THE HAPTIC TOUCH
Dear Friends,

We take pride in saying that WSU Vancouver is Southwest Washington’s only four-year research university. That matters—to us and to our community.

Our research focus goes back to 1890, when the State Legislature established WSU in Pullman as the state’s land-grant university. The mission of land-grant institutions, which initially was to disseminate scientific knowledge for practical use, has expanded to embrace a broader spectrum of research designed to strengthen economies, improve lives and inspire change.

In 1989, in establishing WSU Vancouver and other branch campuses of the state’s two public research universities, the Legislature charged the campuses with increasing access to higher education and promoting regional economic development. Fueling economic growth requires the knowledge and innovation discovered through research.

University research improves the human condition. While many people think of research as laboratory experiments, so much happens outside the lab. Research includes figuring out how to create a culture of safety in the workplace. Engineering ways to improve how technology functions. Developing strategies to prevent childhood obesity. Analyzing state-patrol data in search of any pattern of racial discrimination. Investigating ways to improve classroom teaching. Developing a means to preserve electronic literature. Each of these is an example of work being done at WSU Vancouver.

In this issue of Northwest Crimson & Gray, you’ll find some great examples of faculty research on our campus. In the School of Engineering and Computer Science, Hakan Gurocak has patented two inventions designed to help improve our online experiences. In the Carson College of Business, Iis Tussyadiah is exploring how Airbnb and other peer-to-peer accommodations are changing travelers’ behavior. Our first four prevention science doctoral students are participating in faculty research across the spectrum of human life, from infancy to old age.

WSU has reformulated the land-grant mission for today, reorienting its research agenda around five “Grand Challenges” that represent complex problems the university can help solve: sustaining health, sustainable resources, smart systems, opportunity and equity, and national security.

The modern world has myriad other challenges to address as well. WSU Vancouver faculty are working with local partners and with researchers around the world, as well as government, business, civic and philanthropic leaders—and our students—to tackle these problems. Our research mission inspires us to innovate, analyze and experiment to discover how society can progress.

Sincerely,

Emile “Mel” Netzhammer
Chancellor
ALMOST LIKE HOME
Peer-to-peer accommodations are changing the travel industry.

IN PURSUIT OF THE GOLDEN MIC
Meet Taylor Ocasio, one of college radio’s best on-air personalities.

COMMON READING BRINGS US TOGETHER
“Integration Nation” will spur discussion on immigrants and refugees.

REGENTS HONOR LATE PRESIDENT
WSU medical school will be named after its champion, Elson S. Floyd.

THE HAPTIC TOUCH
Hakan Gurocak’s patents will help advance the digital experience.

ACCENT ON ABILITY
Students with disabilities emphasize communication with professors.

PUTTING SAFETY FIRST
WSU Vancouver is committed to keeping everyone on campus safe.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION
Prevention scientists help stave off threats to public health.

RE-IMAGINING THE FIRST YEAR
WSU Vancouver joins national program to help first-year students succeed.

UP IN THE AIR
Student IEEE Club launches a space balloon.

CAMPUS SNAPSHOT: AGE DIVERSITY
You’re never too old or too young for college.

HOW COUG ARE YOU?
Catch up with Susan Thornton, Nursing ’00.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE
Opsahl Dawson adds excitement to accounting.
ALMOST LIKE HOME

THE RISE OF PEER-TO-PEER ACCOMMODATIONS IS CHANGING TRAVELERS’ BEHAVIOR.
Not long ago, the average person considered travel a luxury. Now, most of us—as individuals, in families or in groups—consider it a necessity. Travel is an opportunity to take a break from the routine, explore new places, see family and friends, and meet new people.

In the past few years, nothing has altered the face of travel more than peer-to-peer accommodations. This means arrangements like Airbnb, HomeAway, Vacation Rental By Owner and others that help ordinary people rent out rooms in their homes—or the entire home or apartment—to strangers.

Conceived as a way to help people make a little extra income from their own residences, peer-to-peer accommodations are becoming larger players in the travel industry. They are also becoming increasingly professional and impersonal, as investors buy houses and apartments not to live in but explicitly to rent through Airbnb and its ilk.

