worcester State's compassionate community of alumni donors and friends have recognized these needs and have initiated funding to address it. Ongoing scholarship support

has been thoughtfully augmented with funds supporting mental health programming, a designated space and programming for students of all faiths to pray and reflect, a meal plan support to address food insecurity, and emergency funding that continues to assist hundreds of our students each year who face the unexpected expenses that life brings. The Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund is also making great strides to continue supporting students and families battling cancer while at the same time educating young adults about early detection and prevention and facilitating innovative cancer research opportunities.

This summer our campus hummed with activity. Cheers and chants could be heard from the quad as large groups of incoming first-year students attended orientation. We hosted high school immersion experiences for young people interested in STEM-related fields, as well as students considering a career as educators. The Aisiku Summer Research Program continued with over a dozen high-achieving STEM students delving into cutting-edge research projects generously funded by esteemed alumnus, Dr. Imoigele Aisiku '92.

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary support of our donor community. To once again quote Dr. Kris, "the work of supporting students is sacred." I'm honored to be a part of a community actively facilitating the tremendous potential of our next generation of community leaders.

With Lancer pride,

THOMAS MCNAMARA '94
Vice President
University Advancement



The Donor Impact Statement is published annually by University Advancement for donors, alumni, and supporters. This report covers the fiscal year June 30, 2022 - July 1, 2023.

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Investing in younger generations

CORNERSTONE STEM CONNECTIONS GIVES UNDERREPRESENTED TEENS SUMMER COLLEGE EXPERIENCE | **BY NANCY SHEEHAN**

A group of local high school students made a splash at Worcester State this summer in a special STEM program that focused on water. They were participants in the Cornerstone STEM Connections program, funded by Cornerstone Bank, which is designed to boost interest among underrepresented high school students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects and introduce them to laboratory and data processing techniques that are key for student success in college.

The program brought students from local high schools to campus over nine days this summer to practice chemistry, ecology, biology, and computer science skills by studying water samples they collected from Lake Ellie, Worcester State’s small but storied water feature, and nearby Patch Reservoir.

“The theme was ‘water,’ and they looked at the biological and chemical composition of water through different disciplines and then tied all the information together,” said Kathleen Murphy, associate professor of chemistry, who was the program coordinator. Each day they did a different lab activity looking at the biological content of water, doing things like preparing plates and using microscopes. They also learned how to determine the hardness of water and used spectroscopy to analyze the phosphorus content of water samples. “These are all activities that use laboratory skills they would likely see in a freshman-level course in college,” Dr. Murphy said.

Cornerstone, a Worcester-based bank, supported the program as part of its commitment to the local community, said Todd Tallman, Cornerstone CEO. “This program gives us an opportunity to invest in the community, to invest in Worcester State, and also to invest in the younger generation,” he said. “That’s something that we take seriously and something that has always been incredibly important to us.”

At the close of the program, the students expressed their gratitude to Cornerstone on a thank-you card by completing the sentence: Your generous support has allowed us to... “learn about filtration and eutrophication,” one student wrote, “use new lab tools and analyze data,” said another, and “have so much fun!” said a third, echoing the sentiments of several others.

The program is designed to work closely with the Worcester Public

Schools system, with STEM teachers at the high schools recommending students who may be interested in pursuing a career in STEM or who they feel should be encouraged to do so. The feedback teachers have received from program participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

“Students really enjoyed participating in the Cornerstone STEM Connections program,” Stacey Hill, science department head at Doherty Memorial High School, said. “They get experience in a college science lab, and it provides exposure to the university and to Professor Murphy and other staff members.”

Through the program, students also get a chance to visit several locations around Worcester, like the Worcester Center for Crafts, where they study non-polluting ways to make art, and the city water filtration plant. “All of these opportunities and experiences are eye-opening for students,” Hill said. “And they also have a chance to meet and interact with students from other schools.”

