

Westfield Engages strengthens, expands and celebrates our civic learning and engagement activities and community service opportunities for our campus community. It is a powerful way for the university to engage, transform, and foster mutually beneficial relationships with our local, regional, national, and global neighbors.



COLLECTING PLASTIC TO SAVE THE ECOSYSTEM

“This research project gave me the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the field.”

— Caleb Alvord '16

During the spring semester, two students of Westfield State University environmental science Professor Michael Vorwerk, Ph.D., researched how much plastic is being released into the Connecticut River via the Westfield River Watershed.

Vorwerk's students, Caleb Alvord '16 and Ryan Abbott '16, are conducting research locally to document the impact of this cycle on the environment. They were literally counting plastic trash they found in the Westfield River because the trash gets eaten by microorganisms that mistake it for food—which ends up harming marine ecosystems.

“When it gets out into the ocean, the microorganisms eat these plastic bits and their guts get so full of plastic they can't really eat anymore,” Vorwerk said. “The ecosystem will crash because they're at the bottom of the food chain.”



While plastic found in a marine ecosystem is a fairly new topic, those found in a freshwater ecosystem is even newer.

“Our research project was basically to create a method for measuring the number of plastic pollutants that are being released into the aquatic environment at the watershed level before they enter into major aquatic areas,” said Alvord, a junior environmental science and geography and regional planning major.

Alvord and Abbott came up with interesting approaches to collecting their data, including taking a canoe ride up and down the Westfield River to view and count the plastic litter in the water.

“It’s cool to see their creativity by coming up with the idea and then sorting out the bits and pieces of how to do it,” Vorwerk said.

For Alvord, having that chance will benefit him in many ways.

“This research project gave me the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the field. We collected and analyzed our own data as well as created a professional presentation,” he said.

The opportunity for students to share their findings demonstrates that their work “at a relatively small liberal arts public school is as good as anybody else’s you see out there,” Vorwerk said.

Alvord and Ryan presented their research at the 21st Annual Undergraduate Research Conference in April at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. ■



“To them, the sight of food after falling asleep on an empty stomach was like seeing angels descend from heaven,” Bottass said. “It was so moving.”

Dr. Scanlon said she was proud of how her students handled themselves, both on a personal and professional basis.

“The highlight of my trip was to experience and witness the interactions of the students with the community members of Guatemala,” Dr. Scanlon said. “To see students smile, laugh, or cry at the work and care they were giving to another human being of a different culture and country was priceless.”

able to lay the foundation for three new classrooms and build a technology classroom in a new high school, as well as build a community center.

Students were asked to raise \$300 each to pay for building supplies, but Patrick Bartel ’15 of Groton, Mass. decided to increase the amount and collected \$1,250. Bartel, who completed the Nicaragua course in 2013, returned this year as a student leader.

“When I first traveled to Nicaragua, I was embraced by the community we worked in and I felt completely welcome,” Bartel said. “I just wanted to help out again.”

Westfield State students also worked with a local construction crew to revamp the water system in the

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— Patrick Bartel ’15

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE IS A WESTFIELD STATE TRADITION

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— Apple Bottass ’16

In Guatemala

For the second consecutive year, 15 Westfield State University students and two faculty members traveled to Santa Maria de Jesus, Guatemala during spring as part of their nursing studies.

“It was a life changing experience,” said Marcia Scanlon, DNP, assistant professor of nursing and allied health. “The students learned to appreciate a different culture and become leaders for social justice.”

Dr. Catherine Johnson, assistant professor of nursing and allied health, said students paid out of pocket for travel expenses and raised money for supplies, including water filters, for the people of Guatemala.

While in Guatemala, students built wheelchairs for two children with physical and intellectual challenges, and constructed a house for a family.

With money they raised, students provided and served 400 children a protein meal for lunch, delivered sandwiches and fruit to the local homeless population, cared for infants and donated money to the infant malnutrition center. The students walked to a remote village to deliver water filters and taught the residents how to properly use them.