How is this affecting hotels, motels, restaurants and tourist attractions? Idissa Tussyadiah would like to know. She is an associate clinical professor of Hospitality Business Management in the Carson College of Business at WSU Vancouver.

“It is an interesting disruption to the conventional economy,” she said.

More people are traveling

Tussyadiah is conducting a series of studies to learn more about that disruption. One of these studies recently resulted in an article in the Journal of Travel Research, “Impacts of Peer-to-Peer Accommodation Use on Travel Patterns.” Her co-author is Juho Pesonen, head of the Centre for Tourism Studies at the University of Eastern Finland. When the trend began, hotels and restaurants didn’t pay much attention to it. “Now I think they pay more attention because of the explosive growth,” she said.

For their study, Tussyadiah and Pesonen conducted online surveys in the United States and Finland. They wanted to learn how using peer-to-peer accommodations changes travelers’ behavior. Do peer-to-peer users travel more often, stay longer and take part in more activities than other travelers?

The answer turned out to be yes. Users of peer-to-peer accommodations, they write, travel more often, visit more places (not just the most popular destinations) and participate in more activities. The primary appeals of peer-to-peer are economic and social. People use them to save money and live like locals, staying in less touristy neighborhoods and meeting people in the community.

“This can be good for the community, but it can also create issues,” Tussyadiah said. For example, while businesses may benefit from the increased spending, too many tourists may mean traffic, crowds and noise for which some communities are not prepared. Neighborhoods not zoned for tourism may worry about strangers threatening residents’ safety, comfort and even health.

The system is maturing

Unlike hotels and other established sectors of the travel industry, peer-to-peer accommodations are not well regulated. Portland, Ore., was one of the first cities to apply taxes, zoning and inspections to peer-to-peer accommodations. Because the peer-to-peer industry is in its infancy, more cities are bound to follow.

“Just like any new system, it has to learn and improve,” Tussyadiah said.

Online travel agencies, which initially ignored the sharing economy, are beginning to recognize the demand from the traveling public. They are now seeing peer-to-peer accommodations as another distribution channel for travel.

“Many are starting to have a strategy to incorporate peer-to-peer businesses,” Tussyadiah said. For instance, a major online travel agency, Expedia, recently acquired HomeAway, a peer-to-peer business.
Another aspect of the sharing economy—online reviews—is important to both conventional hotels and peer-to-peer accommodations. Favorable reviews build a facility’s reputation. Reviews of peer-to-peer places often focus on the host, while those of hotels emphasize the room, service and extras. People expect more from hotels.

Reputation and trust are critical to profits for both hotels and peer-to-peer accommodations. There are stories about dangerous hosts and peeping Toms. But, said Tussyadiah, “trust is also important to hosts.” There are also stories about guests who steal, damage property or throw parties. Airbnb now has insurance for hosts—another sign of the increasing professionalism of the peer-to-peer industry.

People who use peer-to-peer do not rely entirely on it, she said. Most who use hotels also use peer-to-peer, and vice versa. “If they are traveling for work, they will probably stay at a hotel, but if they are with a family with small children and want a homelike environment during their trip, or want to live like a local, they want to go to Airbnb,” Tussyadiah said.

Research can strengthen the industry

As part of her series of studies, Tussyadiah has recently completed an article that will soon be published about why people do or do not use peer-to-peer. And while studies so far have focused on guests, she is also planning to learn more about hosts.

More research on travelers’ evolving behavior will help the travel industry respond to increasing competition from peer-to-peer accommodations. In the end, the entire industry could grow stronger from it. Hotels are already becoming more personal, and peer-to-peer is becoming more professional. Far-flung destinations that don’t get many tourists and hence have few hotels particularly benefit from the presence of a peer-to-peer market.

As Tussyadiah and Pesonen write: “Unique experiences offered by staying at peer-to-peer accommodations diversify tourism products and encourage niche tourism experiences. Eventually, this will enrich destination attributes and add to the competitiveness of destinations.”

Tussyadiah’s research enriches her teaching in the Hospitality Business Management program by enabling her to keep up with issues like this. “I can always give my students the latest application of concepts and theories,” she said. “I teach service operations management, and I ask my students to look at peer-to-peer as one type of service and how the service model is different from the conventional service industry.”

