

WOU'S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

Inaugural Issue



THIS ISSUE'S FEATURES

- *Welcome to New Faculty*
- *New LAS Staff Member*
- *Upcoming Events*
- *Be sure to "like" our new Facebook page!*
- *Dean's Web Page Message*
- *Text of Dean's Fall 2018 Address to LAS Faculty*
- *Note: WOU Calendar can now be found on LAS home page!*

FROM THE LAS DEAN

Happy New Year!

With apologies for the long delay in start-up, we are pleased to distribute the first issue of the WOU College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Newsletter. This is just the first of what we hope will grow into a robust method for sharing information about all the wonderful things that are happening in our college, from faculty and student accomplishments to upcoming and past events to profiles of some of our most interesting people, programs and opportunities. Please use the Google forms on the LAS home page to send informational content to the Dean's office for inclusion in future newsletters.



Message From
DEAN KATHLEEN
CASSITY

(REPRINTED FROM
LAS HOME PAGE)

I'm honored to serve as dean of WOU's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, where I lead an outstanding team of people who are committed to WOU's mission of creating "lasting opportunities for student success through transformative education and personalized support." Together we work toward the shared goal of serving our students, preparing them for a life that is successful in all respects—economically, civically and personally.

Here at WOU, curious people from many walks of life come together and learn in a range of settings, from classrooms to labs, studios, the library, theatre, service learning, internships and study abroad. Working collaboratively, you will learn not only from faculty but also from peers who hail from Oregon, other parts of the U.S.. and even the world. Under the guidance of learned professors who love what they do, you will become part of a vital and thriving community.

Today when we say "liberal arts," the phrase refers not to political leanings but to the original Latin root *liber*, meaning "to become free." The goal of a liberal arts education is to free our minds, deepen our intellectual understanding and expand our sense of what is possible, through the ongoing pursuit of truth. As stated by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, the purpose of a liberal education is to "empower individuals and prepare them to deal with complexity, diversity and change."

During medieval times, a liberal arts education incorporated math and science as well as music, grammar and rhetoric. Today, WOU's College of LAS includes a full range of academic disciplines—business, behavioral sciences, computer science, creative arts, humanities, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences—and offers a variety of academic programs, including majors, minors and certificates. We encourage you to combine programs innovatively in ways that accommodate your personal interests and prepare you for a productive and meaningful life well beyond your college years.

With our emphasis on both breadth and depth of learning, as a student here at WOU you will gain both specific and transferable skills. Along with disciplinary expertise, you will develop your ability to think critically and creatively; engage in deep analysis and reflective inquiry; consider and incorporate multiple points of view; communicate clearly and fluently through both speech and writing; work effectively in teams; and apply ethical judgment to decision-making. You will apply the knowledge you gain in practical settings, through individualized opportunities such as service learning, internships and study abroad. Whatever course of study and field of future work you choose, you will leave WOU with the qualities most sought after by today's employers—the very same attributes that are essential for the ongoing health, vitality and sustainability of our diverse and rapidly changing society.

WOU welcomes all students into our close-knit university community. Many here are the first in their families to attend college, carrying forward the hopes and dreams of their loved ones. No matter what your background—traditional college-age student, first-generation student, transfer or returning adult student, veteran or international student—our faculty and staff are committed to working with you one on one as you successfully complete your college degree. We're happy to have you here, and we look forward to helping you achieve your dreams.

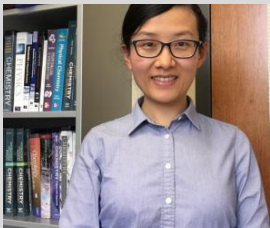
WELCOME, NEW WOLVES!

Say hello to our newest
tenure-track faculty:

Dr. James Reddan,
Music (Choral Director)



Dr. Feier Hou,
Chemistry



Dr. Gareth Hopkins,
Biology



Dr. Dan McCarthy,
Psychology



On September 10, we enthusiastically welcomed Mylisa Behling to our team. Her face may be new to the Dean's Office, but it is not new to WOU.

