



WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY  
166<sup>TH</sup> COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES  
SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 2023

## GOLDEN WOLVES

Leading the processional today are representatives from the class of 1973, celebrating its 50-year anniversary. Their participation symbolizes the pride we have in our alumni and the esteem in which they are held.

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### 2023 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DAN RAYFIELD '03

A WOU alum '03, Speaker Rayfield majored in Geography. After graduating from WOU, Speaker Rayfield attended Willamette University School of Law. Speaker Rayfield represents House District 16, encompassing Corvallis and Oregon State University.

He is also an attorney who works on behalf of individuals bringing consumer and civil rights cases against large corporations, insurance companies, and others. Since joining the legislature in 2015, Speaker Rayfield has served as Co-Chair of Joint Ways and Means, the Legislature's budget-writing committee, several of the budget subcommittees, and the House Rules Committee. Throughout this time, he has focused on investing in democracy, making strategic investments in housing and homelessness, good-paying jobs for working families, behavioral health and healthcare, mitigating the impacts of climate change on our most vulnerable communities, making Oregon communities safer, and stronger schools.



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Out of respect for each other and the solemnity of the occasion, graduates and guests are asked to stay for the entire ceremony.

President Peters and WOU faculty and staff look forward to meeting graduates and their families at a reception in The Grove immediately following the ceremony.

In the event of inclement weather, the reception will be moved to the Pacific Room in the Werner University Center.

# 166<sup>TH</sup> COMMENCEMENT PROGRAM

President Jesse Peters, presiding

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## PRE-PROCESSIONAL

Members of the Western Oregon University Music Department  
2023 Graduating Class, directed by Dirk Freymuth

## PROCESSIONAL

President Jesse Peters

### **National Anthem**

Zackary Vinyard, Music graduate  
Tayler Ristau, American Sign Language Studies graduate

### **Welcome**

President Jesse Peters

### **Outstanding Students Recognition & Awards**

Introduced by Kodee Harwood, ASWOU President  
Blanca Jiménez, Outstanding Graduating Undergraduate Award recipient  
Priscila España, Outstanding Graduating Undergraduate Award recipient  
Tanner Shadbolt, Outstanding Graduate Student Award recipient  
Pamela Morigeau, OHSU Golden Lamp Award recipient

### **Commencement Address**

The Honorable Dan Rayfield '03, Oregon Speaker of the House

### **Presentation of the Graduates**

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Rob Winningham  
assisted by  
Dean Mark Girod, College of Education  
Dean Kathleen Cassity, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Dean Hillary Fouts, Graduate Studies & Research  
Campus Associate Dean Angie Docherty, OHSU School of Nursing - Monmouth

### **Conferring of Degrees**

President Jesse Peters

## RECESSIONAL

GatorQuest  
directed by Dirk Freymuth

# HONORS CORDS

## WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

### OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

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#### WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

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**Abby's House**

Teal/Purple (*service*)

**Anthropology Club**

White/Red/Gold (*academic/leadership*)

**Associated Students of****Western Oregon University**

Black/Silver (*leadership*)

**Board of Trustees Student Representative**

Black/Red/Gold (*service*)

**Chi Alpha Sigma**

Red/White (*National College Athlete Honor Society*)

**Disability Services**

Burgundy/White (*students with disabilities*)

**Fostering Success**

Teal (*current and former foster youth graduates*)

**G.P.A. Honors**

Gold (*academic*)

**International Students**

Royal/Bright Gold/White (*International Club*)

**Lambda Pi Eta**

Gold (*National Communication Association Honor Society, academic*)

**Military Service**

Red/White/Blue (*service recognition*)

**Multicultural Student Services & Programs**

Black (*diversity scholars, academic*)  
Navy Blue/White (*On Track graduate*)

**Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law**

Gold/Purple (*service*)

**Phi Alpha Theta**

Multicolored (*National History Honor Society, academic*)

**Phi Mu Epsilon**

Violet/Lavender/Gold (*National Mathematics Honor Society, academic*)

**Psi Chi**

Yellow/Blue (*International Psychology Honor Society, academic*)

**Sigma Alpha Pi**

Black/White (*National Society of Leadership & Success, leadership*)

**Sigma Phi Omega**

Blue/Gold (*International Gerontology Honor Society, academic*)

**Sigma Tau Delta**

Black/Red (*International English Honor Society, academic*)

**Student Activities Board**

Red/Gray (*service and involvement*)

