



# HEALTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER • FALL 2021

## Public Health Program

### Hello from HHD Chair Keith Russell

Greetings from Bellingham! The students, faculty and staff of the Department of Health and Human Development (HHD) send you warm greetings and hope you have weathered the storm, as it said verbatim on the senior year sweatshirt my daughter received commemorating her final year in high school. We both looked at it and each other and laughed; we are a little seasick, but we weathered it! These past eighteen months have been unlike any other. I will not speak to how hard it has been on our side of the fence, because fences are ubiquitous and COVID left no one unscarred. We simply did not have the bandwidth to send out a newsletter last summer, and when I asked the faculty and staff over a late spring 2020 Zoom meeting if we should try, I was met with blank stares and silence that said in a thousand words: “We would love to, but we are simply trying to teach math to our kids, finish up the quarter, walk our dogs that now have an undergraduate degree from WWU through Zoom, write annual reports, reconfigure our wireless, and finish up the quarter while also scheduling an optometrist appointment because our eyes don’t feel right.” I read the room with deft precision and said, “Alrighty then, the newsletter, like almost everything in 2020, is cancelled.” And here we are, a year later, and we are doing a newsletter, even if it is not approved yet by Governor Inslee’s Phase 3 restrictions. I am certain our faculty and staff still don’t have the bandwidth given their unbelievable efforts over this last year to serve our students and programs, but we all agreed: we have to do it, it is critical.

As usual, HHD has experienced a lot of change in the past few years. In 2020 we welcomed two new faculty and one staff to HHD and are welcoming one more in academic year 2021-2022. Kristen Chmielewski, Ph.D., (Recreation Management and Leadership, University of Iowa) and Mary Hunt, Ph.D., (Public Health, University of Arkansas) each had an opportunity to teach two quarters face-to-face (F2F)

before they were sequestered to their respective home offices and charged with taking all their curricula online. Both Kristen and Mary have done a remarkable job adjusting to WWU’s quarter system and their respective program’s curricula. The effort that was required is staggering, and we owe them sincere gratitude for their efforts in serving our students and programs.

We also welcomed Jen Leita to the team, a long-time instructor in kinesiology who now serves as HHD’s advising coordinator, supporting faculty and staff in serving more than 500 students in our four distinct academic programs. Jen has been an amazing addition to HHD, changing the way we advise our students, teach our classes and respond to student needs. We are fortunate to have her in this position.

Finally, we welcome Nathan Robey, PhD., University of Northern Colorado, to the KPE faculty. Nathan will be replacing Dr. Kari Jo Hilgendorf, who will be leaving HHD to care for her growing family. Dr. Robey previously served as our lab technician, so already knows his way around the Carver Academic Facility and HHD’s ten labs. Dr. Robey has a bachelor’s degree in athletic training from South Dakota State University and a master’s degree from Texas State University, also in athletic training. His doctoral work in exercise science at UNC focused on “The Effect of Visual Disruption on Stability After Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction,” which he completed in the summer of 2020.

We are happy to report that despite the pandemic, Dr. Jun San Juan’s Human Anatomy Dissection class this spring was able to provide students with an incomparable experience to learn human anatomy through hands-on human body dissection. This series of courses allows HHD faculty to better prepare our students for careers in allied health.



Keith Russell hiking with his dogs Cody and Banjo

Other news is that the Community Health Program has formally changed its name to Public Health to better reflect the mission and curriculum of our nationally accredited program.

This fall our goal is to offer as many classes as possible F2F even though we are confronted with myriad challenges trying to accomplish this goal. There are so many moving targets, that we are all accustomed to pivoting on a moment's notice because we simply do not have the answers we need to plan. In fact, this spring after submitting our primarily online-delivered academic schedule for fall 2021, we received notice that vaccinations would be required and we all would need to teach F2F. Two days later, we again received a notice, this time that faculty actually had the choice whether to teach online or F2F. In the midst of making these decisions, the administration was writing policy in real time for what that would look like for the fall. HHD's staff of Sue, Denise, Katey, Rob and Jen have been remarkable supporting us through this tumultuous time.