Like most in her study, Tussyadiah herself rents both hotel rooms and peer-to-peer accommodations. “I have used Airbnb in New York a few times, because hotels in my favorite areas of the city are so expensive,” she said. In New York, she especially likes to stay in apartments whose hosts are out of town. “So far my experience with Airbnb has been really good,” she said.
Taylor Ocasio grew up in a household filled with music. His father played Spanish music to help his family maintain a connection with their heritage. The great crooners of the 1940s and ’50s—Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis Jr.—also were regulars on his playlist.

That was the inspiration for Ocasio’s radio show “DJ T.O.’s Classics.” It played weekly during fall semester on WSU Vancouver’s student-run Internet radio station, KOUG Radio.

“Classic music is underplayed,” said Ocasio. “I wanted to give listeners the experience I grew up with.”

One day Ocasio noticed a flyer for a radio contest in the corner of the studio.

KOUG Radio is a member of the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System, a nonprofit educational association founded in 1940 that acts as a resource for college radio, TV and webcasting stations. Each year the IBS presents Golden Microphone awards to the best in college radio in 40 categories.

Just days before the deadline, Ocasio decided to enter the Golden Microphone competition in the “Best On-air Personality” category. He put together a five-minute mix featuring clips of his favorite tunes, along with the introduction and closing segments of his Halloween special.

“My dad helped me put the mix together, but neither of us had experience with editing software,” said Ocasio. The pair spent hours on the mix and stayed up late to make the deadline.

That clip got him noticed. Ocasio is one of five finalists in his category, and competition was fierce. Awards were handed out at the 76th Annual IBS International Radio Conference March 4 – 6 in New York City. Ocasio brought home a Finalist trophy for his category.

“DJ T.O.’s Classics” is on hiatus during spring semester. Ocasio had hoped to study abroad, but plans fell through. He’ll be back, though. He has a dream. Currently a psychology major, Ocasio intends to go on for a master’s degree, then a doctorate. He hopes to open a psychology practice one day. Guess what will be playing in the waiting room?
If you’ve ever shared a favorite novel with a friend or been a member of a book club, you know about the kinds of conversations that result from the shared experience. Themes. Characters. Settings. Differences in interpretations. It can be fodder for hours of meaningful discussions that often help us understand each other better.

WSU’s Common Reading Program is like a book club, only bigger. It connects the community through a shared academic experience, and creates common academic ground and dialogue for all who participate. First-year students receive a copy of the book. Current students, staff, faculty and community members are encouraged to borrow the book from the library or purchase a copy and join the conversations. The book is used in first-year courses and in special programs that occur throughout the academic year.

All WSU campuses have selected a book that adheres to the theme “Social Justice and Leadership.” “Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees, and America at Its Best,” by Susan E. Eaton, is the WSU Vancouver Common Reading Program book for 2016/17. “Integration Nation” is a collection of case studies that take us on a cross-country journey, introducing us to individuals who challenge America’s prejudice against people from other countries by welcoming immigrants and collaborating with the foreign-born as they become integral members of their new communities.

Eaton said the book emerged from a storytelling and organizing project she founded called One Nation Indivisible. Beginning in 2011, she and a group of experienced journalists set out across the country to write about the variety of efforts to assist immigrants in becoming full participants in the political, economic, educational and social lives of their new communities. She wrote most but not all of the stories contained in the book.

In light of the recent debate on immigration and the upcoming presidential election, “Integration Nation” is very current. It also highlights many types of leaders among a broad sector of people.

“It’s a very solution-oriented book that should spark good discussion among our students and includes several examples from our region,” said Suzanne Smith, director of academic planning and special assistant to the vice chancellor of academic affairs, who is leading the Common Reading Program.

A selection committee reviewed 27 books last fall and recommended three to Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Renny Christopher, who made the final selection.

“Susan Eaton’s storytelling style is very engaging as she presents stories of American communities integrating immigrants in unexpected, productive ways to produce more vibrant, flexible and successful educational and economic enterprises. The book is relevant to both national and local interests, given that the New American population of the state of Washington has more than doubled in the past 20 years, currently standing at more than 13 percent,” said Christopher.

