

*What's new in*

# ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

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## From the Provost

*April is the cruelest month....* so begins T.S. Eliot's famed poem *The Waste Land*. Critics continue to debate whether this is a poem of despair or of salvation but perhaps Eliot had simply visited a college campus during April.

It's tough to be a professor in springtime. Here in West Chester, it's finally starting to warm up after a long, cold winter. On mild days, our students' eyes are drawn to classroom windows, where they catch glimpses of other students lounging out in the sunshine. But while the Adirondack chairs on the Academic Quad may be tempting, there is much work to be done before spring semester draws to a close. And not just for our students. It's crunch time for faculty and staff, too, as final exams must be drawn up, papers graded, and projects completed before the term ends.

So, we enjoy snatches of birdsong and glimpses of the budding flowers, knowing that these busy days won't last forever. I hope that you have been having many rewarding experiences this semester and wish you well in these busy, remaining weeks of the term.



Dr. Linda Lamwers

## CROSSFIT & WCU TEAM UP TO STUDY SODIUM LOSS IN ATHLETES

Last August, two otherwise healthy teenagers died from drinking too much water during and after their football practices. One reportedly drank 16 liters of water and Gatorade at practice, in a misguided attempt to alleviate muscle cramps. The official cause of death was hyponatremic encephalopathy, caused when low blood sodium levels draw excess fluid into the brain, making the brain cells swell.

Sandra Fowkes Godek, professor of sports medicine and director of the university's HEAT (Heat Illness Evaluation Avoidance and Treatment) Institute, is one of the nation's leading experts on exercise-associated hyponatremia (EAH). In its mildest form, this sodium imbalance causes headaches and nausea; at its most severe, as in the case of the two young football players, it can prove fatal.



Sandra Fowkes Godek

"I have been researching EAH for years and have read and heard about many similar tragedies, but I was really shook up by the stories of these two boys," says Fowkes Godek. "I wrote a comment about them on a blog maintained by CrossFit, the fitness company, and a company representative responded. We talked a bit and before I knew it, CrossFit offered to sponsor a conference on EAH."

The HEAT Institute organized the conference, which was held in Carlsbad, Calif., in late February. The conference attracted researchers and physicians from as far away as Australia and Europe and also attracted the attention of the media. Four days after the conference, Fowkes Godek was featured in a *Wall Street Journal* article about EAH.

Athletes have it drummed into their heads to drink up, whether they are thirsty or not. Every running event has multiple water stations – even short 5Ks -- and 10-gallon water jugs are ubiquitous at every high school football game.

"Athletes are lot more likely to do serious harm to themselves by drinking too much rather than drinking too little," notes Fowkes Godek. In addition, she says that researchers are discovering that drinking less doesn't hurt performance, and might even improve it.

"Drink if you are thirsty; if you aren't, don't drink. It's that simple, and that important," says Fowkes Godek. "I was in the Student Rec Center the other day and cringed at the sight of this tiny young woman equipped with a huge water bottle for a half-hour workout. I educate everybody I see about the dangers of excessive water consumption during exercise."

Brawny football players, not petite "gym rats," are who Fowkes Godek encounters most. She is conducting on-going research with the WCU football team and also has

collaborated with the Philadelphia Eagles, the Philadelphia Flyers, and the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team.

Some of the individuals she studies are prone to be "salty sweaters," as Fowkes Godek dubs it, and that's not a good thing. We all sweat at different rates and excrete varying amounts of sodium in our sweat. The "salty sweater" is someone who sweats a lot, and sweats out lots of sodium, too. Typically, the "salty sweater" gets into trouble after multiple practices per day, continuing over consecutive days, during which they lose large amounts of sodium and drink excessive liquids.



