

# Targeting student wellness equips students with tools for success

BY VANESSA EVELETH ('23)

College students often carry enormous pressure on their shoulders and find themselves pushing for perfection or assigning self-worth based on their grades. Westminster Honors college students aren't an exception to this trend. In a climate survey conducted in 2018, the Honors college observed a great number of students struggling with mental health issues.

So, in 2019, the Honors college implemented an intentional wellness program to support first-year students entering the stressful college environment. Using the semester-long class "Tuesday Conversations" and peer mentors, Honors college first-year students receive mindfulness practice sessions and a built-in peer support system.

In 2022, the Honors college was recognized for the wellness initiative by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities with The Beacon Award for Excellence in Student Achievement and Success.

During Tuesday Conversations, first-year Honors college students are able to select two mindfulness practices for the semester: yoga, reflective writing, and meditation.

First-year Katherine Larson said she had learned a couple mindfulness practices for anxiety before entering college. But, the practices were not "super structured," according to Larson.

Larson, who chose meditation and reflective writing, said the mindfulness practices offered at Tuesday Conversations were helpful, especially with the required time commitment in the first semester.

"It was nice to have something at the beginning of the year because there's a lot of stuff going on," Larson said. "So it was kind of nice to have this allotment of time for meditating."

Hannah Henke, a sophomore accounting major, went through the mindfulness program last year and also chose to practice reflective writing and meditation.

"I had done a couple yoga classes [before college]," Henke said. "[But] I fell in love with the meditation class [...] and so I've continued meditating. And there are a couple lessons and thoughtful writing that I occasionally do when I'm feeling a little stressed about something."

Henke said the mindfulness practices helped her ground herself during that first year.

"[The first year] was definitely hard and scary, and everything

was new," Henke said. "I didn't realize how helpful it would be to do meditation and thoughtful writing — just to be in my body and calm down because I realized I was a little anxious all the time."

In addition to the mindfulness practices, first-year Honors college students also hear advice and guidance from peer mentors during Tuesday Conversations.

Katherine Larson said a specific piece of advice about friendships resonated with her from a peer mentor's moment.

Larson said the advice was along the lines of "the people you meet the first week aren't necessarily going to be your friends the entire time. If you don't click with people immediately, that's not weird."

Hannah Henke said she loved listening to the peer mentor moments as a first year.

"Coming in[to college], I really thought there was one answer on how to do it," Henke said. "And then hearing all these older students [...], realizing they have such different perspectives and things that helped them, [it] was just really helpful to realize there's multiple ways to approach college."

For Henke, the peer mentor moments showed her she wasn't alone.

"[The mentor moments] made [college] feel more like a team like, 'Oh, we're all in this together. We're all trying,'" Henke said.

As a peer mentor this year, Henke said she was excited to share her moment with the first years.

"It was really cool getting to do my peer mentor moment, because I was like, 'Okay, this is what I've learned. And I'm excited to share this because I wish someone had told me this,'" Henke said.

Targeting student wellness with Tuesday Conversations creates a space for Honors college students to equip themselves for success. Henke and Larson echoed each other and said Tuesday Conversations helped them better understand how to navigate college.

"I felt like I was able to find a better balance, using those skills that I learned in [Tuesday Conversations]," Henke said. "And the mentor moments just really helped me kind of get a better understanding of the community. It gives me confidence to go out, ask questions, and just be willing to trial and error and learn what worked for me." *HML.*



*Hannah Henke with legs crossed and eyes closed as she meditates outside by Emigration Creek.*

*Photo courtesy of Lucas Arico*

# Honors Advisory Board: Do you know about the Honors Advisory Board?

BY VANESSA EVELETH ('23)

## What is the Honors College Advisory Board?

The Honors College Advisory Board is made up of a group of 19 alumni, college staff members, and friends of the college. The board collectively strives to support the students and the Honors college. Three times a year the board meets all together. Between those times, the Advocacy and Advancement Committees meet to focus on their targeted work.

## Why do we have an Honors College Advisory Board?

“It always helps to have passionate ambassadors spreading the word about the powerful learning community that makes up the honors college,” said Honors College Dean Richard Badenhausen.

Honors college advisory boards are a common feature of honors colleges across the country, according to Badenhausen. Often times, these boards have people passionate about the mission of honors education, Badenhausen said.

“Board members have access to many personal and professional networks, which allows us to extend the reach of the Westminster Honors college story into other communities,” Badenhausen said.

Catherine Foster ('17), chair of the Honors College Advisory Board, said the group's work is still taking shape because the board has only existed for a few years.

“A core aspect of our impact is in fundraising and advocating for giving initiatives,” Foster said. “These efforts directly impact, and hopefully enhance, your student experience.”

## How does the board support the Honors College community?

Board members are “great cheerleaders,” according to Honors college Dean Richard Badenhausen, which he said is incredibly important.

Board members provide advice; are a resource for students; and say “yes” when asked to serve in a various capacities such as being on other committees on campus, visiting with students during Tuesday Conversation, and judging in the annual statewide high school essay, according to Badenhausen.

Catherine Foster ('17), chair of the Honors College Advisory Board, said the board also works

on engaging honors alums in intentional ways that keep them connected to the Westminster experience.

“Everything we do as board members from advocating for the Westminster experience to fundraising is all done because we believe every student who goes through this program is worth all the effort we can give,” Foster said.

## Who is on the board?

Board members serve three-year terms. Currently, Catherine Foster ('17) is the chair of the board. Taylor Stevens ('18) serves as chair of the Advancement Committee, while Elaine Sheehan ('18) is the chair of the Advocacy Committee. Four college staff members sit on the board:

- Honors College Dean Richard Badenhausen
- Honors College Assistant Dean José Hernández Zamudio
- Director of Fellowship Advising Alicia Cunningham-Bryant
- Vice President of Institutional Advancement Daniel Lewis.

The other 12 members of the current board are:

- Kate Bradshaw ('03)
- Heather Brown ('06)
- Chris Cunningham ('15)
- Kim Adamson ('79)
- Judy Fang ('99)
- Pepper Hayes ('05)
- Brody Leven ('10)
- Marie Martin ('08)
- Allie Roach ('12)
- Chris Roundy ('11)
- Stacie Whitford ('92)
- Hannah Williams ('16)

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The Honors College Advisory Board stands inside the new Simonds Seminar Room with some members attending the fall meeting via Zoom.

Photo courtesy of Lucas Arico