Many of you may know Mylisa from her prior WOU adventures, which include University Advancement, the Humanities Division, and most recently the Registrar's Office. After taking a hiatus from the workplace to be at home with her son, Mylisa has returned in a new capacity. While Susan Griffin continues to staff the front desk for several hours per week, she now spends considerable time providing valuable advising to our students in Interdisciplinary Studies. To assure that we always have a friendly smile and welcoming presence at our front desk, Mylisa is serving in that capacity. She is also tasked with helping us create a social media presence, building a communication conduit within the College (including this newsletter), and assisting Debbie Braun with her myriad tasks. Mylisa is here from Monday through Thursday, 9:15 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Stop by if you need a helping hand, or just to say hello.

Mylisa attended WOU as an SEP student in 1999, after graduating with honors from Grants Pass High School. While her journey has not allowed her to complete her degree quite yet, she has kept busy by working for 16 years in the banking industry as an AVP, Executive Assistant, Junior Client Manager, and in other roles. In her leisure time, Mylisa is passionate about sewing (a skill taught to her by a professor here on campus), crocheting, cooking, camping and reading. Of course, her husband of almost 13 years and her son, age 8, are at the top of this list. Other quirky facts: Mylisa does not own a microwave, and each year she cans at least 60 jars of home-grown beets.

Please join the LAS Dean's office in welcoming Mylisa back to WOU!

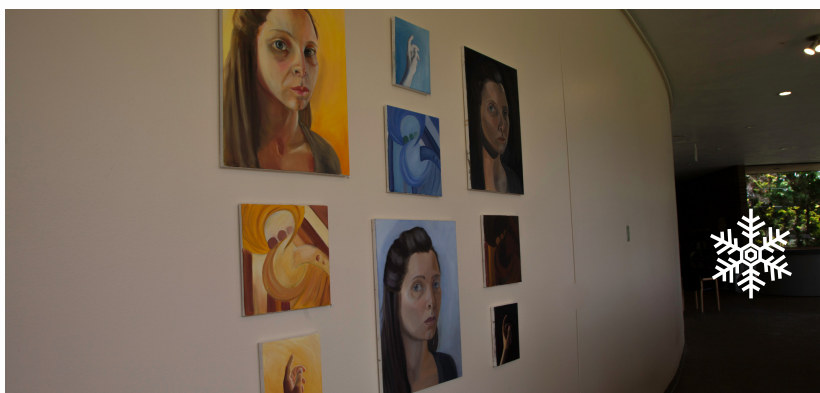


EVENTS OF INTEREST

January & February

Get out there and enjoy!

- 1/11: 1:00pm at Rice Auditorium: Rainbow Dance Theatre, K-8 student performance.
- 1/11: 7:30pm at Rice Auditorium: Rainbow Dance Theatre, presented by Smith Fine Arts
- 1/15: 7:30pm at Smith Music Hall: Keith Karns and Friends, Jazz Recital
- 1/18: 4:00pm at Rice Auditorium: Songwriting Workshop with John Gorka
- 1/18: 7:30pm at Rice Auditorium: Smith Fine Arts presents John Gorka
- 1/19: 1:00-6:00pm at NPE: Alumni Kickoff Rally
- 02/04: 4:30pm at Hamersly 107: Environmental Poetry Reading by Todd Davis
- 2/21 & 2/22: 7:30pm at Smith Music Hall: Paul Roberts, guest artist
- 2/23: All day at Werner University Center: Sonia Kovalevsky Mathematics Day



NOTEWORTHY NEWS...

Model UN
(submitted by
Mary
Pettenger)



In February 2018, four Western students were able to travel to Geneva and Lausanne, Switzerland to take part in the first-ever SIHMUN conference. Students were able to tour the Geneva United Nations Headquarters, which club president Sapphire Dorfman described as "the best day of my life." Above you can see the four WOU delegates standing in the room where the Commission for Human Rights meets.

Student Amber Holland said, "It was truly incredible to be standing in the same room where such important resolutions have been signed." Our students performed well in the conference; Sapphire Dorfman won the best delegate award in her committee, while Maddie Dohrer also won best delegate and overall most well-spoken.

A worthy read!
Written by Sriram Khé

Inside Higher ED
"The Best Way Out Is Always Through"

Fall 2018 Kickoff Message

by Dean Kathleen Cassity

It's hard to believe more than a year has passed since I left the tropical splendor of Hawaii and relocated in Oregon's wine country (equally beautiful, in a different way). People often ask me if I miss Hawaii, and the truthful answer is that while I enjoy being back home in the Pacific Northwest, yes, sometimes I do miss it.