Worcester Public Schools’ enrollment is about 23,700. Of this number 74% are low income, compared to the 48% state average. The district’s minority enrollment is nearing 70%. Lower than average scores on standardized tests in science and technology areas show a clear need for programs like Cornerstone STEM Connections that provide experiential learning



Photo by Nancy Sheehan



Students from Worcester Public Schools visited the greenhouse on the fifth floor of Worcester State’s Ghosh Science and Technology Building as part of a tour of campus during the Cornerstone STEM Connections program, supported by Cornerstone Bank.

“This program gives us an opportunity to invest in the community, to invest in Worcester State, and also to invest in the younger generation.”

—Todd Tallman, Cornerstone CEO

opportunities for a diverse group of students, according to Dr. Murphy. The program is designed to encourage them to consider STEM careers and to help students, especially first-generation students, begin to feel comfortable on a college campus.

Perhaps most importantly, program organizers ensure that the students have a positive experience. “We try to guarantee that they have fun while they’re here,” Dr. Murphy said. “We go to the dining hall for lunch, which they really like, and I come around with candy at 2 o’clock in the afternoon to give them a boost. We have two Worcester State student helpers who talk with them and get to know them, so we really try to get them to begin to see themselves on a college campus.”

From Cornerstone’s perspective, Tallman said giving students access to a STEM learning program is not only a great opportunity for the participants but something that benefits the community as well. “Maybe it will lead to a new path for them, and maybe it isn’t science. Maybe it’s more math, which from a banking perspective is more in keeping with what we do,” he said. “But it’s important to give students who might not otherwise have that access the chance to see a lot of different things and find out what works for them. And, ultimately, if we can be a part of that, that’s fantastic.”

Bringing the campus together

NEW GIFT SUPPORTS PRESIDENTIAL LECTURE SERIES TO HOST DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS ON CAMPUS | BY NANCY SHEEHAN

John Connolly '62, EdD, says he always appreciated what his Worcester State education did for him. Now, he's returning the favor with a gift that creates a first-of-its-kind academic enrichment program for the Worcester State community.

A CEO and chairman of several successful companies and a former college president, Connolly recently made a gift to support a new Presidential Lecture Series that each year will bring distinguished speakers to campus to address a variety of contemporary topics. The gift also commemorates Connolly's late wife, Ingrid, to whom he was married for 57 years.

The idea for a lecture series came about through discussions with President Barry M. Maloney and Tom McNamara, vice president for University Advancement, Connolly said. "I always appreciated the opportunity Worcester State gave me, and we all thought a lecture series would bring the campus community together over an interesting event and a prominent speaker."

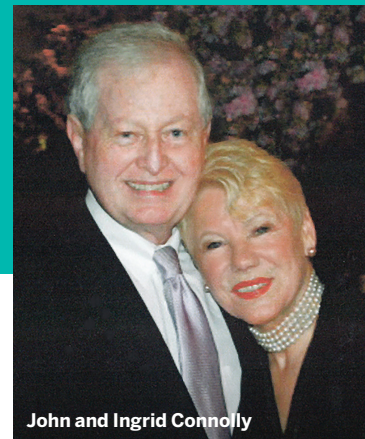
Maloney says the series will have a positive impact on the campus and beyond. "John is a great role model, and we appreciate his commitment to Worcester State," he said. "This series will bring important speakers to campus which will not only benefit students, faculty, and staff, but also bring greater recognition to the university in the broader community as well."

After graduating from Worcester State, Connolly earned a master's degree in counseling and guidance from the University of Connecticut, then worked in Worcester Public Schools as a teacher and guidance counselor for several years.

Connolly eventually furthered his education at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he received a doctor of education degree. "It was all because Worcester State gave me a very solid education, so that when I would take an admissions exam of any kind, I would crush it," he said.

“I always appreciated the opportunity Worcester State gave me, and we all thought a lecture series would bring the campus community together over an interesting event and a prominent speaker.”

—John Connolly '62, EdD



John and Ingrid Connolly

Photo courtesy of John Connolly



He began a career in higher education in the late 1960s when the community college movement was gaining steam. "Community colleges were opening up one a week around the nation," he said. "I saw it as an interesting opportunity." His first job at that level was as director of admissions and registrar at Sullivan County Community College in New York, followed by stints at Mercer County and Harford community colleges. He then became president of Dutchess Community College in New York.