I want to send a HUGE THANKS to everyone who contributed to the various scholarships and funds in the department over the past couple of years. Your donations make it possible for us to support and enrich students' education in the form of scholarships, support conference attendance and other learning opportunities, and maintain our state-of-the-art lab

equipment. We are eternally grateful for your continued support. Thank you for helping us develop the next generation of HHD alumni who work to improve the quality of life of those they serve through their dedicated work in health and human development.

Please let us know if you will be in the area and keep a watch for a possible alumni event in spring of '22. We are long overdue for some real NOT socially distanced connecting. Best wishes for a healthy 2021-22!

Keith  
Chair, Health and Human Development  
Professor, Recreation Management and Leadership

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## News from Ying Li Public Health Program Coordinator

Dear alumni and friends,

I am so happy to write to you again through our newsletter, which was temporarily halted last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, we all have changed our lives in some way to cope with the pandemic, of which some parts have been positive, and some parts have been unpleasant but a must. I am confident that we will be back to normal in the near future thanks to the availability of the vaccines and all the public health efforts in rolling out the vaccination programs nationwide. With that perspective in mind, Western decided that most of our classes will be delivered with face-to-face modality in the fall of 2021. Our students welcome this decision and can't wait to return to campus and the classroom again.

Looking back, the public health faculty devoted a lot of effort to revise our curriculum, as I shared with our PH alumni in our December update email. After the completion of the curriculum revision, we have been focusing on informing various student service-oriented offices and students about our program changes with the hope of increasing program visibility among students who are interested in pursuing a major in public health. The other significant efforts faculty have been focused on is helping students adjust to online learning, which includes taking various teaching workshops to enhance the virtual education experience for students; providing continuous emotional support for our students who struggle with pandemic-induced issues; etc. While we work diligently to provide a meaningful and rigorous virtual education experience for students, our alumni and community partners are also doing what they can to help our students: for example, some are offering virtual

internships to help students graduate on time. As always, we feel fortunate and grateful to have you on our side.

Personally, the past year and half have been an interesting adventure for me in finding the appropriate work-life balance. On the one hand, I appreciate the convenience and flexibility of working from home; on the other hand, I struggle with keeping a clear boundary between family life and my job. Though both of my kids are old enough that I don't have to keep an eye on them constantly, I still have to put in more than a normal amount of time in supervision, which makes me think a lot about families with babies and toddlers who have no access to daycare.

Professionally, I presented with three colleagues at the 2021 SHAPE America National Convention to talk about social norms and health education in schools, and I submitted one food insecurity research abstract for the 2022 APHA Annual Meeting and Expo.

Service-wise, I enjoyed working with other professionals to create and implement SOPHE's Student Health Edu-Thon for the first time in their 2021 national conference. The Edu-Thon is a case

competition that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in health promotion.

I hope you all had a great summer!



Ying Li visiting the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Sculpture is "Homeward Bound" by Allan Houser.

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## Big changes in Western's Public Health program mean more real-world opportunities for students

by Kaleigh Carrol, Western Today

Amidst the shifting health mandates and regulations of the pandemic last year, Western's Public Health Program has updated its curriculum to better focus on the practical needs of students seeking to enter the healthcare field.

Combining courses, creating equitable application requirements and streamlining the course sequences are some of the alterations.

Change isn't a new concept for the program. Just last year, the program changed its name from Community Health to Public Health, because of alumni feedback, professor and program coordinator Ying Li said.

"Even though alumni graduated from the community health program, they would tell people it was 'public health' because people barely knew what community health was," Li said.

When reflecting on the myriad of changes to the program, Li said she was most proud of the newly flexible science requirements and additional concentrations available to students." Read the rest of the article on the [Western Today website](#).



Fourth-year public health students present their social marketing campaigns to their professors, peers and community organizations.

## News from Steve Bennett

2020 was quite the year. It has been interesting and humbling to watch our program continue through a pandemic. Also, to watch our students persevere. Our students have faced challenges that would have sunk me as an undergrad. I am continuously impressed with their engagement.

I am also excited as we begin welcoming new groups of students into our revamped Public Health Program. As the landscape of public health changes, so must our program. We must ensure that the education students are getting is adequately preparing them to work in the field—wherever and whatever that ‘field’ may be. I am also excited to reengage with research and action at a global scale as well as locally here in Whatcom County. Rebuilding as we, hopefully, emerge from the darkest days of the pandemic is going to be a massive community-led effort, and I know our faculty and students have a role to play.