In addition, students visited a daycare of 100 children and donated arts and crafts and school supplies to the center. While there, students balanced their time between participating in art projects and teaching the children how to use toothbrushes and other basic health skills.

Nursing student Apple Bottass ’16 of Tolland, Mass. who acted as a translator, said traveling to Guatemala made her appreciate everything she had a little more, especially after delivering meals to a homeless man and his wife at night.

In Nicaragua

For the fifth consecutive year, 17 Westfield State University students cut their winter breaks short to travel to Granada, Nicaragua to assist La Esperanza Granada, a local nonprofit that focuses on improving children’s education and aids more than 2,000 children in poverty-stricken areas. Alumni Director, Kathi Bradford and Westfield State alumna, Kelli Nielsen ’04 led the global service learning course.

In the five years that Westfield State has traveled to Nicaragua, students have raised more than \$30,000 for the organization. With that money, and help from student and faculty volunteers, the groups were



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— Drew Belskey '15



elementary schools. One member of the Nicaraguan crew, Mario, was so dedicated to the project that he would often sleep at the work site to ensure that the supplies weren't stolen.

Student Drew Belskey '15 of Wilbraham, noticed that Mario's bike, his main form of transportation, was worn down and in rough shape.

“I just saw a man who was in need and wanted to do what I could to help him,” Belskey said.

After he discovered the bike was beyond repair, he teamed up with the rest of the class and pooled their money to purchase a new bike for Mario. The students presented him with the bike the day before their departure and he was speechless.

“I could see the water building up in his eyes, which made my eyes start to water as well,” Belskey said. “It was a great feeling.”

Belskey said he was happy to give back to a man that taught him to appreciate his surroundings.

“I now appreciate so much that we take for granted,” Belskey said. “While I was helping those around me in Nicaragua, as I returned to the United States I realized that they helped me just as much.”

Course leader Kathi Bradford said that after completing the class, students often develop new perspectives and sometimes change majors or career paths.

“Helping students find their inner beliefs about service, global awareness, and passion to help is a priceless benefit of this incredible work,” said Bradford. ■

In Puerto Rico

Nine Westfield State University education majors and two faculty members traveled to San Juan, Puerto Rico during winter break as part of a short-term study abroad course.

The “Civic Engagement and Language Immersion in Puerto Rico,” course focused heavily on the connections between Puerto Rico and Western Massachusetts. During the course, students had the opportunity to more fully appreciate the culture of Puerto Rico, the history of the territory, and its influence upon and connection to western Massachusetts.

The program, led by education department professor Wilma Ortiz and instructor Robin Marion, was intended to provide students with the opportunity to be part of Puerto Rican daily life and culture.

“These soon-to-be teachers must learn to appreciate cultural differences and how these differences can enrich our lives, as well as the classroom,” Ortiz said.

Matthew Campagna '17, a special education major with a concentration in reading, from Springfield, Mass., felt comfortable visiting the territory and picking up the language.

“I thoroughly enjoyed learning Spanish and then using it with the people there,” he said.