**Student Enrichment Program**

Powder Blue (*service*)

**Student Engagement**

Mint (*fraternity and sorority*)  
Rainbow (*lavender graduate*)  
Silver (*leadership certificate*)

**WOU Honors Program**

White (*academic*)

#### OHSU SCHOOL OF NURSING | MONMOUTH CAMPUS

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**Global Brigades**

Blue/Orange (*service*)

**G.P.A. Honors**

Gold (*academic*)

**HealthE STEPS**

Peacock (*leadership*)

**Monmouth Student Nurses Association Officers**

Gold/Blue/Green (*leadership*)

**Sigma Theta Tau**

Purple/White (*International Honor Society of Nursing, academic*)

# MEDALLIONS, PINS & STOLES

## WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

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### MEDALLIONS

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**Outstanding Graduating  
Student: Graduate**  
*(Graduate Programs)*

**Psi Chi**  
*Yellow/Blue (International  
Psychology Honor Society)*

**Sigma Tau Delta**  
*Black/Red (International  
English Honor Society)*

**Outstanding Graduating  
Student: Undergraduate**  
*(Student Affairs)*

**Sigma Phi Omega**  
*Blue/Gold (International  
Gerontology Honor Society)*

**University Housing**  
*(service)*

### PINS

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**Lambda Pi Eta**  
*Gold (National Communication  
Association Honor Society,  
academic)*

**Phi Kappa Phi Honor  
Society** *(academic)*

### STOLES

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**Indigenous Peoples**  
*Native pattern with feathers  
(Native American graduate)*

**Sigma Alpha Pi**  
*Black/White (National Society of  
Leadership & Success, leadership)*

**Upward Bound**  
*Black, Red/White Stripes  
(Upward Bound/TRIO)*

**Kappa Sigma**  
*Scarlet Red/White (service)*

**Sigma Tau Delta**  
*Red (International English  
Honor Society)*

**Veteran Honor Stole**  
*Black/Silver Trim, Olive Green  
(Honorable Discharge, Good  
Conduct)*

**MEChA Executive Board**  
*Red/White/Green (leadership)*

**Stole of Gratitude**  
*White, often decorated  
(Presented to someone who  
provided extraordinary help or  
support)*

**Multicultural Student  
Services & Programs**  
*Black/Multicolored Stripes  
(executive board, leadership)*

**Phi Alpha Theta**  
*Red/Blue (National History  
Honor Society)*

**Student Engagement**  
*Kente Cloth (Black graduate)*

# TRADITIONS OF ACADEMIC REGALIA

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THE CUSTOM OF wearing academic regalia on commencement day has survived more than a thousand years. Dressing in caps, gowns, hoods and tassels for special occasions originated in medieval Europe and is patterned after the formal dress code of clergymen of that time period. This tradition serves as a reminder of the wearer's responsibility in the scholarly world.

On most college campuses, the faculty and seniors appear in academic garb at ceremonies such as commencement and baccalaureate. Since 1895, colleges and universities in the United States have followed a uniform code specifying the type of cap and hood for each degree. The significance of the decorative costumes is determined by the sleeves and hoods.

Holders of doctoral degrees wear round bell sleeves. The gown is faced down the front and barred on the sleeves with black velvet or velvet of a color indicating the degree; the doctoral hood is large. The doctoral cap may include a gold tassel. Faculty participating in a commencement ceremony wear robes in colors of the institutions from which they graduated.

Master's degree holders wear a long, closed sleeve with a slit near the upper arm; the hood is mid-sized. Bachelor's degree holders wear a long, pointed sleeve. Those graduating with honors wear a gold cord around the shoulders. Hoods are lined with colors of the institution granting the degree (or one with which the wearer is associated) and are trimmed with velvet of the color distinctive of their degree.