I am proud to see the groups of public health professionals that we have entering the workforce. Public health is at a crossroads. It has taken a beating. We have faced extreme challenges over the past two years that have shaken the core of what public health stands for. At no other time in my memory have so many lost faith in many of our institutions or been confused and misled by mixed messaging from the over-politicization of health. Many of our public health professionals have worked tirelessly to support the health of communities, often while being continuously criticized and often unfairly berated. I look to the future when these students, as trained and experienced professionals, can work with current practitioners to gain that trust back. As we move forward, it is up to trained, educated and experienced public health practitioners to rebuild our systems and ensure that we partner with communities to achieve greater health for all.

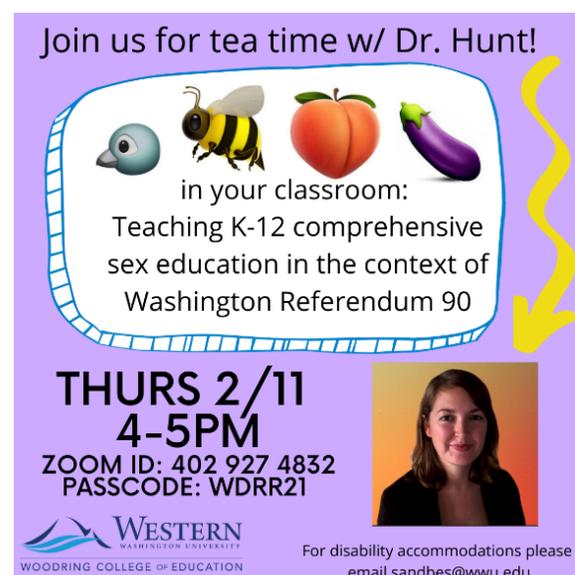
## News from Mary Hunt

Hello to everyone from the newest member of the public health faculty!

I started at Western in fall 2019, taught almost two full quarters in person before we transitioned online (at the onslaught of the pandemic near the end of winter 2020) and then spent the next five quarters teaching over Zoom. Suffice to say my first two years at Western has been quite an experience. In addition to learning how to teach online more effectively through several teaching and pedagogy workshops, the Public Health Program changed its name (from Community Health) and underwent CEPH accreditation processes and a massive curriculum revision (to be implemented starting fall 2021). I will teach a new qualitative research methods class in the spring for cohort students and a specialized honors seminar in the fall titled “Abortion in the United States: History, Politics, and Attitudes,” both of which will bridge my teaching with my research expertise in reproductive health and qualitative methodology. I am very excited!

Simultaneous with teaching preparation and creation of new courses, I launched a sexuality climate survey with colleagues in Prevention and Wellness Services and secured grant funding for participant incentives, resulting in responses from 1,000 Western students. I chaired three students’ honors theses as they each analyzed a data subset from the survey and co-wrote a

manuscript with me. Through the hardships of the pandemic, I am grateful for our hard-working public health students who persevered through the quarters and kept their cameras on to keep me from teaching to the void of black Zoom boxes. I am sincerely looking forward to teaching in person again with full vaccinations. It has also been a pleasure being in this department and part of this tightknit program working with Dr. Li and Dr. Bennett to grow our creativity, inclusivity and empathy.



Join us for tea time w/ Dr. Hunt!



in your classroom:  
Teaching K-12 comprehensive sex education in the context of Washington Referendum 90

**THURS 2/11**  
**4-5PM**  
ZOOM ID: 402 927 4832  
PASSCODE: WDRR21



For disability accommodations please email [sandbes@wwu.edu](mailto:sandbes@wwu.edu)

  
WOODRING COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Mary Hunt Tea Time flyer

## Senior Luncheon and Awards Ceremony

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to host a senior luncheon for the 2020 and 2021 cohorts. Instead, we hosted a mini-Zoom celebration to honor students' achievements.