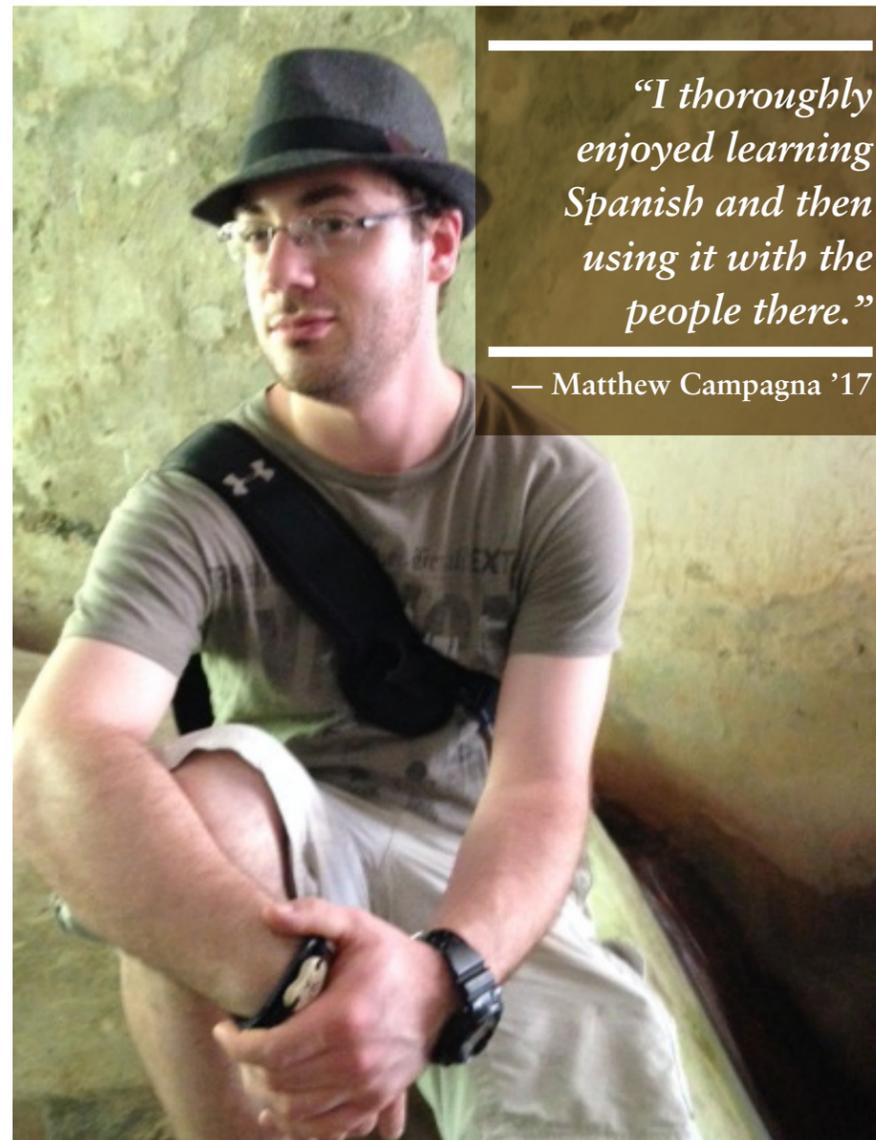
Both instructors believe that civic engagement courses, studies that align curriculum with the public good, are essential because they provide students with an authentic element that cannot be found in a traditional education classroom.

Marion said that she and Ortiz wanted students to “develop new insights into their own identity and better understand how personal experiences and assumptions shape their worldview.” ■



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VOLUNTEERS WALK ALL NIGHT FOR RELAY FOR LIFE

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— Beth Teague '15,
Co-President,
Relay for Life Club



In April, hundreds of students and volunteers at Westfield State University pulled an all-nighter to raise money at the Second Annual Relay for Life at the Woodward Center's indoor track. The Relay for Life event gives communities a chance to celebrate the lives of people who have battled cancer, remember loved ones lost, and fight back against the disease.

Beth Teague '15 and Brenna Closius '15, co-presidents of the Relay for Life Club, organized this second Relay for Life event on the Westfield State campus. The 61 teams and 496 participants have raised over \$38,000 so far, with a goal of raising \$55,000. All donations will be given to the American Cancer Society for research and treatments. Donations are being accepted online until the end of August at www.relayforlife.org/wsuma.

The Relay for Life event at Westfield State was a 13-hour overnight event. Groups of people registered for the event as “teams” and raised money before the event took place. During the event, team

members walked the track, supported each other, and also participated in games, raffles, live entertainment, food, and themed laps.

“The generosity of our community here, as well as our home communities, astounds me,” said Teague, president of the Relay for Life Club. Teague has volunteered for numerous Relay for Life events during the past decade and brought the iconic fundraiser to Westfield State last year.

Relay for Life is the main volunteer-driven cancer fundraising event of the American Cancer Society. Created in the United States, the event has spread to 21 countries. Relay for Life events are held in local parks, colleges and universities, and military bases, with all proceeds donated to cancer research and for improving the lives of people living with cancer.