Later, Connolly was named president of New York Medical College, a tenure that saw his interests turn to business opportunities in the medical field. He became one of the nation's foremost experts on identifying top physicians as co-founder and CEO of Castle Connolly Medical, publisher of America's Top Doctors and other consumer guides to help people find the best health care. He and his partner, John Castle, sold that company in 2018 and, with Dr. Dean McElwain, co-founded Castle Connolly Private Health Partners, LLC, a concierge medical company. This fall, Connolly will launch a new medical consulting company, Accel Medical Advisors, LLC.

Connolly says that when he entered Worcester State, he had no idea that he would achieve such a high degree of success in business and education. "I didn't really apply myself in high school very well," he said. "I was fortunate to get into Worcester State and, when I did, I thought, 'Here, I have an opportunity, and I had better take advantage of it. I better work hard and do well,' which I did." He says he would encourage any student to do the same. "It's important for them to strive to get the best grades possible and learn as much as possible in every subject they're taking," he said. "And then stay open to opportunities, be flexible, and be willing to take risks on potentially exciting new careers, and just continue working hard."

Those are lessons Connolly learned at Worcester State, and he still lives by them today.

"I'm 83, and I still work at least half time," he said. "I don't know what I would do if I didn't work. I only play golf three days a week, so I work the rest of the time," he said, with a laugh. "It keeps me motivated and invigorated and, hopefully, helps me to stay young."

Nurturing spiritual life

CAMPUS MINISTRY FUND SUPPORTS PRAYER AND MEDITATION LOUNGE | BY REBECCA CROSS

In 2022 Barbara Kirklauskas '64 read a newspaper article about the high rate of suicide among college students since the COVID-19 pandemic started. "That bothered me," she said.

She called Tom McNamara, vice president of University Advancement, and asked what resources the university had for students who were struggling. Though the university had in place several mental health services, there was one area where Barbara, a devout Catholic, saw a need—something that would nurture students' spiritual lives.

At one time, there had been a building on campus where students met for services and meals, but it had been closed to students because the building was not wheelchair accessible. Students were instead worshipping in dormitories. Barbara hoped to create a space on campus where students of all faiths—or no faith—could come together to talk, pray, meditate, or just have a moment of quiet. "If they're not happy or away from their family or there's something happening in their life that they can't handle, this would be a place they can go to," she said.

She donated funds to create the Campus Ministry Prayer and Meditation Lounge, an all-inclusive space for anyone who wants a quiet space, located in a large, airy room in the Learning Resource Center. The room has several different seating areas where students may hold discussions and a smaller space partitioned off from the rest of the room that is reserved for quiet prayer and meditation. The space is open late and can be reserved—at no cost—for functions.

With Barbara's contribution, the university was able to purchase furniture, artwork, books, and prayer mats for the space and is able to keep a supply of coffee and water on hand. The contribution also allows the university to pay for



programs and other supplies students might need and to offer a stipend to guest speakers.

Since the lounge opened in November, students have made good use of it. They have used the space to hold small meetings, study, pray, or simply hang out between classes. Some of the university's student organizations have held scriptural studies there as well.

And it is only going to continue to grow. The university is working to get a liaison to help grow the center and develop a calendar of events. "Our goal is to grow it so large, we grow out of the space," said Susan Vigeant, staff assistant in University Advancement, who has been involved with the project from the beginning.

"We are so thankful for the generous donation provided by Mrs. Kirklauskas," said Kiristie McNamara, director of the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership Development. "With the funding, we are hoping to expand our spiritual life offerings by providing more resources for the prayer and meditation lounge, spiritual programming, and by connecting the university to local houses of worship in the Worcester community."

This is Barbara's dream as well. She hopes one day soon the university will have a building dedicated to campus ministries, with enough space to hold large gatherings such as retreats, communal meals, concerts, and movies, and a dedicated staff to help students in times of crisis. She also hopes that, through Worcester State's Campus Ministries program, students will be able to do projects and activities that connect them with the greater Worcester community.

For the 2023-24 academic year, the space will be renamed the Spiritual Life Prayer and Meditation Lounge, and the university will host an open house during Welcome Week to reintroduce the space to campus.