### 2020 Cohort Awards

#### Outstanding Public Health Graduate

- Christiane Jones

#### Outstanding Public Health Major

- Emily Karmy

#### Spirit of Health Education

- Tess Davis

#### Evelyn Ames CHES Award

- Lucy Kodish scored the highest on the CHES proxy examination to receive this award

### 2021 Cohort Awards

#### Outstanding Public Health Graduate

- Kess Nelson

#### Outstanding Public Health Major

- Anna Fritschen

#### Spirit of Health Education

- Emma Giri

#### Evelyn Ames CHES Award

- Jenna Rosenbaum scored the highest on the CHES proxy examination to receive this award



## Honors Project Flyers for Public Health Majors' Presentations

A Senior Honors Capstone Presentation

# RISKY BUSINESS?

Examining prevention and perception of STI and pregnancy risk among college students at Western Washington University

**MARCH 11th @1-1:45pm**  
Presented by Emily van Deirse  
Advised by Dr. Mary Hunt

For Disability Accommodations, please email [honors@wwu.edu](mailto:honors@wwu.edu)

## Sexual Violence, Power, and Safety at WWU:

Where we are and where we go from here

Zoë Evans-Agnew  
Advised by Dr. Mary Hunt

**JUNE 8TH  
3PM**

A campus-wide survey on the unwanted sexual experiences of WWU students

For Disability Accommodations please email [honors@wwu.edu](mailto:honors@wwu.edu)

## Public Health Alumni Spotlight

Note: The public health major was formerly called community health when most of these alumni attended Western.

### Marni Henderson (1995)

After partnering for two years with another nonprofit, in 2019 Marni founded Sunrise Retreats in Idaho. Following the death of her husband and fellow WWU alumni, Tyler Henderson (1994), she realized the need for health and wellness education specific to those navigating life after the death of a spouse. She looks forward to expanding resources and educational offerings that enhance the health and wellbeing of the widowed community and their families.

#### [Sunrise Retreats](#)



A Sunrise Retreat trip on the Payette River in McCall, Idaho

### Rachel Lucy (2000)

In February 2021, Dr. Rachel Lucy celebrated the completion of her PhD in Healthcare Leadership and Change from Antioch University. Lucy serves as the Northwest director of Community Health for PeaceHealth, a non-profit healthcare system serving 10 communities in the Pacific Northwest. Her career has focused on advocating for the underserved, community wellness and caregiver engagement. Her dissertation was an exploratory case study focused on the central question of what shapes inclusive engagement of participants with lived or living experience in multi-sector collaborations (MSCs working towards community health improvement). This study sought to precisely include the perceptions of these individuals most closely impacted. The study is available on the [Antioch AURA website](#).

Rachel resides in Bellingham with her husband of 20 years, Jason (also a Western graduate), and their two daughters, Allison and Blakely.

### Rachel Lucy (2000) and Jerry Rajcich (2019)

A much-needed facility will be coming to Bellingham in 2022. The Way Station will be a safe and welcoming facility where individuals and families experiencing homelessness can find a constellation of services to assist their transition to housing and access to vital social and health services. The vision for The Way Station came together in summer of 2019. Western community health graduate Jerry Rajcich (2019) was interning at the time with Rachel Lucy, director of Community Health at PeaceHealth. Together they worked collaboratively with other community partners in Whatcom County to tour other facilities offering similar programming in the state of Washington. The tours inspired this all-in-one model that will include recuperative respite care 24-7, health care services, case management, hygiene services and more.

There has been enthusiastic support from the community, including an initial award of \$400,000 from PeaceHealth. Then, in April 2019, the team got some incredible news that \$4 million was allocated in the state's capital budget for this new facility. Watching this facility go from dream to reality has been humbling for Jerry and Rachel, who both got their start in Western's community health program. They have both carried the values of community health into their work in deeply meaningful and rewarding ways that serve our local community.



Various Whatcom County partners from multiple organizations stop for a photo while touring a program in Seattle (Rachel center front, Jerry center back)

### Stephanie Van Cleave (2009)

Stephanie graduated with a master's in nursing science in March 2021. She is working for the federal government in Puerto Rico as a school nurse to

manage chronic illnesses, ensure immunization compliance and promote health through education. This year has been focused on COVID-19 prevention, education and contact tracing. As a school nurse, Stephanie uses her community health and nursing degrees to educate and empower the students she works with.



Stephanie Van Cleave at work as a school nurse in Puerto Rico

### Kaylee Knowles (2010)

Kaylee was awarded a Master of Science in International Health Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in November 2020. A student when the coronavirus pandemic began, her daily commute via the London Underground ceased when LSE transitioned to online courses mid-way through the degree. Her dissertation, titled "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospital discharge arrangements: Analysis using Kingdon's policy agenda setting framework to assess integration between health and social care in England," was completed during a remote work placement at the LSE Care Policy and Evaluation Centre. She was honored to be a part of the LSE Health Policy Department during that time; the same professors that were teaching students to critically analyze health systems were simultaneously advising governments in their pandemic response.

