

# Professor profile: Daniel Cairo

## Honors professor integrates community wellness, unity into teaching

BY VANESSA EVELETH

This spring, the Honors College welcomed Daniel Cairo, the director of the Student Diversity and Inclusion Center and the assistant dean of students, to its faculty. Throughout his three years at Westminster College, Cairo has observed the unique commitment to engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Cairo views the Student Diversity and Inclusion Center's role as creating a place to frame people's individual experiences and build relationships to work towards collective justice and solidarity. Infrastructure and how individuals conduct themselves are the two key components for collective justice and solidarity, according to Cairo. The center works towards the goal through infrastructure, while Cairo focuses on viewing others as more than their social positions of student or staff.

"I want them to know that I see them beyond just a student," said Cairo. "We are people together and as people I want them to see me also as a type of person. And so, stopping and saying hello, really asking, 'how are you?' and meaning it. I think those are the small practices that allow us to build that community."



*Daniel Cairo, director of the Student Diversity and Inclusion Center and assistant dean of students.*

*Photo courtesy of Ceci Rigby*

The social conditioning to ignore diversity is another focal point for viewing others on an individual basis, according to Cairo. Society has conditioned people to ignore or avoid talking about concepts like race or queerness.

"These conversations benefit our campus because they make us better because of it," said Cairo.

Building an inclusive campus, he believes, requires the commitment and choice to see others on an individual basis and to work collectively to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Cairo said he remembers being told that "every single one of us matters" in his elementary school after immigrating to the

United States as a young child.

"I believe that idea down to my core, that every single one of our stories is important, that we matter," said Cairo. "We also know that injustices make it so that some people matter less than others. Work about inclusion is making [good] on that promise that we were told from the beginning: that every single one of us deserves the best shot that we can get." *HM.*