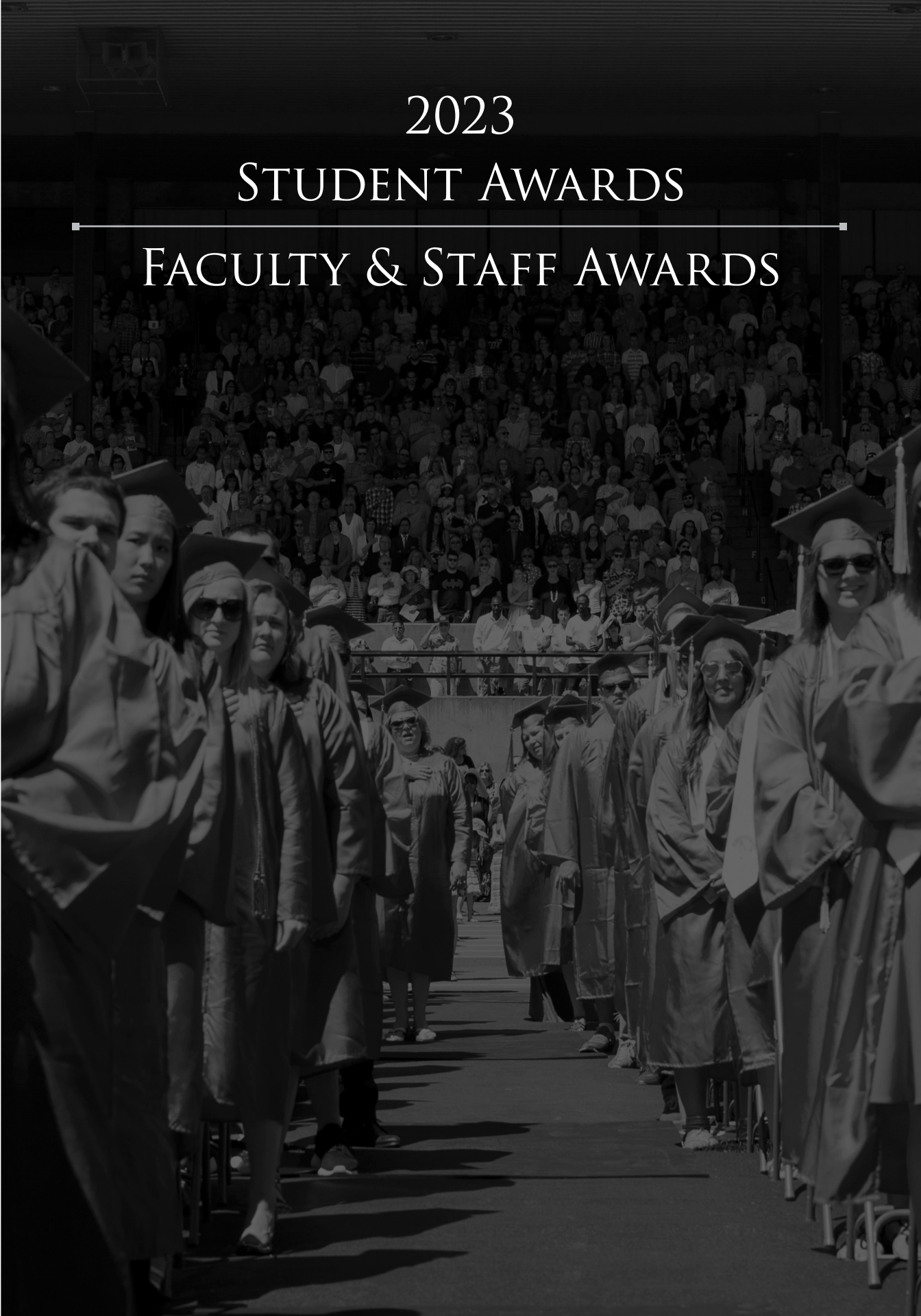


2023

STUDENT AWARDS

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FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS





# OUTSTANDING GRADUATING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

## Blanca Jimenez '23

*Formerly known as the Delmer Dewey/Julia McCulloch Smith Award—presented each year to outstanding graduating students—is named for former Dean of Men Delmer Dewey, who died in 1953, and in memory of Julia McCulloch Smith, who died in 1930. The awards were first presented in 1954.*

AFTER HER FIRST semester at Western Oregon University, Blanca Jimenez '23 was missing her family, unsure about whether she had chosen the right major and felt like an imposter.

“As a first-generation college student, we are more than often lost amidst the many uncertainties of attending higher education. I felt like I didn't belong and I almost dropped out,” she recalls. “Thankfully, I got involved within the university in different leadership positions and found a home outside of home. That's what kept me here.”

Today Jimenez, who is graduating with top marks and a double major in Public Health and Psychology, credits much of her success as a student to the support services from MSSP and SEP, and to her involvement with campus groups like Multicultural Student Union, where she served on the executive board, and with Unidos, a club for undocumented or DACA recipients and their allies.