But there was one day last winter when I was relieved not to be in Hawaii. Let's roll the clock back to Saturday, January 13, 2018.

Those of us who live in Oregon were going about our daily business, which for me on a Saturday morning meant sleeping in, with my phone ringer off. Thank goodness, because this meant I didn't learn until later what my family and friends in Hawaii were going through. Imagine hearing a sharp alarm sound on your phone and looking down to see a message that reads:



They were right about one thing. It was not a drill.

It also wasn't a real alert. It was just ... a mistake.

The alert went out at 8:07 a.m. By 8:10 a.m.—just three minutes later—the National Guard had confirmed with U.S. Pacific Command that there was no missile launch. The Honolulu Police Department was subsequently notified that there was no missile launch. The alert was cancelled at 8:13 a.m. In other words, state officials knew it was a mistake—within minutes.

The rest of the population finally received an incredibly welcome text message, "There is no missile threat or danger to the State of Hawaii. Repeat. False Alarm. There is no missile threat." That message went out at 8:45 a.m.—a full 38 minutes after the false alarm.

Imagine 38 minutes, in which nearly two million people were phoning and texting their loved ones to say goodbye. Imagine 38 minutes of parents huddling indoors with their children, trying to explain to them what this might mean.

(Later, explanations were offered. In one press conference, the governor said they couldn't send out the second message without FEMA authorization because there isn't an "automated" way to counter an alert. In another press conference, it was reported that the governor couldn't remember his Twitter password.)

I'm still relieved that I had my ringer off during that 38 minutes, because hundreds of people I know were enduring this terrifying experience. That included several of my closest friends, our niece, her husband and their two-month-old baby, and my brother. Thank goodness it was all over before I got the messages. One of those was from my brother, who wrote, "Hard to explain what a sickening feeling that is to hear that awful sound, see that message and think, how weird, that this is how I'm going to die."

As the day unfolded, relief gave way to understandable outrage. It soon became apparent that, bad as the mistake was, most people were less angry about that mistake than they were about the *failure to communicate*.

I've spent some time lately studying the philosophy of positive leadership, and I decided to begin my Fall 2018 address to LAS faculty with this story because it resonates with so many aspects of positive leadership, especially when it comes to responsibility and communication.

Mistakes will always happen. We all make them. I've made them, and I will continue to make them. Admitting mistakes is not easy for anyone. The desire to cover up mistakes, delay notification, or evade responsibility is also a natural human reaction, especially when we fear negative consequences. I'd suggest that it's especially difficult for those of us who have devoted ourselves to academia, where we place enormous value on holding high standards.

Yet, as the Hawaii missile alert incident teaches us, evading responsibility often compounds the original error. When we make a mistake, whether intentional or not, it's usually best to recognize it and make restitution as best we can. When it comes to mistakes made by others, it's best (when possible) to err on the side of mercy—bearing in mind that next time, we could be the one messing up and begging for mercy.

Closely related to responsibility is the issue of communication, both internal and external. One of my goals for this year is, first, to publicize all the great things happening here at WOU.

We have faculty members engaged in many exciting projects—traditional research as well as community-based activism that makes a positive difference in our world. We have students and alumni who are accomplishing outstanding things—and what's more, many of them hail from life circumstances that made these accomplishments especially challenging. Despite these challenges, they continue to succeed. We have many incredibly talented and hardworking staff members without whom the whole train would derail, and their contributions are vital, even when much of their work goes largely unseen.

Yet the word often doesn't get out as well as it could. Accordingly, this year our office is working to develop new channels through which word can get around campus, about everything from upcoming events to student and faculty achievements to alumni news. We'll be strengthening our presence on social media, updating our web site and calendar, disseminating this newsletter regularly, and working closely with both Admissions and Marketing to publicize our programs—*all* of our programs.

I'll be convening a working group that includes participants from each division to expand our alumni outreach program, so that we can put more of our successful alumni directly in contact with our current students and help them build their personal and professional networks. We'll be publicly sharing our success stories from our students, faculty and alumni. Successful alumni are WOU's greatest ambassadors, not only in programs with a specific career trajectory but also in programs with more flexible career trajectories.