"This program is as elemental as it gets. You've got to have food in your belly in order to think."

—David Bedard '74

students to donate guest meal passes that can be used in the student hall. During the 2022-23 academic year, 1,573 meal swipes were donated by students to students.

Still, there are Worcester State students who are going without meals. That's where the new Bedard Family Meal Plan Support Fund comes in. The fund provides an annual stipend of \$1,500 that will be incrementally disbursed to support the greatest number of students throughout the year and will provide on-demand nutritional support to students throughout the academic year.

Alumnus and Foundation Board member David Bedard '74 and his wife, Linda, have supported individual Worcester State students for years through the Bedard Family Scholarships, and they wanted to find a way to help even more students who needed essentials.

David grew up in a housing project and understands struggling to afford the basics. He realizes that going to college is a stretch for many students, and some may go without food to pay their tuition. "This program is as elemental as it gets," he said. "You've got to have food in your belly in order to think."

"There's a time for learning, a time for earning, and a time for returning," he added. "We're at a point in life that I can't imagine going hungry." So, this is his time, he says, to support others.

Worcester State is committed to fighting hunger on campus. It has recently received a \$75,000 Hunger Free Campus Initiative grant from the state of Massachusetts, which will support an 18-month effort to strategically address food insecurity on campus by exploring ways to provide for students' immediate need for food while also developing long-term solutions.

Bedard hopes others will be inspired to donate more funds to similar programs. "We want it to grow and grow because the need is great. I would encourage others to make a difference at a very basic level, to nourish students physically so they can function mentally and get out there and change the world."

Healthy meals for all students

GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE MEALS FOR STUDENTS GETS BOOST FROM DONOR

BY REBECCA CROSS

Imagine having to choose between your rent and eating. With the rising costs of housing, gas, and food, that's exactly the choice many college students are facing.

Worcester State students are not immune to food insecurity. A Worcester State Urban Action Institute self-study conducted before the pandemic revealed that close to a third of the university's students struggle with hunger.

To combat this, in 2019, the Urban Action Institute, along with Student Affairs, Enactus, the Urban Studies Club, and a group of students, opened Thea's Pantry, an on-campus food pantry funded by individual donations that allows students, faculty, staff, and alumni to take home up to 35 pounds of food each week. In the same year, students in the Urban Studies Club started a Swipe It Forward campaign, which allowed

Expanding counseling services

WITH DONOR GIFT, STUDENTS RECEIVE CRITICAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT | BY DEBORAH ALVAREZ O'NEIL

Each year, hundreds of Worcester State students come together for a daylong mental health fair that promotes awareness, suicide prevention, de-stigmatization, and an opportunity to explore a variety of supportive services in a positive and uplifting environment.

“The goal is to create an atmosphere of emotional well-being while decreasing stigma around help seeking,” said Julie Glovin, mental health outreach manager and assistant director of counseling services. “We hope that students will see that the campus cares about their emotional health and well-being.”

The event, Fresh Check Day, is the university’s largest mental health outreach event of the year, taking up three floors of the Student Center and featuring upward of 18 student- and staff-run booths with a variety of activities. The event is made possible through support from Digital Federal Credit Union (DCU). With DCU funds, the university is able to purchase all of the materials, prizes, and giveaways that make the event such a huge draw for students.

“This is the most important outreach event of the year for student mental health services,” said Laura Murphy, Worcester State’s associate dean of health and wellness and director of counseling. “If we didn’t have DCU funds, we wouldn’t be able to do it. The benefit is that we are able to educate a large number of students. We have faculty who send their entire classes to Fresh Check Day. We are so grateful to have the support we need to continue this event, especially at a time when mental health services are so needed on campus.”

Even before the pandemic, college students were facing growing mental health challenges. A 2023 Healthy Minds Study showed that 79% of Worcester State students felt that emotional or mental difficulties had hurt their academic performance. A 2022 national Gallup poll showed that emotional stress has impacted college students’ ability to stay in college: nearly a third of students have considered dropping out.

