

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY



HONORS COLLEGE *My Dear Friend Campaign*

Where there's a will, there's a way!

Honors students demonstrate that they care through cards

Not even a pandemic could stop Honors students from their goal of completing civic engagement at William Paterson this fall. In early November, nearly 100 Honors students met on Zoom to participate in an activity that involved creating handmade greeting cards for nursing home residents who are isolated during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.



Brianna Belar (left) and Jenna Vitale assemble packets for the "My Dear Friend" campaign.

activities on campus, and were involved in many clubs and activities in high school. One evening as they were in their room lamenting about how the pandemic was making it difficult for students to participate in volunteer activities, Jenna visited the website of "GlamourGals," a national organization she had volunteered for in high school that is devoted to providing companionship to senior citizens in nursing homes. She discovered that since

The idea originated with sophomore Honors Peer Leaders and roommates, Jenna Vitale and Brianna Belar. In addition to sharing a room in Skyline Hall, they share an interest in participating in co-curricular and extra-curricular

GlamourGals volunteers were no longer able to visit residents due to Covid restrictions, the organization had launched a *My Dear Friend* card writing campaign, as a way of reaching isolated seniors during the crisis. They were seeking volunteers to write cards and letters to seniors in nursing homes across the country. Jenna contacted Amanda Kruzynski, Program Director of GlamourGals, who welcomed the idea of the WP Honors College getting involved in their card writing campaign. Ms. Kruzynski provided guidelines for participating and helped identify senior centers in the Wayne area.

Jenna and Brianna mentioned the project to Jan Pinkston, the Assistant Director of Honors, who was in the process of finding a civic engagement activity to replace the annual Honors Coat Drive that was cancelled this year.





“The Honors College and Honors Club have partnered with Passaic Family Head Start on the Coat Drive for the last 15 years and we were disappointed that they were unable to accept our donations this year due to the pandemic,” said Pinkston. “Jenna and Brianna’s idea of hosting a card-writing campaign was perfect since it could accommodate a large number of students, whether they were attending classes on campus or remotely during the fall semester.”



Brianna Belar (left) and Jenna Vitale count and process the cards that were made by Honors students for residents of nearby senior homes.

As advisor of the Honors Club, Pinkston reached out to Club President and Honors office student assistant, Julianna McVeigh, who agreed to help organize the event. Together, the three students assembled packets that included plastic zip lock bags, card stock, and markers generously donated by the WP department of Campus Activities and Student Leadership (CASL). They also designed electronic packets for students who were participating remotely and using their own supplies.

The organizers designed flyers and embarked on a social media campaign to advertise the event and register students. Pinkston also worked with the student organizers to plan the three-hour Zoom event, which included remarks by several guest speakers: Dr. Barbara Andrew, Dean of the Honors College who welcomed the students and discussed the importance of civic engagement; Ms. Amanda Kruzynski, Program Director of GlamourGals who spoke about the mission of the organization; Mr. Steve Caruso, Executive Director of Brookdale Wayne senior center who told the group about the facility and some of the residents; and Ms. Maria Pagan of CASL, who provided the students with an overview of civic engagement opportunities on campus.

Following the remarks, the participants spent an hour creating cards together before breaking into small groups to show off their cards and reflect on what they had learned during the activity. The students got back together for a large group discussion prior to the conclusion of the event.

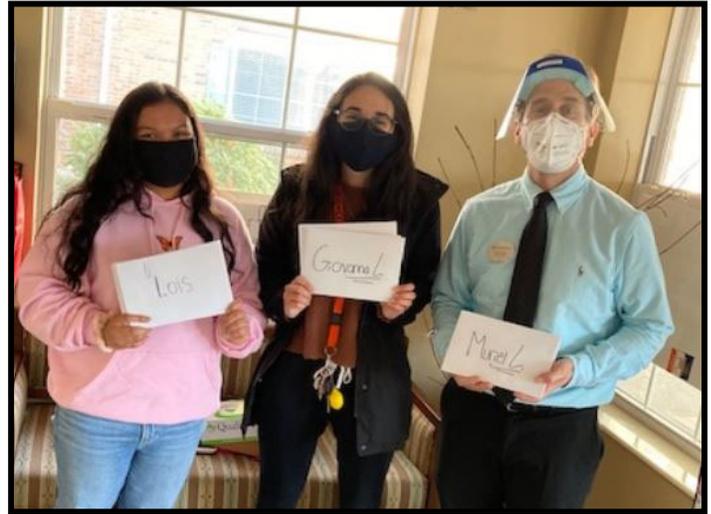
While the prospect of a three-hour Zoom meeting seemed daunting at first, the students reported that they enjoyed participating in the event and learned a lot. For junior chemistry major, Jimmy Yray, it was personal. Jimmy, a student in the Honors Social Sciences Track, knows first-hand how much an older person appreciates receiving a personalized greeting card. “My grandmother is in a nursing home with limited visitors,” said Jimmy, “and I’ve taken care of my bedridden grandfather who keeps going back and forth to the hospital, so I really gave it my all.”

First year Honors student, Tyler Sanchez, a Biology/ Pre-Med major, thought the event was fun and meaningful. “As college students we are always so focused on



Nearly 100 Honors students participated in the card writing civic engagement event on Zoom on November 1st. Over 400 cards were submitted to the Honors Office!

ourselves, whether we are trying to get good grades or trying to make the best of college that we forget about the people outside of school.” Tyler felt that the event helped make students aware of the disappointment that elderly people feel because they are unable to see their family, especially with the holidays coming up. “Making these cards was the least we could do for the senior citizens,” he said.



Honors students delivered the homemade cards to Brookdale Wayne senior center. Pictured from left are Honors students, Brianna Belar and Jenna Vitale, along with Brookdale Wayne Executive Director, Steve Caruso.



Many of the students reported that they especially enjoyed hearing from Steve Caruso, the Executive Director of Brookdale Wayne who told stories about the residents, which helped the students visualize who would be receiving the cards. He reminded the participants that the cards would help the seniors keep going, especially during the Covid crisis when everything seems to be at stand-still.

In the two weeks following the event, over 400 cards arrived at the Honors Office. The student organizers processed and counted the cards, and delivered them to Brookdale of Wayne last week, wrapping up a very rewarding event.

“I am thrilled with how successful this event was,” said Dr. Barbara Andrew, Dean of the Honors College. “In addition to serving the mission of civic engagement at William Paterson by allowing our students to get involved and make a difference in the community, this event helped students begin to think about leadership roles they can take on at the University, and it allowed them to make connections with professionals outside of William Paterson,” said Andrew. “It was also a meaningful way to help students reflect upon a

population that they might not have felt much of a connection to prior to this.”

Dr. Andrew was also impressed by the quality and the number of cards that were produced. “It was moving to see how so many students took this so seriously and crafted such beautiful, heartfelt cards,” she said.

Given the success of this event, the Honors College students and staff look forward to offering similar events in the future. A special thank you goes out to Maribel Rodriquez and Maria Pagan from CASL for their support, and to the student organizers: Brianna Belar, Julianna McVeigh, and Jenna Vitale for their hard work and the dedication they put forth to make this event a huge success!



UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE
honors@wpunj.edu

Website: www.wpunj.edu/honors
Visit us on Facebook!
www.facebook.com/wphonorscollege