*Fowkes Godek says athletes need to guard against excessive hydration*

In addition to regulating an athlete's intake of fluids, one of the best ways to reduce the risk of EAH is to eliminate multiple practices in a single day. At the pro and college level, this already happened, at least in the case of football. In 2003, the NCCA banned college football from consecutive days of "two-a-day" practices. In 2012, the NFL stopped "two-a-day" practices completely. But at the high school level, only a handful of states have done so. Texas, Georgia and Alabama, where high school football is virtually a religion, have all banned consecutive practices in one day. Here, in Pennsylvania, school districts are free to schedule multiple practices per day, for both high school and middle school teams.

"The CrossFit Conference on Exercise-Associated Hyponatremia was invaluable from a research perspective but I'm also very pleased that it has helped get the issue of EAH out there to the general public," says Fowkes Godek. "The coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* made a splash, and we have been continuing to get inquiries from the media. This is great, because I want every athlete, coach, and athletic trainer to know about the risk of drinking too much and losing too much sodium."

## WCU CHOSEN TO LAUNCH DEGREE COMPASS NATIONWIDE

Much like Amazon uses algorithms to suggest books for customers based on their past buying habits, Degree Compass software can suggest courses for students based on their past behaviors, including grades.

Degree Compass is coming to West Chester University within the next academic year and this powerful course recommendation system could transform the way that WCU students, in tandem with their faculty advisors, choose courses and navigate their way through a degree program.



However, there are some key distinctions between the ways that Amazon or Pandora or Netflix work versus Degree Compass, notes Jeff Osgood, who is currently serving as faculty associate to the provost. Chief among these differences is that Degree Compass doesn't make recommendations based on which classes are most popular. Instead, it uses predictive analytic techniques based on grade and enrollment data to rank courses according to factors that measure how well each course might help students progress through their own degree programs.

By improving the advising process, Degree Compass could strengthen WCU's commitment to student success and increase student persistence and graduation rates.

Degree Compass provides information in three directions. The advisor-facing interface of the site offers predictive data about grades, allowing the faculty member to offer more nuanced advice to their advisees. The student-facing interface is designed to be user-friendly, with course choices presented in an informative and appealing way. Finally, an array of reports will allow WCU to aggregate recommendations and use it to optimize future class schedules.

"Beyond scheduling, these reports act as an early alert system by letting us know which students are at risk of performing poorly in their courses," says Osgood.

Degree Compass was developed by Tristan Denley, a mathematician at Austin Peay State University (APSU) in Tennessee. Arizona State University has created a similar academic advising software dubbed eAdvisor. Currently, APSU

and three other Tennessee institutions utilize Degree Compass. Preliminary research from large-scale trials show that the system is effective. Students who follow Degree Compass course recommendations increase their number of credit hours and achieve better grades. Minority students showed the largest gains in credit hours per term when they took the courses that Degree Compass suggested. In fact, these gains largely erased the achievement gap between whites and nonwhites at these four colleges.

D2L acquired Degree Compass from APSU and is offering WCU the opportunity to be the launch customer as it begins to roll out the software nationwide. “The advantage of being the launch customer is that WCU faculty will have significant input into what features make sense for our institutional culture and are consistent with our values,” says Osgood. “No decisions have been made as to what features will or won’t be included. A faculty implementation group will be formed to assist with the development process.”

Degree Compass will be piloted to a limited number of WCU programs and colleges in 2015, with a complete roll-out planned for academic year 2017.

## WCU STUDENTS RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR RESEARCH



*Award winners, from left, John E. Smith, Derek Duquette and Kristen Waltz*

When Heather Jones graduates from WCU in May with a degree in exercise science, she will have plenty to talk about in job interviews. Like the fact that she has published her research in a peer-reviewed journal and that she made a presentation at an American College of Sports Medicine conference in San Diego. Or that she was one of the winners of WCU’s Student Research and Creative Activities Award, which was presented on Research Day, March 24.