Worcester State’s Counseling Services has been able to expand its support for students through gifts like the DCU’s, as well as grants from the state, including \$142,000 from the Department of Higher Education

that funded the launch of the pilot program ResilientU@WooState in November 2022. The ResilientU program, which offers a 24/7 mental health support line, telehealth counseling, psychiatry, and a host of online wellness resources, will continue through fall 2023.

Now entering its ninth year, Fresh Check Day is scheduled for October 25, 2023, at Worcester State. Founded by the Jordan Porco Foundation, the national event has been added to the the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s new Best Practices Registry.

Support for initiatives like Fresh Check Day aligns with DCU’s philanthropic approach, says Foundation Manager Maureen Spaulding. Along with the event, DCU’s gift to the university supports a variety of academic enrichment and student well-being initiatives on campus, including the Worcester State Teaching Garden, Thea’s Pantry, and the Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice.

“DCU has three core principles. People come first. Do the right thing, and Make a difference,” she said. “We ask those questions: Who is that person, and where is the greatest need? That’s how we’d most like to see our funding being allocated to help individuals. The goal is to make a true impact for the Worcester State student population.”

“We hope that students will see that the campus cares about their emotional health and well-being.”

—Julie Glovin, assistant director of Counseling Services



freshcheckday
checkin'-in with college students

FY 2022-23

Worcester State Foundation

The Worcester State Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization that promotes the growth and progress of Worcester State University through philanthropy. With the support of generous donors and grant funders, the Foundation had a record-setting year for fundraising. Here are highlights from the fiscal year June 30, 2022 - July 1, 2023.



from **3,255** total donors who gave **\$1.86 million** for scholarships and awards

\$354,563 for unrestricted support and **\$7.65 million** for other university priorities

The Foundation provided the university with nearly **\$2.5 million** including **\$1.04 million** in direct student aid

23 new funds created by donors

University receives \$3.3 million in grants

Here are highlights from some new FY 2022-23 grants

Expanding Nursing Workforce \$1 million

from the Baker-Polito Administration



This grant will enable Worcester State to strengthen the region's nursing talent pipeline, improve career pathways for the nursing profession, and build on the university's academic partnership with Quinsigamond Community College for seamless RN to BSN transfer.



Higher Education Innovation \$56,000

from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

This grant to the university's Academic Affairs Department will support the WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, and Supportive Environments) initiative which fosters advanced career development opportunities for BIPOC/ALANA graduate students on a path toward university teaching through the establishment of a Distinguished Graduate Fellows Program.



Research on Mentoring Relationships \$214,641

from the National Science Foundation

This grant, awarded to the Department of Urban Studies, will advance the knowledge of how mentoring relationship heterogeneity influences the developmental outcomes of undergraduate students. It is an REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) grant that provides support for undergraduate students to participate in research as part of a new or ongoing NSF-funded research project.



Career and Technical Student Support \$60,000

from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

This grant to the Department of Health Sciences will support work with HOSA-Future Health Professionals, which works with more than 300 career and technical high school students across the state to help them prepare for success after high school.



Hunger-Free Campus Initiative \$75,000

from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

This grant to the Urban Action Institute in the Department of Urban Studies will support an 18-month effort to strategically address food insecurity at Worcester State using a multi-pronged approach to provide for students' immediate need for affordable fresh food while also developing long-term solutions for equitable access to healthier and more affordable food for all students.

Behavioral Mental Health \$141,655

from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education



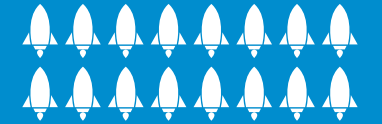
This grant, which was part of the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds given to the state, supports the launch of the new pilot program Resilient U, which offers a 24/7 mental health support line, telehealth counseling, psychiatry, and a host of online wellness resources.



Star Formation Research \$256,600

from the Universities Space Research Association

This federal grant to Dr. Ian Stephens in the Department of Earth, Environment, and Physics continues support for his ongoing research on star formation with the SOFIA telescope, the only telescope in the world that can make observations in the far infrared.



Early College Worcester \$160,000

from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

This grant to Enrollment Management provides additional support for the Early College Worcester program, which provides free college classes, college preparatory workshops, and wraparound support to thousands of Worcester Public Schools students.