Though she is not undocumented herself, Jimenez has family members who are and that perspective enabled her to be an effective ally, she says. “I wanted to be part of Unidos because I felt like I could bring something to the table, to be a spokesperson, because it wasn't my identity at risk. I had privilege – I was born in the United States – and I could use it to be a voice for others.”

As President of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano De Aztlán) Jimenez led an effort to install a mural by Portland artist Jahdi Levvi at the Werner University Center, a project she found especially meaningful.

“Before that, when I walked into the center I didn't feel like I saw myself represented,” she says. “Now I see myself, my ancestors, different cultures and backgrounds in that mural. The diversity

Western promotes is now actually represented on campus, so being able to install this mural was a triumph for all of us. Students who come after me will see a little piece of themselves in that mural.”

But it was serving as a victim advocate for Marion County's Victim Assistance Program, where her career path came into focus. She worked on-call helping victims of domestic and sexual assault find community services and to navigate the criminal justice system.

“It was really eye-opening. I found a really strong passion and it shifted my career goals,” she says. “I'd like to work as a clinical psychologist, specifically with clients who have experienced trauma.”

Jimenez is now interning with Liberty House where she has seen first-hand how child abuse prevention, treatment and support can provide light and hope during a dark time.

In addition to her passion for others, Jimenez is also passionate about rugby. She took up the sport in high school, finding it especially cathartic for releasing difficult emotions. At Western she played at the club level and took home a bowl championship while on the National Student Exchange program at New York's Stony Brook University.

“Being able to play with a group of strong and dedicated women who have many aspirations in life, was very uplifting,” she says. She plans to pay-it-forward with coaching at the high school level.

But first, Jimenez says she will spend the summer traveling and relaxing after all the hard work of the past four years. She will lead a reading curriculum and enrichment program for middle school students, and is applying for full-time positions that align with her career goals. She dedicates her diploma to her parents and sisters for all their continuous support and sacrifices.



*Blanca Jimenez*



# OUTSTANDING GRADUATING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

## Priscila España '23

*Formerly known as the Delmer Dewey/Julia McCulloch Smith Award—presented each year to outstanding graduating students—is named for former Dean of Men Delmer Dewey, who died in 1953, and in memory of Julia McCulloch Smith, who died in 1930. The awards were first presented in 1954.*

PRISCILA ESPAÑA, '23, is graduating with a double major in Public Policy & Administration and Spanish, and says she sees herself working in a policy role or social service.

Born in Washington, and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico and Medford, Oregon, España has always deeply valued education. Nevertheless, she found the adjustment to college challenging. As a first-generation student, she didn't have a parent who understood what she was going through and most of her friends were going through the same thing. So she turned to advisors and made a concerted effort to get involved on campus. Once she found her footing, she made it her mission to extend a helping hand to students facing similar situations.

She became a peer mentor and advisor, and was intentional about joining organizations like the Multicultural Student Union, Kappa Delta Chi, MEChA, and Unidos. All of these activities allowed her to make an impact on campus.

With España's leadership, MEChA completed a campus mural project that stalled in 2016. The group revived the project, garnered campus support, raised the funds and saw the project come to fruition in spring 2022.

"It was entirely student-led. We reached out to staff to join our committee and to people for funding, and to artists. The interim president offered to fund the project. We got input from students about how to represent the diversity on campus," she recalls. "It's so cool to walk by and see people looking or talking about it. It makes me happy and proud to have brought that to campus."

España also worked with Upward Bound, a college prep program for low-income and

prospective first-generation college students. During the early days of the pandemic España planned workshops, virtual college tours and socials largely over Zoom.

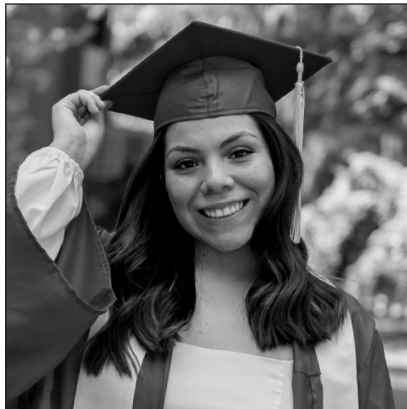
"It was a really unique opportunity to be able to help create community for these students despite being online, and to help with their college search and application process," she says. "Quarantine was such a weird time, so I am really fortunate that I was able to help students who might have been missing out on community during this time."

España also had a hand in making campus feel "back-to-normal" after the pandemic by co-coordinating a Women of Culture Event highlighting Asian American and Pacific Islander women.