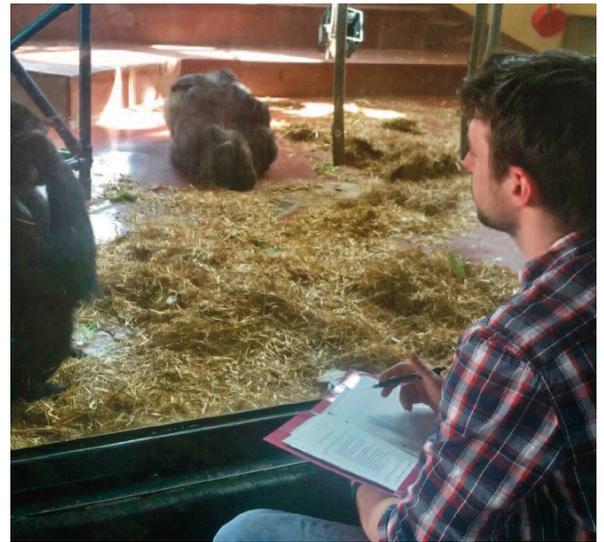
“Research is an invaluable component of the undergraduate experience,” says Gautam Pillay, associate vice president for research and sponsored programs. “Faculty are working to give opportunities to conduct research or create scholarly or creative work to every WCU student.”

A lot of learning happens when students do research. Through research, students can enhance their understanding and knowledge of the discipline they are studying; improve their critical thinking, communication, problem-solving and time-management skills; and refine academic, career and personal goals. And there’s no denying it looks great on a resume, too.

“Research projects and other experiential learning opportunities give our students an edge when they seek employment or apply to graduate school,” notes Pillay.

Jones was one of four individual winners, in addition to one group winner, of the Student Research and Creative Activities Award, which recognizes excellence in student research at the undergraduate or graduate level. Each winner received \$1,000 as well as the opportunity to present their work.

The other individual winners are: Sara Barker, a senior majoring in economics and finance; Alex Strandberg, a senior majoring in psychology; and Kristen Geiger, a graduate student majoring in history/early American studies. The group award winners are Derek Duquette, a junior majoring in German and history; John E. Smith, a junior majoring in history and political science; and Kristen Waltz, a senior majoring in social studies education.



*Alex Strandberg observes a gorilla at the Philadelphia Zoo*

Jones’ research analyzed blood lactate levels and respiratory exchange ratios of research participants as they performed Alpha Cardio Focus T25, a popular 25-minute workout DVD that is billed as “fat-burning.”

“However, it is well known that in order to burn fat during a workout you must exercise at a moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes,” notes Jones. “So far we have found that the participants doing T25 are exercising at a high intensity and are primarily burning carbohydrates throughout the workout. I find this area of research particularly interesting due to the lack of knowledge among the general public about fat or carbohydrate oxidation during different workouts.”

Melissa Whidden, an assistant professor in the department of kinesiology, was Jones’ faculty mentor for the project.

Alex Strandberg watched gorillas work up a sweat – and chill out, too – in his research observing gorillas interacting together at the Philadelphia Zoo. The project was designed to look at the connection between crowd size and gorilla behavior in an attempt to monitor gorilla welfare.

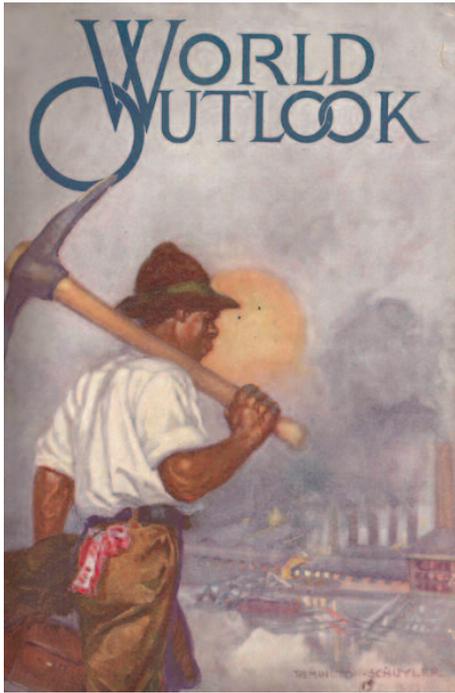


*Derek Duquette*

“I started doing this research two years ago after taking an animal behavior class with Dr. [Rebecca] Chancellor,” says Strandberg. “She has such passion for her research that it inspired me to get involved.”