Latino Education Institute \$792,664

in grants from Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Fred Harris Daniels Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, UMass Medical School Foundation, United Way of Central Massachusetts, Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives, City of Worcester, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

New grants this year will support a variety of projects including a wellness program for BIPOC girls ages 10-14 and a healing gardens project for Latino/BIPOC youth.

Summer research opportunity

ROSEN CANCER AWARENESS FUND PROVIDES UNDERGRADUATES WITH VALUABLE BIOLOGY LAB SKILLS | BY NANCY SHEEHAN

The work of two Worcester State researchers may someday help lead to a new “twist” in cancer treatment, thanks to a grant from the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund.

Jennifer Hood-DeGrenier, PhD, Biology Department chair, and student researcher Aspen Zheng '24 are studying how a protein scientists call TWIST1 promotes metastasis, the process by which secondary tumors form by dispersal throughout the body of cancer cells from a primary tumor. Metastasis is responsible for most cancer deaths.

“Those are cells that separate from the primary tumor, then go through the body, and they have the potential to found new tumors,” Hood-DeGrenier said. “It’s a much more difficult situation if you have many targets that you have to deal with as opposed to a single tumor.”

Hood-DeGrenier and Zheng are trying to understand what is involved in the process of metastasis and how TWIST1 causes cancer cells to

be able to move around the body. If the triggers that cause tumor-cell migration, including TWIST1, are better understood, then it may be possible someday to prevent metastasis from getting worse, or even happening at all.

“There potentially could be an anti-TWIST drug that could be a tool for treating metastatic cancer, or even pre-metastatic cancer so that it doesn’t get to that point,” Hood-DeGrenier said.

Zheng is directly involved in all the experiments, which will serve to sharpen her lab skills and help her reach her career goal of becoming a physician. “Aspen will unquestionably learn a lot of things about cancer biology that will be applicable if she pursues her current plan to attend medical school,” Hood-DeGrenier said. “And she also will gain valuable skills that will help her obtain a lab research job during the gap year when she is applying to medical schools.”

While the project aligns with Zheng’s long-term plans, it also provides a more immediate benefit for her as a paid part-time summer job. “I need to earn money over the summer, but, as an international student, it’s very hard for me to find research opportunities off campus because a lot of them are only available to students who have citizenship or a green card, and I don’t have either,” she said. “So, I just feel really grateful for this opportunity.”

Other Worcester State students will also benefit from the research because Hood-DeGrenier will use parts of the project as lab activities in a cancer biology elective course. “We will be trying out some new things in

“I feel like I’m doing something really meaningful. I’m learning something new almost every day, and it feels great.”

—Aspen Zheng '24



Photos by Matt Wright '10

Aspen Zheng '24 (left) spent the summer working closely with professor Jennifer Hood-DeGrenier (right) researching the process of metastasis, which is responsible for most cancer deaths. They are the recipients of the first summer research grant from the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund, established by alumni couple Gregg Rosen '86 and Pam Rosen '87.



the course lab work to expose more students to more of these techniques,” she said. “There are a lot of different techniques involved that are very basic to almost any kind of cell biology research.”

The Rosen summer research grant is part of a larger gift from alumni couple Gregg Rosen '86 and Pam Rosen '87 that supports cancer education, outreach, and awareness initiatives on campus. The Rosens created the fund after Gregg was diagnosed in 2020 with non-Hodgkin’s follicular lymphoma.

The grant includes \$3,000 for research supplies, which is critical to the project. “It allows us to buy the things we need because, unfortunately, this type of research is pretty expensive, even on a small scale,” Hood-DeGrenier said. “One of our experiments uses three different antibodies and each of those is over \$300. For big research organizations, that’s nothing. But for us here, that’s a lot of money, and the grant covers that. We absolutely couldn’t do it otherwise.”

Zheng says she finds the project especially important. “I feel like I’m doing something really meaningful,” she said. “I have done research before, but cancer research involves a lot of different techniques. I’m learning something new almost every day, and it feels great.”