Each year, more than 4 million volunteers in over 21 countries take part raising funds and awareness to save lives affected by cancer. Relay for Life events have raised nearly \$5 billion to date. ■

SAVING ELEPHANTS IN THAILAND

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— Tony Kopacz '14



Westfield State biology graduate, Tony Kopacz '14, spent time last summer volunteering for The Surin Project in northeastern Thailand. This new and innovative project focuses on finding solutions to the challenges faced by captive elephants and their keepers, called *mahouts*.

Kopacz volunteered with the project whose mission is improving the living conditions of captive Asian elephants and providing sustainable economic revenue for their mahouts in the local community.

Many elephant owners in Thailand struggle to make a living with their elephants and sadly must resort to taking their elephants to the streets of large cities to beg for money to survive. With The Surin Project providing an alternative form of employment, mahouts have the opportunity to afford better living conditions and allow more freedom for their elephants.

Located in the small village of Baan Tha Klang in Surin province, the Elephant Study Center subsidizes nearly 200 mahouts and their elephants to live in the center, thus avoiding their need to beg for money in Bangkok.

The living conditions of the elephants at the Center are shifting away from elephants being shackled

all day long with little or nothing more to do than to stand in the sun. The Surin Project helps improve their living conditions and give these captive elephants the opportunity to roam free and behave naturally.

“The volunteers clean elephant enclosures, take elephants for walks in the forests, feed and bath the elephants in the river, and plant sugarcane and other crops for elephants to eat,” said Kopacz.

Kopacz worked with the mahouts and provided them with the tools to adapt their husbandry methods to be more considerate of the elephants' welfare.

“For example, elephant riding is very common in the region,” said Kopacz, “However, this is extremely bad for the elephant's spine and can lead to many issues over the course of their life.”

Returning from his volunteer mission with the elephants, Kopacz says he wants to raise awareness about the current living conditions of the elephants in Thailand and improve their life in captivity.

To support their effort, Kopacz invites you to visit The Surin Project website at: www.surinproject.org ■

MONGOOSE RESEARCH TO PROTECT SEA TURTLES IN ST. CROIX

“Mongoose are a threat to sea turtles. They have an especially serious impact on hawksbill and green sea turtle nests.”

— Buzz Hoagland, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair,
Biology Department



“Mongoose long ago captured my intellectual heart, and continue to do so,” says Donald “Buzz” Hoagland, chair of the biology department at Westfield State University. He became intrigued with mongoose as a University of Vermont student studying evolutionary biology, and has studied the animal ever since.

The mongoose is a carnivorous mammal. Native to South Asia and Africa, it was introduced into the Virgin Islands in the 1800’s to control rat populations on sugar plantations. Though the mongoose adapted very well to the islands, the eradication of rats was not successful as mongoose hunt during the day and the rats come out at night. The mongoose proliferation has caused harm to island’s inhabitants as they feed on snakes, birds, bird’s eggs and turtle hatchlings.

In recent years, Hoagland and Westfield State students have been capturing and electronically tagging mongooses on the Caribbean island of St. Croix. The mongooses have been captured, released, and studied on Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge (SPNWR), a protected area for its leatherback, loggerhead, and hawksbill sea turtle nesting beaches.

Hoagland’s research seeks to provide mongoose movement data that will answer questions about basic mongoose biology. These data will then be used for the development of comprehensive mongoose management plans for SPNWR and other turtle nesting beaches on St. Croix and additional Caribbean islands inhabited by mongoose, and will insure the continued survival of sea turtle populations.



“Mongoose are a threat to sea turtles,” he says. “They have an especially serious impact on hawksbill and green sea turtle nests.”

Many organizations have invested heavily in sea turtle conservation and restoration. Hoagland’s research involves better understanding mongoose—how they move, how they use habitat, their sex and age ratios, their habits. This information can help inform conservationists in protecting sea turtles.

“At Sandy Point, you could build a barrier like a moat to protect the nesting beach,” says Hoagland. “This species of mongoose does not go in water.” However, Hoagland also points out that it’s a mistake to view sea turtle conservation in isolation.