After completing the degree, Kaylee passed the exam to become a Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES). She is continually grateful for the quality education she received as a Western community health alumna. The teachings and practices instilled by Western professors prepared her for a fulfilling and impactful career, now further enhanced with her master's degree. She is thankful for Western's community health professors who supported her graduate school applications, making it possible to turn her professional goal into reality.



Kaylee Knowles at Lake Werbellinsee in Biosphärenreservat Schorfheide-Chorin, a nature preserve park outside of Berlin, Germany

### Amika Savage (2016)

Beginning shortly after her graduation from Western, Amika has been living in Portland, OR, and attending Oregon Health & Science University. She graduated in June 2021 with a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree and has been credentialed as a family nurse practitioner. For her doctorate project, she conducted a needs assessment in partnership with the Multnomah County Health Department with the goal of advancing care for sexual and gender minority patients in local student health centers. She is thankful for the related knowledge and experiences she gained through the Community Health Program, as that foundation greatly supported her more recent efforts. Following graduation, she is looking forward to her first summer without school obligations in seven years(!) and will be seeking employment as a primary care nurse practitioner in the Portland area.

## Sarah Mills (2018)

Sarah served with the Peace Corps in Togo, West Africa, as a health volunteer from June 2019 until global evacuation of all volunteers due to COVID-19 in March 2020. Her projects focused on maternal and child health and supporting rural community health educators. After evacuation she moved back home to Alaska and has since found a job doing outreach and nutrition education with the Anchorage Health Department's WIC program.

## Aimee Ott (2018)

Aimee has been working at the Opportunity Council in Bellingham for the last two years; she says it is an incredible organization, and the job is a great use of her degree. She started as a housing case manager and spent the last year as the lead for her team. Over the last year she found herself drawn to funeral services and is pursuing a degree to become a funeral director in fall 2022. She and her partner are moving to Boston, MA, in preparation for her new career.

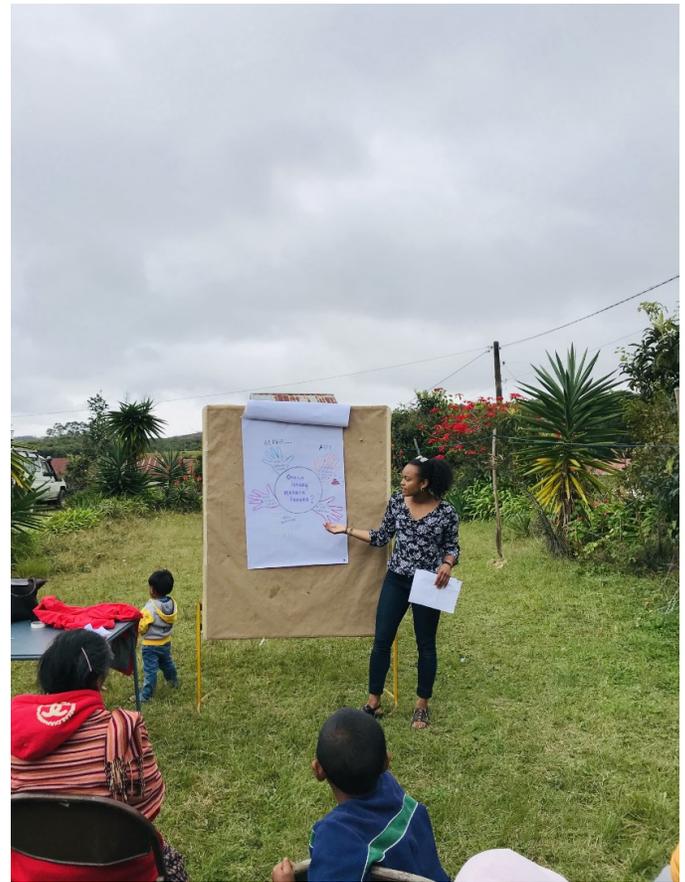
## Laurel Puffert (2018)

In December 2020, Laurel started working at San Francisco General Hospital as a patient navigator on the addiction care team. She works to provide high quality care to patients who have substance use disorders and to teach them about harm reduction practices to reduce overdose and complications of use.