Hood-DeGrenier plans to present findings from the project at an American Society for Cell Biology conference in Boston in December with funding from the Worcester State Foundation. The conference has an undergraduate poster presentation that they hope Aspen can participate in as well.

After a pandemic-forced hiatus, Hood-DeGrenier says lab research is finally getting back to normal, a welcome development for faculty and students. “I’ve been really happy this summer to get back into the lab and to work with Aspen,” she said. “I realize that the research we do here is just a tiny drop in the bucket, but for our students it’s transformational.”

Learning beyond the classroom

STIPENDS, GRANTS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR STUDENTS TO GAIN REAL-WORLD SKILLS THROUGH INTERNSHIPS AND RESEARCH | **BY REBECCA CROSS**

Worcester State is preparing its students for the real world through a variety of experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning “rounds out a college education in ways that are immediate and impactful but also prepares students for life after,” said Provost Lois Wims. Many times an internship leads directly to a job, she added. The employer is impressed by the student and hires them as soon as they graduate.

Associate Professor Weichu Xu has been providing experiential learning opportunities to students since 2016. He also sees how important these opportunities are for students’ future careers, as they gain knowledge and develop teamwork skills working with other students and interacting with other departments. “These are skills they need when they move on to further education or go into an industry,” he said.

Unfortunately, many experiential learning opportunities are unpaid, which places them out of reach for some students, especially when the time commitment would make working a paid job impossible. To relieve this hardship and make these experiences more accessible to a wider range of students, the university offers a number of donor-supported scholarships and grants specifically for experiential learning.

The Summer Undergraduate Research Grant was established in 2020 through a bequest from Lt. Col. James F. Sheehan ’55 and gives motivated students the chance to gain skills and learn advanced research methodology. Students who participate often receive co-authorship credit on research papers and/or present their research at a conference.

In 2022, Worcester State alumna Diane Aramony established a stipend for education majors. Student teaching experiences are required for education majors, and they are unpaid. The many hours involved in teaching and lesson planning make working a paid job extremely challenging. The \$500 stipend reduces some of the financial burden these students face.

“I’m very happy that this stipend can assist student teachers during this critical phase of their training,” Aramony said. “I applaud Worcester State for providing the opportunity to support student teachers in this way.”

The Experiential Learning Stipend provides \$500 stipends for students participating in unpaid, credit-bearing experiential learning experiences, such as internships, research, etc. All funding for the stipend comes from unrestricted funds of the Worcester State Foundation. Students might use the award toward a student loan, tuition for an upcoming semester, personal items, research projects, or teaching materials.

The fund was offered for the first time in fall 2020. “We had an incredible response from students,” said Louise Taylor, director of gift planning and scholarships in University Advancement. In fall 2022, the Worcester State Foundation committed \$30,000 to support up to 60 students. Since the stipend’s inception, the university has awarded \$97,000 to students.

Still, there are more applicants than there are funds to support them.

“I greatly appreciate even having the opportunity to receive this stipend. It is so special to have worked so hard these last few years of college, and it pays off in more ways than one.”

—Sydney Demers ’23



Photos by Nancy Sheehan

One of the students who benefitted from the stipend was Sydney Demers, who participated last fall in a project with Xu to develop a discovery-style learning approach in chemistry labs. “I greatly appreciate even having the opportunity to receive this stipend,” she said. “It is so special to have worked so hard these last few years of college, and it pays off in more ways than one.”

Another student who has worked with Xu on a project is biology major Emma Polak. “I learned so much both academically and professionally from my team, and those skills I learned then I still use today,” she said. “Having the opportunity to participate in independent research as a first-year student inspired me. I want to have a career doing research, and now I will be a published author on two research papers before my senior year. I know that is because of the opportunity here at Worcester State.”

Xu is looking forward to doing more projects with students. “Working with students, it’s not just getting the research done, it’s seeing how the student grows up and matures. It’s seeing their achievements and the positive impact on their lives,” he said. Many of the students who did research with him have gone on to PhD programs or gotten jobs in industry. “I feel happy for them and happy for myself as well.”



Top: With support from an experiential learning stipend, Sydney Demers ’23 worked to develop a discovery-style learning approach in Worcester State’s chemistry labs.