"It was really special. It allowed me to learn about another culture and gave me the opportunity to help plan a meaningful event for those outside my community. I learned a lot," she says.

España's future plans reflect the same ethos of helping others as she's demonstrated as a student at Western. "Growing up, my family didn't have a lot of money and so we often relied on support programs, so I know how important they can be. I think to be able to go back to that and work in similar programs would be great," she says.

This summer she is interning with Washington County on a project called "Washington County Means Progress," which aims to provide communities of color with meaningful professional experiences, wealth-building opportunities, and to invest in equity, diversity, and inclusion.



*Priscila España*

# OUTSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

## Tanner Shadbolt '23

*The Outstanding Graduate Student Award honors a student who has demonstrated superior achievements in scholarship and academics, character, leadership and initiative during graduate studies.*

LOOKING FOR MORE opportunities in his field led Tanner Shadbolt '23 to Western for a master's degree in Criminal Justice.

Shadbolt grew up in Sherwood, Oregon and attended George Fox University as an undergraduate where he earned a double major in Chemistry and Sociology. During his senior year, it was a guest speaker from McLaren Youth Correctional Facility that inspired Shadbolt to consider a job there after graduation.

"It wasn't in the plan, but during my senior year at George Fox I took a juvenile delinquency course and the person from McLaren talked about what they did. That got me interested in working there," he says.

From there he moved on to work as a juvenile probation officer in Jefferson County and then in Polk County, where he has worked full-time for the past two years.

"I wanted to get my master's in hopes that it would open more opportunities – either wider opportunities in the field or to move up in my current position," he says. "I had a previous supervisor who got her master's through Western, so I'd already heard a little bit about it."

Being able to take classes online made the program another plus, since he lives in Wilsonville and commutes to his job in Dallas. Without that option he likely wouldn't have been able to pursue the degree, he says.

For his graduate thesis, Shadbolt analyzed the recidivism rates of juveniles who committed sex offenses and compared those who were polygraphed with those who were not polygraphed in treatment.

He says he is looking forward to seeing first-hand how some of this research might apply to his job, as he just took over the caseload of juveniles who have committed sex offenses.

With a full time job in the field, Shadbolt is already seeing how theories he learned about in the classroom can have real-world applications.

"I took a criminal justice theory course and I can actually see how some of those theories apply," he says. "When I took courses like that as an undergrad, it was hard to picture how the theories are actually applied. But after working and then going back to school, I can see how those theories came about and are applied in the real world."

As for his future plans, Shadbolt would like to continue working with young people and hopes to have a positive influence in their lives.

"Part of the reason I like working with them is that they have more time to change," he says. "Yes, they're on probation, but we understand they are kids so we can be a little more flexible. I like the discretion on the juvenile side, the amount of time you can work with them and turn their decision making around."

In his spare time, Shadbolt enjoys sports – both as a fan and participant. He follows the Blazers and the Pittsburgh Steelers, and is a volunteer football coach at Central High School in Independence. He's working on his golf game so he can keep up with his father and father-in-law, and says he likes to travel and spend time hiking with his wife, Emma, and their dog, Heinz.



Tanner Shadbolt

OHSU SCHOOL OF NURSING-MONMOUTH CAMPUS  
**GOLDEN LAMP AWARD**  
**Pamela Morigeau '23**

*The Golden Lamp Award is based on the American Nurses Association Code for Professional Nurses and the Florence Nightingale Pledge. It is given in recognition of exemplary demonstration of scholarship, leadership, professional commitment, innovative contributions and humanitarian ideals.*

WHEN PAMELA MORIGEAU '23 was a young girl in rural Colombia, her grandmother, who had largely cared for her, became ill with cancer. Because the family was poor and lacked the means to pay for treatment, her grandmother was left to endure the illness at home. Dutifully and with love, Morigeau nursed her grandmother, bringing her food and talking with her until the end, even though she was only six years old.

This painful experience planted the seeds of a dream to help others.

"I grew up thinking I wanted to be there for older people," she says. "They can be neglected and alone, and they don't often have anybody who can fight for them or be a voice for them. They often don't get services."

But the path wasn't straight or quick. In her early 20s, Morigeau moved to Qatar, where she learned English and worked as an ESL instructor. There she met her American husband, David, moved to the United States in 2011, and settled in Salem with the dream of nursing still on her mind.