## Deja Svastisalee (2018)

In 2019, Deja was serving in the Peace Corps in Madagascar as a public health advisor. She was placed in a rural village 15km from the main road where she spent her days at the health clinic speaking to community members about vaccines, handwashing and nutrition, amongst other things. When the 2020 pandemic hit, she returned home from the Peace Corps, where handwashing was a continuous topic being spoken about. She took some time to readjust to the fast-paced American lifestyle, became a 2020 Census worker, then joined Seattle & King County Public Health as a health education specialist/community health worker. Working remotely, she speaks to several people a day who've been exposed to COVID-19. King County has been a progressive organization to work with, as they work towards health equity, especially after declaring racism a public health issue this past year.

Deja has been fortunate to witness several programs be inspired by their communities and implemented by King County Public Health during a time of many unknowns.



Deja Svastisalee in Madagascar speaking to community members about handwashing

## Jake Thomson (2018)

Post-graduation from Western, Jake moved to Seattle and spent the first two years working as a lead team coordinator at Seattle Cancer Center after completing his internship there. In January 2021, he transitioned into a clinical research coordinator role in the thoracic head and neck oncology research team. In addition to working full time, Jake is currently in school working on a Master of Public Health degree from West Coast University and will graduate in August 2021.

## Nicole Rhodes (2019)

Since July 2020, Nicole has been with the Snohomish Health District working on their COVID-19 efforts in the county. She has worked on many aspects of the effort, including contact tracing, working at the testing site, submitting vaccination records, contacting employers about COVID-19 in the workplace and much more. She recently received her COVID-19 vaccination as well. Obviously, Nicole wishes this pandemic hadn't

occurred, so these “accomplishments” are bittersweet to her. She is thankful to have a job and be helping in the effort to combat this virus but hopes it all comes to an end soon.



Nicole Rhodes working as a contract tracer

### Spencer Kentaro Davis (2020)

Spencer has spent the last year gaining a plethora of unique and diverse professional experiences. In addition, he has learned to adapt and navigate through these trying times of COVID-19. After graduation, he accepted a position as a senior plasma center technician doing phlebotomy for Biolife Plasma Services. Here he experienced strenuous, tedious and technical healthcare training to collect plasma used for life-saving medicines for people with rare and complex diseases worldwide. In February 2021, he accepted an offer from the Oregon Health Authority as the operations team lead under their Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention section. Here he leads and works with a phenomenal team to reduce barriers and create more efficient processes to make Oregon a healthier place to live, work, learn, play and age. He is currently preparing to apply to multiple Master of Health Administration programs to fulfill his career goal to become a chief operations officer (COO) in the healthcare field.



Spencer Kentaro Davis and his partner receiving their COVID-19 vaccines

### Emma Ratliff (2020)

Since graduation, Emma became CHES certified. She has been working for United Healthcare as a field-based community health worker (CHW). As a CHW, she focuses on a whole person approach to care management that integrates a variety of physical and behavioral health services to identify, assess and address the members’ physical, behavioral and social/environmental needs. She works with Medicaid members to ensure appropriate care is accessed as well as to provide health education. She assists people by giving guidance on health behaviors, advocates for individual and community health needs, and provides necessary resources. In her free time, Emma enjoys walking her dog, reading and quality time with family.

*Way to go, alumni!*

## Ways to Give to the Public Health Program

As always, we appreciate your support of the Public Health Program, which allows us to offer more opportunities to our students. Our Public Health Foundation fund (also known as Community Health and Health Education) covers conference attendance, special events, guest speakers, equipment, books, teaching materials, etc.

Online: [Public Health \(Community Health\) Foundation Fund](#)

[Health and Human Development Foundation Fund](#)

Via phone: 360-650-3027

With a check made payable to the WWU Foundation; please indicate which fund you are donating to on the memo line of your check. Mail to: WWU Foundation, 516 High Street, Mailstop 9034, Bellingham, WA 98225-9034



Thank you for your generosity. We appreciate your support! Questions? Need help? Visit the [How to Give](#) page.

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Contact us: [HHD website](#)

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View from Oyster Dome (photo by Jasmine Goodnow)