Bottom: Sydney Demers ’23 (right) and Ynhi Nguyen ’24 (left) at work in the chemistry lab.

Doing good for the next generation

LEGACY GIFTS ENSURE A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR WORCESTER STATE STUDENTS | BY REBECCA CROSS

Estate gifts are an easy way for an individual to support the University after their passing, leaving a legacy by which they will be remembered. Many people name Worcester State as a beneficiary in their wills, but some choose to do things a different way.

Dianne (Helow) '59 and Robert D. Payne have recently chosen to set up two charitable gift annuities. A charitable gift annuity involves a simple contract between the donor and Worcester State where the donor agrees to make a gift to Worcester State. In return, the University agrees to pay the donor or someone of their choosing a fixed amount each year for the rest of the donor's life. For Robert the gift was a sound financial decision. "This is an example of a win-win. It's a win for the University and a win for the donor," he said.

The Paynes have donated generously to the University for years, establishing the Dianne (Helow) '59 and Robert D. Payne Endowed Scholarship, which supports sophomores who are active and involved in campus activities at Worcester State.

"We're in a position where we can donate, and Worcester State was the first place that came to mind," Dianne said. "I love Worcester State. The people there do a wonderful job, and we want to support them."

The Paynes' gifts are among many planned gifts that the University has received in the last couple of years. Other recent gifts include a memorial scholarship from Susan R. (Marsh) Hall; the estate of Robert Mullin '53, MEd '56, which included his Manhattan apartment and its contents; and a charitable remainder trust from Anne L. (Brierly) Gordon '67. Estate gifts may be used by the University to support academic programs, scholarships, and research—whatever the donor specifies in their will.



Photo courtesy of Dianne and Robert Payne

“I love Worcester State. The people there do a wonderful job, and we want to support them.”

—Dianne (Helow) Payne '59



Photo by Matt Wright '10

It is a common misconception that only wealthy people make planned gifts. Robert said that certainly there are donors who might set up a trust with \$100,000, but “you don’t have to do it at that kind of size.” A trust can be set up with \$10,000.

“It comes to the point that you have to do some good with the money that you have, and Worcester State certainly deserves it,” Dianne said. “I trust our donation will be used in the best way possible.”

If you are interested in learning how you can create a charitable gift annuity or other planned gift, please contact Louise Taylor, director of gift planning and scholarships in University Advancement, at ltaylor@worchester.edu or 508-929-8033.

Left: Dianne (Helow) '59 and Robert D. Payne have recently chosen to set up charitable gift annuities at Worcester State.

Above: Students from the Class of 2023 at the May Commencement Ceremony

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Funds created in the last fiscal year are green and marked with an *

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 The Jacob and Laeh '42 and Gail '68 Aframe Scholarship
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 The Elizabeth Lenk Andronikos Scholarship
 The Diane Aramony Student Teacher Stipend *
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 The Dr. Janelle C. Ashley Presidential Initiative
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 The Bedard Family Endowed Scholarship for Business Entrepreneurs
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 The Promila Bhan Scholarship

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 The Honorable John J. Binienda Center for Civic Engagement
 The Bisk Mathematics Teaching Award *
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 The Brissette Family Endowed Fund for Athletics
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 The Elizabeth W. Carver Memorial Scholarship
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 The Central Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association Spirit of Service Award for Criminal Justice
 The Dr. Stephanie Chalupka Fund for Public Health Nursing Research and Innovation
 The Lucy Chand Nursing Scholarship

The John and Priscilla Charron Memorial Scholarship
 The Father Roland Chenier Memorial Scholarship
 The Class of '52 Emerging Leaders Lecture Series
 The Class of 1952 Endowed Academic Achievement Award
 The Class of 1953 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1954 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1958 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1960 Memorial Scholarship
 The Class of 1961 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1962 Memorial Scholarship
 The Class of 1963 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1964 Scholarship
 The Class of 1965 Memorial Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1966 Scholarship
 The Class of 1967 Endowed Scholarship
 The Class of 1968 Scholarship
 The Class of 1969 Endowed Scholarship
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