Strandberg plans to attend graduate school and is currently co-writing a paper about the primate research project. Chancellor, an assistant professor in the department of psychology, was Strandberg’s faculty mentor.

Barker, 22, loves to travel and that helped her hone in on an intriguing research topic. “My research looks at what affects airline prices,” she says. “The unpredictability of airline prices is not unfamiliar to me. It didn’t seem like there was a reason for the volatility in pricing. My project looks at variables like competition to see how much of an impact they have on airfares.”



This was Barker's first experience with research but it won't be her last, as she plans to attend graduate school. In the meantime, she is continuing to study the airline industry to discover whether there is a relationship between prices and service. Barker's faculty mentor was Simon Condliffe.

The group award winners -- Duquette, Smith and Waltz -- as well as graduate student Geiger, collaborated on a website called Goin' North: Stories from the First Great Migration to Philadelphia <http://goinnorth.org/>. Their faculty mentor was Janneken Smucker, an assistant professor of history.

The multimedia website shares the stories of African Americans who migrated from the South to Philadelphia during the 1910s and 1920s, revealing the complex struggles to overcome racism both in the South and in Philadelphia; the search for opportunities in the North; and a look at the worlds of church, work, school, and entertainment for these individuals.

The site includes oral histories of 15 such individuals; photos; audio of popular songs from this era; an archive of photographs and documents from regional and national collections about the Great Migration to Philadelphia; and much more.

"My contribution to the website creates a window into the life of a domestic worker who lived to provide her son with an education, an impossibility in the Jim Crow South," notes Waltz. "My classmates worked on similar projects, focusing on other personal histories. All in all, the website showcases the big picture of life for Black Philadelphians in the early 20th century."

*No Matter  
How Long  
Winter is,  
Spring is  
Sure to Follow*



## WORKING – FOR A GOOD CAUSE – OVER SPRING BREAK

WCU works hard to create a culture of service in which every member of the University community is asked to step outside their own needs and commitments – for an hour, a day, or many hours throughout the year -- and work for the greater good.

For some students, staff and faculty members, this may mean planting native trees on the WCU campus on Arbor Day, which is coming up April 24. (See sidebar below.) For others, it may mean foregoing a relaxing spring break last month and instead working with Habitat for Humanity to repair and build homes in Buffalo, New York, or serving a community impacted by HIV and AIDS in Pittsburgh.

WCU sponsored five Alternative Break trips this semester, including three domestic and two international trips. In addition to Buffalo and Pittsburgh, there was a work project to several eastern Pennsylvania towns that focused on creating sustainable food resources such as community gardens. Internationally, students on a trip to Costa Rica used Cap Kits (learning manipulatives created from recycled bottle caps) for academic enrichment activities with students and also for teacher training. On a first-ever WCU student trip to Guatemala, students helped build homes, educate youth, and spread awareness of public health issues.

Students report that they get as much out of the experience as they give. “As a trip leader, I have learned a lot about myself, and a lot about working with groups, but most of all I have learned how to overcome challenges and face community issues with humility and confidence,” says Mauricio Martinez, student trip leader for the sustainable food resources project.

“Over the past three years, WCU’s Alternative Break program has really flourished, expanding from one trip in the spring of 2013 to five trips this spring. With the support and enthusiasm of students, faculty, and staff, this program will only continue to grow,” says Jamie Williams, interim assistant director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs.

Faculty interested in coordinating a domestic or international service trip should contact Jodi Roth-Saks, director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs, at [Jroth@wcupa.edu](mailto:Jroth@wcupa.edu). Roth-Saks and her staff can assist with securing partnerships with community agencies, recruiting students, logistics and more.