"I was a teacher assistant for many, many years," she recalls. "And I realized I was getting older and I said to myself, well there is this dream that I have to go back to school and become a nurse, but I'm scared of not being able to keep up with the work. It's a different language and math wasn't always my friend. But I decided the worst thing that could happen is that I try and if I don't make it, I don't make it. But I made it."

Morigeau took night classes at Chemeketa Community College to fulfill the prerequisites for

the OHSU nursing program, relying heavily on her husband as both a cheerleader and tutor.

"He spent hours and hours with me so I could pass math. After that he tutored me to write essays and read my papers. He has been an amazing support and this wouldn't have been the same experience if I didn't have somebody who believed in me," she says. "When I felt like I couldn't make it he would say you have gotten this far, you can keep going."



*Pamela Morigeau*

All the hard work paid off and Morigeau was accepted into the OHSU nursing program at WOU in 2020, during the height of the pandemic. She completed nursing rotations at Salem Health Emergency Room and in the intermediate critical care unit, and at Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital. She recently accepted a permanent full-time position at Salem Health, in the medical telemetry unit.

But her dreams don't end there. Morigeau says she hopes to continue her schooling to pursue a Family Nurse Practitioner degree and one day open her own practice. While she still loves working with elderly patients, she would like to focus

specifically on Latina and Black women, offering a holistic approach that emphasizes equally the physical, mental and emotional aspects of health.

"I'm very good at inspiring and talking to people," she says. "I want to talk to women about their illnesses, of course, but also where are you mentally? What dreams do you have? What kind of things do you want to achieve? Because health encompasses everything – the inside and the outside."

# MARIO AND ALMA PASTEGA EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP AWARD Isidore Lobnibe

*The Mario and Alma Pastega Excellence in Scholarship Award honors a classified or administrative staff member who demonstrates exceptional service to the university. Once nominees are received, a screening committee submits a list of finalists to the president, who then chooses the recipient.*

LOVE OF LEARNING. Passion. Enthusiasm. World-class scholar. These are just a few of the superlatives expressed in support of Dr. Isidore Lobnibe, Professor of Anthropology, as recipient for this year's Mario and Alma Pastega Award for Excellence in Scholarship.

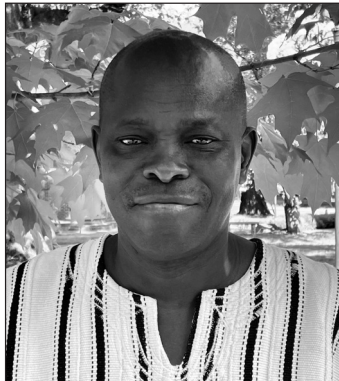
Lobnibe's journey to becoming a respected scholar and excellent teacher began with earning a bachelor's degree in History and French at Cape Coast University, 350 miles from his home in northwest Ghana. He went on to teach high school in northern Ghana, on the border with Burkina Faso, before migrating with his family to the United States for graduate studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Since joining the faculty of WOU in 2007, Lobnibe has ably balanced his role as a teacher and mentor, with that of active scholar; he has served as a peer reviewer for journals worldwide, conducted international field research, presented papers, published numerous articles, and received several distinguished research fellowships. He has a particular interest in the evolution of anthropology as a discipline, engaging with it through a critical lens, from a local and lived experience growing up in rural Ghana, and as a scholar. Lobnibe co-authored the recent book *Imagining Futures: Memory and Belonging in an African Family*, a collaborative study that turned the lens on his own extended family, exploring how active memory-making binds globally dispersed kin.

It is these rich insights and perspectives that Lobnibe shares with students in courses such as Cultures of Africa – a survey of Africa's different regions and cultures, and the history that has impacted both over time. In Transnational Migration, students examine the experiences and

challenges of long-term or permanent migrants, and in Medical Anthropology they study healthcare from a cross-cultural perspective. African Film and Society, Religion and Ritual, and Women Hold Up Half the Sky are some of the many courses Lobnibe has taught over the years.

"I tell a lot of stories about Africa and sometimes my personal background," he says. "I try to get my students from Western out of their comfort zone. I integrate a lot of international perspectives into my teaching."



Isidore Lobnibe

With Lobnibe's encouragement, WOU students have studied abroad in Ghana, Korea and Costa Rica, with several returning to publish their senior thesis in Western's *PURE Insights* undergraduate journal.

"Initially you meet them in the classes and they are very timid," he says. "But by the junior or senior year, you see them very transformed, and that is the thing that really gets you excited."