(As an aside: I'm tired of hearing skills like communication and critical thinking referred to as "soft" skills, as opposed to the more task-oriented "hard skills." "Hard" versus "soft" is a problematic dichotomy for several reasons. First, "soft" implies easy, and mastering the so-called "soft" skills is not easy. "Soft" is also feminizing, and as we all probably know, concepts that are feminized tend to be undervalued. I prefer to conceptualize such skills as "flexible" rather than "soft" skills, as compared to "specific" rather than "hard" skills.)

While communicating effectively amongst ourselves is vital, it is also urgent that we communicate effectively beyond WOU. In our current cultural climate, we must do whatever we can to promote higher education as a greater good. At this moment in history, this means giving significant attention to the liberal arts. Because, let's face it: there are existing structures in our society that are charged with promoting the interests of commerce and technology; and, while I acknowledge that science and evidence-based reasoning are under attack today as never before, there are still some existing structures in place to promote the interests of science. Let's hope those support structures continue to remain robust, and that evidence-based reasoning continues to be a central tenet of civil society.

But what structures exist to support and promote the less quantifiable, less tangible benefits of the arts and humanities?

It's us.

If those of us in higher education aren't the ones who cultivate and communicate the less tangible, less quantitatively measurable benefits of higher education, then who will?

One purpose of the university is to protect the values that may not find a home anywhere else in society. Doing that is our job—and that means all of us, whatever our disciplines may be. We are the guardians of the value of higher education. As Ray Bradbury put it in *Fahrenheit 451*: We are each charged with doing “our own bit of saving.”

Also essential to our work together this year is a concept so closely related to communication that it shares a Latin root—*communus*, or “shared in common,” referring to a shared sense of purpose and belonging. That word is “community.” This brings me to another text message I received from my brother on January 13th: “One weird thing about today, everybody's talking to everybody else and people are being super cool.”

We all probably can recall times when that happened. For the most part, our society is far too disconnected and dehumanizing—yet every once in a while, something happens that causes us to recognize our shared humanity. Often this happens when we recognize a common threat. Sadly, such moments of connection rarely last. We human beings tend to revert to our old comfortable ways, even when those ways are not maximally functional. But as we consider the lessons of the missile alert mistake, we would do well to ponder a couple of additional things.

First, while I hope that building community doesn't depend on fear, I believe we do in fact have a common adversary. Higher education is under threat today, on a variety of fronts. Some disciplines may be feeling it more than others. But the threats are real, for all of us. What we stand for here at WOU, and as educators in both the national and global communities, is threatened. The public belief in higher education, particularly when it comes to fulfilling a purpose beyond job training, is threatened. Affordability is threatened, and consequently, so is access to education for our most vulnerable populations. The idea of higher education as serving the greater good is threatened. The concept of a quest for truth is threatened. Today, even concepts such as “greater good” and “truth” are threatened.

I say this not to foster despair, but because it may help if we remember that we are all in this together, and our best chance at prevailing against the forces amassed against us lies in working together. Notice I said “work together,” not “be best friends.” When we hear words like “community,” we may imagine people sitting around campfires playing guitars and singing folk songs. That’s not how I’m defining “community” here (though I’m probably up for a few folk songs, if anyone else would like to join me).

Let’s face it, we’re not always going to agree. In fact, we *shouldn’t* always agree. If you’ve got more than one person in the room and everyone is in perfect accord on all things, then either somebody has been brainwashed or somebody is lying. But we can recognize that whether we are all buddies or not, we are all still part of one community, and we all share a commitment to the greater good: of serving our students, of building knowledge in our disciplines, and of pursuing the quest for truth—however vexed that concept may be at the moment.

This year I’m calling on all of us to remember that if we wish to preserve and communicate the value of higher education, it’s important that we work together, as one community. We must be cognizant that what we stand for is under attack, and that we’re all in the same boat even when we’re seated in different parts of the boat. Bearing that in mind may make it easier to take responsibility, to communicate with each other and with the wider world, and to continue building an ever more vibrant and collaborative community.

As we do so, we would do well to bear in mind that because of who we are, we are the first ambassadors for the value of a transformative education. It’s up to us to be the best ambassadors we can be, by exemplifying what it means to be educators—those who bring out the best in others.

We can’t wait for anyone else to set an example, especially during these times when good examples can be hard to come by. Fortunately, we don’t need anyone else to show us how to do the right thing. We can just do the right thing, starting now and starting where we are.



Until the next issue, be well.