*Donna Sanderson demonstrates how to use Cap Kits*



*Junior Lauren Collins with Costa Rican students*

### CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY BY PLANTING A TREE

On April 24, Arbor Day, members of the WCU community are encouraged to pick up a shovel and plant a tree. WCU has partnered with the Brandywine Conservancy to plant native hardwoods at the Gordon Natural Area. The project is funded in part by a grant from TreeVitalize, a program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

Volunteers are needed from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and are asked to bring a water bottle and to wear close-toed shoes and clothes that can get dirty. Sign up at <http://bit.ly/Springtrees> or by emailing [mmayer@brandywine.org](mailto:mmayer@brandywine.org). Snacks, water, shovels and gloves will be provided. Volunteers should meet at the gate to the Gordon Natural Area (Lot R) shortly before 2 p.m.



## PRINCETON TEAM PHYSICIAN KEYNOTES BRAIN HEALTH CONFERENCE APRIL 24-25

“Concussion is not only a concern for professional athletes,” says Amanda Blue, outreach business manager of WCU’s College of Health Sciences. “More effective methods of concussion prevention and treatment have become an imperative, particularly for young people with developing brains.”

With the goal of increasing knowledge and awareness, WCU’s Spring Health Conference 2015 will focus on “Brain Health: Keeping Your Brain Safe and Strong.” The keynote speaker is Dr. Margot Putukian, director of athletic medicine and the head team physician at Princeton University. Putukian also is a team physician for U.S. Soccer and the U.S. Men’s Lacrosse Team and serves on the NFL’s Head, Neck & Spine Committee, chairing the Return to Play Committee.

The conference kicks off April 24 with Putukian’s keynote address at 8 p.m. at Asplundh Concert Hall. It continues Saturday at WCU’s Graduate Center, with a full day of programming on topics including concussion prevention, and managing the return to school or work after a concussion, as well as broader issues in brain health, such as dietary and lifestyle approaches for optimizing brain health, and the effects of aging and disease on communication.

Although there will certainly be health professionals in attendance, the conference is designed for everyone, stresses Blue, who organized the event. “I specifically discussed the audience with each of the speakers so they understood that they will be speaking with members

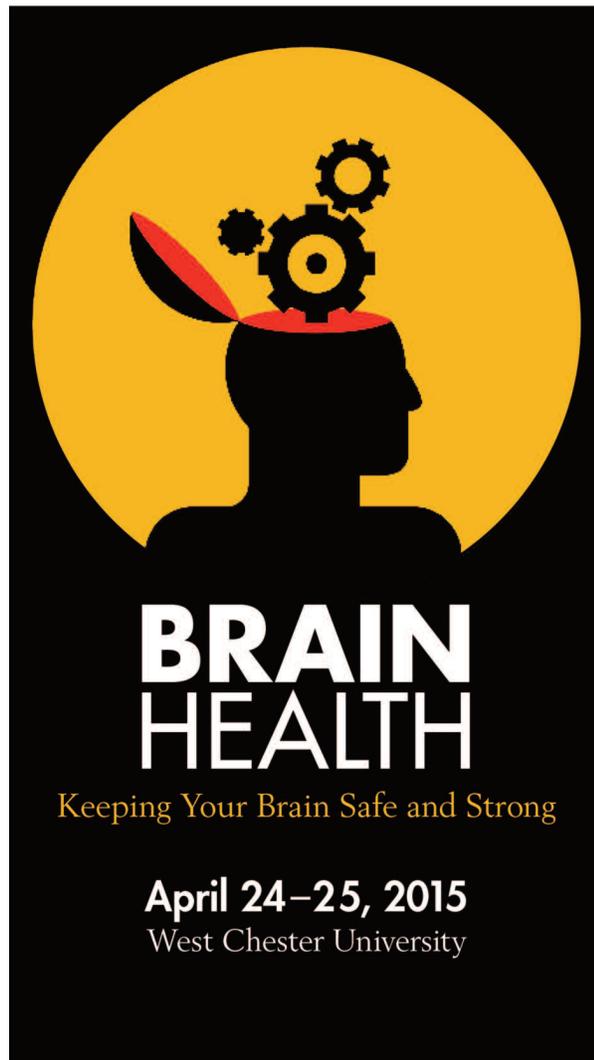
of our community, as well as to other health professionals,” she says. “I expect the conference to attract plenty of parents, youth sport coaches and educators.”