Lobnibe is grateful for the support of WOU travel grants and faculty development that

enable him to combine research with his teaching responsibilities.

"One fascinating thing I discovered once I got here was the flexibility that Western offers in terms of scholarship," he says. "Our teaching load is a bit heavy but there's also a lot of support for faculty research so one is able to marry the two."

To that end, next year Lobnibe will spend his sabbatical at the University of Ghana, Legon, where he's received a University of Freiburg fellowship with the Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA). He plans to complete a book about how mortuary practices and funeral rites in northwest Ghana have been affected by the region's changing political economy.



# MARIO AND ALMA PASTEGA EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

## Misty Weitzel

*The Mario and Alma Pastega Award for Excellence in Teaching honors a full-time faculty member who demonstrates excellence in teaching and relationships with students, both in and out of the classroom. Once nominees are received, a screening committee submits a list of finalists to the president, who then chooses the recipient.*

THOUGH SHE KNEW that most anthropologists ended up teaching, Misty A. Weitzel, Ph.D., didn't think she'd be one of them.

Hailing from Sandy, Oregon, she was eager to travel and learn about the wider world. While earning a Ph.D. in archeology and physical anthropology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton Weitzel had the opportunity to do both. She traveled to Siberia to excavate and analyze Bronze Age skeletons and to Cyprus to study remains at burial sites.

Now as a professor of Criminal Justice, Forensic Anthropology and the Graduate Program Coordinator in the Criminal Justice Sciences Division at WOU, Weitzel applies these skills and methods to forensic anthropology.

"I was in denial about teaching," she says with a laugh. "But I needed to go through that journey to figure out that teaching is actually something I really love to do."

That gradual journey started at Oregon State University, where she was an early adopter of online learning, and received accolades for her innovative approaches to education. Since joining Western's faculty in 2012, Weitzel has continued to seek innovative ways to engage students.

She developed the forensic anthropology minor and concentration, and teaches courses ranging from Introduction to Forensic Anthropology to the capstone course for graduate students in Criminal Justice. This is Weitzel's fifth year as Graduate Coordinator.

Forensic anthropology is a discipline theoretically grounded in human evolution, so it's fitting that personal evolution is central to Weitzel's teaching philosophy.

"To be effective teachers, we need to evolve," she says. "There are so many selective pressures at work: COVID, social media, political, social and environmental issues. If we fight against them, we aren't going to get very far. I try to find ways – whether it's technology or just being a very caring person in the classroom – to meet the changing needs of academia and our students."

During COVID quarantine, Weitzel and her colleague Jerielle Cartales launched a podcast, *Cabin Femur: Forensic Anthropology in The Age of Quarantine*, to connect with students and feature their work. She also advocated successfully for the addition of a Race & Justice course to the Criminal Justice core curriculum.

"I really love creating assignments or just capitalizing on what students enjoy most about the material, in a way that I never did when I was teaching 18 years ago," she says. "They get inspired and I get inspired. Giving them different ways to do that is really beneficial for all of us."

An example is what she calls an "unessay" assignment that led a student to make a set of acrylic nails on missing indigenous women, and another to write a song about material covered in class.

Weitzel has been equally creative when helping forensic anthropology students to gain real-world experience. She has led students on search and rescue missions for buried raccoons and to a big pig dig to learn search, excavation and analysis techniques typically applied to human remains.

"Encouraging students to get involved in their own learning in ways that interest them is my *raison d'être* when it comes to teaching," she says.



*Misty Weitzel*

# MARIO AND ALMA PASTEGA EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE AWARD

## Leigh Graziano

*The Mario and Alma Pastega Excellence in Service Award honors a classified or administrative staff member who demonstrates exceptional service to the university. Once nominees are received, a screening committee submits a list of finalists to the president, who then chooses the recipient.*

WHEN LEIGH GRAZIANO, Ph.D, Associate Professor, English, and Director, First-Year Writing, received the offer to join the faculty at Western in 2017, she jumped at the opportunity.

“It was exactly the kind of school I have known I have always wanted to work at,” she says. “I knew I would be able to really focus on my students, where things would be very student-centered and where I’d have opportunities to serve my community.”

Graziano has sought opportunities to serve the WOU community at every turn, from Chair of the General Education Committee to President of the Faculty Senate. She has been a member of several search committees, including the current Provost search, and serves as Faculty Advisor to the student-led WOU Freedom Center Advisory Board. She also represents WOU as a member of the statewide Oregon Writing and English Advisory Council.