“Yes, mongoose are a threat,” he says. “So are boat collisions, pollution, plastics, and other factors. There are a lot of things behind the demise of sea turtles.”

Hoagland doesn’t believe the mongoose can be eradicated, so continuing to develop new methods to mitigate their impacts will be essential.

“There’s still a lot we don’t know,” he says. “We just keep discovering new things about them.”

Hoagland encourages an approach that looks at the animal as part of current island ecology rather than a menacing predator. He maintains this will offer a better way of living with these animals and a better way for conservation. He also says mongooses are not the biggest threat to the sea turtles.

“Habitat destruction is far more important for conservation. Invasive species are not the biggest threat humanity faces,” says Hoagland. “An adaptable, non-native species makes a convenient scapegoat. As a species, humans look for scapegoats, instead of looking at ourselves.” ■

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Justin Connolly '16, Mr. Westfield 2015 and Mr. Congeniality



John & Patrick Bartel '15



Andrew Manchino '17



John Cubetus '17



Jeff Gruber '16



Dan Fullam '15



Miles Cipriano '18



Wayne Barnaby '17



Alex Veber '18



Nicholas Odell '15



Anthony Swenson '18



Nicholas Smarra '15

2015 MR. WESTFIELD PAGEANT GRANTS WISHES FOR CHILDREN

“It feels great knowing that everybody as a whole came together to help out such a great cause.”

— Dan Fullam '15

Westfield State held its fourth annual Mr. Westfield pageant in March to raise money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an organization that grants wishes for children with terminal illnesses. Make-A-Wish granted 14,000 wishes last year alone. On average, one wish is granted for a terminally ill child every 38 minutes. The foundation is sustained by donations, like the proceeds from Westfield State's 2015 Mr. Westfield pageant.

“The work Make-A-Wish does is so inspiring. To see the look on a child's face when he or she has their wish granted is beyond words,” said Class of 2015 President Richard Darrach. “We are just truly thankful for the outstanding support from the community and the opportunity to be a part of something this grand.”

Organized and hosted by the Class of 2015 and Class of 2017, the Mr. Westfield pageant consists of one male representative from each residential building on campus, as well as one representative from each class on campus. The student contestants, judged by a panel of Westfield State staff and faculty, participated in a number of categories that included talent, outfit of choice, question and answer, formal wear, and fundraising.

There were three winning categories at this year's pageant: Mr. Westfield 2015, who was the overall winner; Mr. Congeniality, who was chosen by the other contestants; and, Mr. Fundraiser, who raised the most money of all the contestants.

Justin Connolly '16 of Walpole, Mass., was crowned Mr. Westfield

2015 and Mr. Congeniality. “I was equally surprised and flattered for being chosen to win both of these titles. It was an honor to spend all this great time and make all these great memories with these great guys,” Connolly said.

Dan Fullam '15 of Braintree, Mass., who had previously competed in three Mr. Westfield pageants, was named Mr. Fundraiser 2015, after raising more than \$2,000 for this year's event. In total, over the past three years, Fullam has raised \$3,700 for Make-A-Wish Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

“It feels great knowing that everybody as a whole came together to help out such a great cause,” said Fullam. “I think part of me is still in shock at how much money we raised.”

This year's event raised \$12,500 through contestant fundraising,

sponsorship, ticket sales, concessions, and other donations. This amount surpassed the \$7,500 target, the average cost of one wish, the organizers had initially hoped to raise.

With an unexpected anonymous donation at the end of the event, Mr. Westfield's grand total fundraising amount was \$15,750, enough to grant two wishes through Make-A-Wish Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Since 2011, the Mr. Westfield pageant has raised a total of \$28,000 for Make-A-Wish Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and Westfield State University has raised approximately \$62,000 in total for the organization since 2006 through various fundraising efforts.

To learn more about Make-A-Wish and how you can help grant a child's wish, please visit <http://wish.org>. ■

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— Justin Connolly '16



In This Issue



Plastic **1**



International **2**



Relay for Life **6**



Elephants **7**



Mongoose **8**



Mr. Westfield **10**