Putukian’s keynote, “The Art & Science of Concussion: Translating Data into Concussion Prevention,” will summarize some of the facts and fallacies about concussion, and provide insight about how community and school-based based interventions can improve safety in sport, from pee-wee leagues on up to the pros.

Tickets can be purchased either in advance or at the door for the keynote address; pre-registration is necessary for Saturday’s sessions. Tickets are \$10 for the keynote address;

students get in free. Saturday’s program, which runs from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., is \$45 for adults and \$30 for students. The fee includes lunch. A combined ticket for both days is \$50. Educators can receive seven Act 48 credits.

For more information or to register go to [www.wcupa.edu/chs](http://www.wcupa.edu/chs).

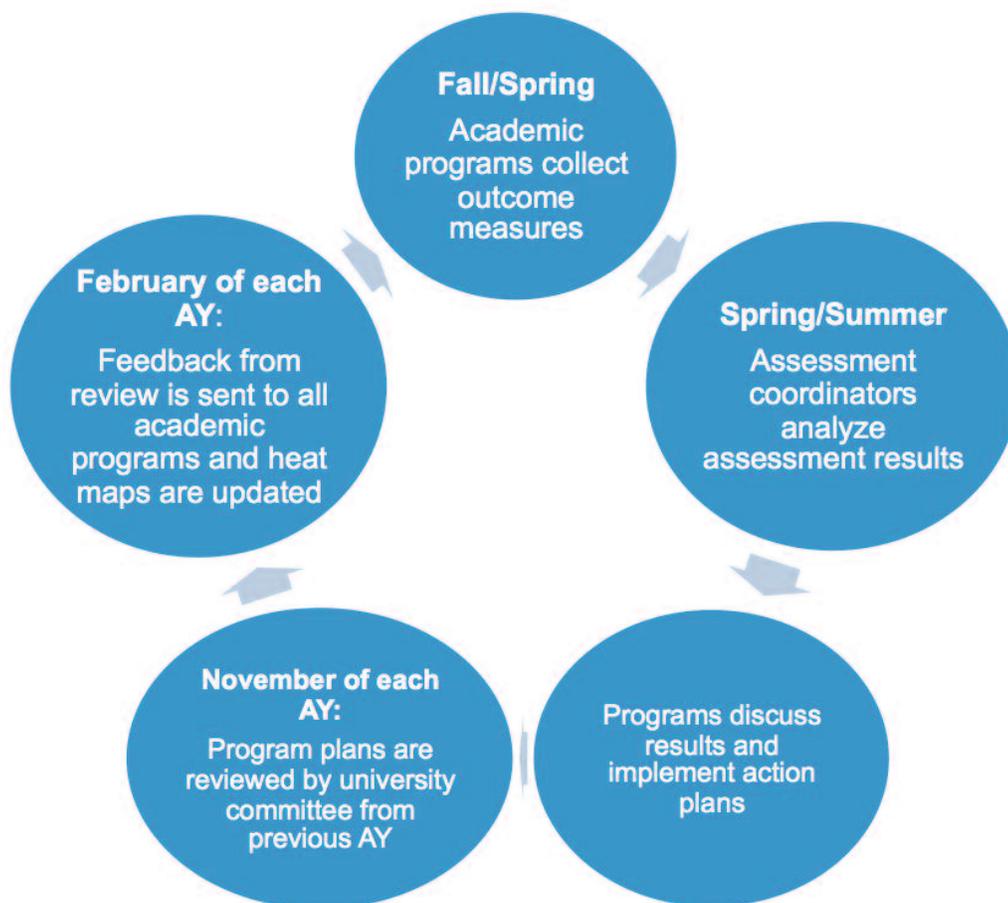


## ASSURANCE OF STUDENT LEARNING RUBRIC MOVES ASSESSMENT FORWARD

During the last two and a half years, Academic Affairs has instituted a process for evaluating student learning assessment plans for all graduate and undergraduate programs. The goal is to better understand the quality of program-level assessment plans and communicate a consistent message as to what needs to be included in a high-quality assessment plan, says Scott Heinerichs, who is a faculty associate for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in the Office of the Associate Provost.

“Prior to this process we were able to quantify elements related to plans, such as how many programs had outcomes, results and action plans, however we could not speak to the quality of the plan,” notes Heinerichs. “Through the use of the assurance of student learning (ASL) rubric there is now more transparency with regard to the institutional expectation related to academic program student learning assessment.”

Under Heinerichs’ direction, the university assessment advisory committee and associate deans have been responsible for reviewing program plans each year and providing feedback (using the rubric as a guide) to programs that relates to the quality of the plan. In addition to scores for each element of the rubric, feedback is provided so programs can improve their plan where appropriate in an effort to obtain better student learning outcome results. Heat maps that display academic program scores based on this process are posted here: <http://www.wcupa.edu/tlac/assessment.asp>. These charts are updated at the end of the review cycle annually. Heat maps measure the progress of the ASL initiative, not specific student learning outcomes, stresses Heinerichs. For program-specific student learning outcomes, refer to department websites.





## ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Looking for a good book to read this weekend? WCU English professor Geetha Ramanathan suggests *Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez.

Nonfiction more your thing? Then how about *An Astronaut's Guide to Life: What Going to Space Taught Me about Ingenuity, Determination, and Being Prepared for Anything* by Chris Hadfield and recommended by WCU associate professor Tim Ray.

A summer reading (and viewing) list is just one of the many user-friendly features on the English department's newly redesigned website. The site also features an Upcoming Events calendar, which lists readings, panels and other special events that are free and open to the public.

The "Why English" page offers compelling testimonials from WCU English graduates who discuss how their degrees have helped them thrive in a variety of careers. And the enhanced Faculty section includes detailed information about faculty research interests and publications.

Andrew Sargent, associate professor and assistant chair of the English department, coordinated the web redesign, working closely with WCU's Web Team members Kimberly Slattery, director of content & web services, and Michelle Ortnier, web team specialist.

Check out the new English department website at: [http://www.wcupa.edu/\\_academics/sch\\_cas.eng](http://www.wcupa.edu/_academics/sch_cas.eng).

## WOMEN STUDENTS LEARN LEADERSHIP SKILLS FROM WCU ALUM



*Alum speakers at the Women's Leadership Forum included, from left, Christine Warren, with eBay Enterprise; Sonia Trudeau of the New Castle County (Del.) Police; and Jessica Tracy, of Conner Strong & Buckelew.*

In late March, the College of Business and Public Affairs held a Women's Leadership Forum focused on preparing women students to succeed in the workplace. The event included a panel discussion by distinguished WCU alumnae. Workshop topics included the importance of networking; interview etiquette; navigating office politics; negotiating salary; the importance of mentors; and soft skills, those personal qualities such as a strong work ethic and positive attitude that can be the deciding factor in who gets hired and who gets promoted.

Alumnae speakers came from a wide range of fields, ranging from business – such as Christine Warren, director of Client Success for eBay Enterprise – to law enforcement, represented by Sonia Trudeau, a sergeant with the New Castle County (Del.) Police.

“The evening was a success, and we plan to offer a leadership forum for women students again next year,” says Monica Zimmerman, interim associate dean for the College of Business and Public Affairs. “We are delighted to have accomplished alumnae who are willing to share their experience and insight and help women students prepare for a career and achieve success.”