Not only is Graziano generous with her time, she brings empathy, compassion and humility to the ongoing work of improving the campus community and the larger landscape of education in the state.

“In the broadest sense, service work is part of the landscape of how we get work done at the university,” she says. “But the way I think about service is how we can be agents of change on campus. Service work is how we can advocate for each other and for our students, and collaborate across sectors to solve problems and get work done.”

Graziano’s curricular expertise was central to a recent service appointment as co-chair and WOU’s representative for the state common course

numbering subcommittee. The group worked to ensure that the most transferrable general education courses share titles, credits, learning outcomes, and course descriptions to eliminate transfer barriers as students move between institutions.

“It was an opportunity you don’t often get, which is to collaborate with colleagues across the state to work on curriculum. It was challenging, but in spite of the challenges, students were at the center of this labor,” she says. “We really built something that everyone felt like they could get behind and that would do what it was meant to do, which is to help our students.”

Graziano says that one of her most difficult appointments was as Faculty Senate President during pandemic-necessitated budget cuts that saw the closure of several programs, and the loss of faculty and staff.

“In spite of how obviously challenging that was, I tried to look for ways to use the position to do things that my colleagues needed,” she says. “I advocated for more conversation, for more collaboration, and for more

input from faculty before decisions were made. It was an emotionally fraught period and so I tried to remain a source of balance, calm and empathy as we went through this terrible time together.”

Graziano is currently serving as secretary of the Faculty Union and is looking forward to continuing her service next year.

“I’m excited. I think it’s an opportunity to build a really new relationship between faculty and administration, and to look at how we can collaborate to support each other and solve problems.”



*Leigh Graziano*



# MARIO AND ALMA PASTEGA STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARD

## Rosario Peralta-Cortez

*The Mario and Alma Pastega Staff Excellence Award honors a classified or administrative staff member who demonstrates exceptional service to the university. Once nominees are received, a screening committee submits a list of finalists to the president, who then chooses the recipient.*

WITH A MAJOR in Spanish and minor in Writing, Rosario Peralta-Cortez '13 had always assumed she would teach Spanish. It didn't work out that way and she couldn't be happier.

It was a serendipitous stint as an undergraduate intern at the WOU Writing Center that sparked a passion for helping Spanish-speakers find their voice in written English.

"I thought the Writing Center was a magical place," she recalls. "Working with students, working with writing, and working with Spanish-speaking students in particular – it was a dream that I didn't realize that I had."

After graduation, Peralta-Cortez took the summer to work as a freelance interpreter before stepping into the position of English Writing Specialist for Spanish Speakers, a post she's held for nearly 10 years.

Her days are spent helping students with everything from research papers, scripts and powerpoint presentations to scholarship and job applications. She also leads in-class

presentations and workshops on everything from proper citations to professionalism in writing, all while spreading the word about the free resources available at the Writing Center.

Whether she's addressing a class or working with an individual student, Peralta-Cortez says the most rewarding part of her job is connecting with others.

"With writing, you get to connect in such a special way," she says. "Sometimes it's connecting over the content, sometimes it's admitting I do the same thing when I'm procrastinating, but most of the time we get to just really connect as people."

It's no surprise then that one of her favorite things to do is help students craft winning

scholarship essays and effective personal statements. "I really get to know a student. I can sit down for 30 minutes to an hour and walk away knowing that I really helped them," she says.

As students find their voice and the confidence to express it, Peralta-Cortez imparts skills that translate into other areas of their lives as they reach for their dreams.

"I think a lot of times, how we do one thing is how we do a lot of things," she says. "I might help a student figure out how to manage time in a class, which sometimes means that they're able to manage their time outside of that class. Or teaching them how to help themselves with their writing shows them that they can ask for help. The skill I like to give students is how to seek out the things you need, advocate for yourself and prepare yourself for whatever you need in life."

Peralta-Cortez is quick to acknowledge Writing Center Director Katherine Schmidt, Ph.D., along with her fellow tutors and student interns, who create a welcoming and supportive environment focused on student success.

"We try to foster a really positive and uplifting work environment. That's my number one priority – to create a really safe and welcoming space on our campus," she says.

In her free time Peralta-Cortez enjoys hiking, exploring new restaurants and spending time with her nephews. When they aren't busy scrambling around the local playground or up a dusty trail, it's no surprise that she's encouraging them to dream and write stories, proving it's never too early – or late – to find your voice.



*Rosario Peralta-Cortez*