An array of Common Reading Program events will take place throughout the 2016/17 academic year. Keep your eye on WSU Vancouver’s events calendar at events.vancouver.wsu.edu to find ways you can participate.
REGENTS HONOR LATE PRESIDENT

WSU’s medical college will bear the name of its strongest champion, the late President Elson S. Floyd. The WSU Board of Regents approved a proposal in September to change the name from the College of Medical Sciences to the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine.

President Floyd believed the time was right for a second public medical school in the state of Washington, and he worked tirelessly to make it happen. He died of cancer June 20, 2015, just 10 days before the State Legislature completed a two-year operating budget that included $2.5 million to establish a medical school at WSU.

Dr. John Tomkowiak, a veteran of community-based, interprofessional medical education, has been named dean of the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine. The first class of 40 medical students will begin their studies in fall 2017 at WSU Spokane.

New degree—B.S. in Mathematics—starts this fall.

A mathematics degree can lead to careers in:

**Actuarial Science** takes mathematics and statistics and applies them to finance and insurance.

**Biomathematics**—modeling natural and biological processes—applies to cellular neurobiology, epidemic modeling and population genetics.

**Computer Science**: Mathematicians, with their training in logical and precise thinking, are highly prized in this field.

**Cryptography** is the practice and study of hiding information. Think security for ATM cards and computer passwords.

**Finance**: Mathematicians can help explain and predict the behavior of financial markets.

**Operations Research** uses mathematical methods to arrive at the best solution to a problem, improving the performance of a system.

**Statistics** is used in a wide array of fields: Environment, government surveys, industry, market research and medicine.

**Teaching mathematics** at the K-12 level is a high-demand profession, and the need is expected to grow in the future.

To see the complete list of academic offerings, visit vancouver.wsu.edu/programs.
Hakan Gurocak wearing a haptic glove designed using patented technology, including electronically controlled brakes and an actuator.
PHOTO: LAURA DUTELLE

H A P T I C  T O U C H
One major reason hands-on experiences are so different from digital experiences is the sense of touch. When you go shopping at a retail store, for example, you can handle an item before you buy it. But when you shop online, you can only see a picture of it.

That’s bound to change, because haptics technology—technology that conveys a sense of touch—is already here. Haptics technology enables us to develop smart systems by converting digital objects into reality. For example, dental training systems already exist that allow students to work on digital patients to practice dental procedures. Through the haptic interface, the smart system can make interactions with the digital patient more realistic, as if the student were working on a real person.

You can find haptics technology in the automotive industry, in medical training, in videogames and even on your smartphone’s keypad. In the future, the technology has potential for use in surgery, physician training and many other quality-of-life applications.

So far, however, it has not spread to everyday desktop computer use.

Hakan Gurocak is out to help change that. Gurocak is professor and director of the School of Engineering and Computer Science at WSU Vancouver.

For every advance in the power of computing and technology, there are numerous pieces to the puzzle. Gurocak’s research fills in some of the puzzle for haptic technology.

Haptic technology relies on actuators—a generic term describing motors, electronic brakes and pneumatic systems. Actuators create vibrations or force that generates a haptic sensation.

“One of the biggest challenges in building futuristic interfaces is current actuator technology,” Gurocak said.

Last summer, Gurocak received his first two U.S. patents—one to help improve electronically controlled brakes, and the other for an improved internal design that will allow for a much smaller but more powerful actuator. These two patents are a big step toward haptic interfaces—possibly something wearable, like a type of glove—that will expand applications of the technology.

“It’s very exciting to me personally, and it was quite a learning process to go from ‘I have an idea, I wonder if it would work,’ and ending up with a U.S. patent,” Gurocak said.

**THE STICKINESS FACTOR**

The first patent, received July 28, 2015, is titled “Magnetorheological devices and associated methods of control.” These devices, called MR devices, use a special fluid that is employed in the development of electronically controllable brakes. The fluid, usually slippery, becomes sticky in the presence of a magnetic field, and the stickiness creates the resistance that is essential in building new haptic interfaces for the sense of touch.

Gurocak’s contribution was to solve a problem with the stickiness factor. Once activated, MR devices tend to keep the stickiness in memory and not revert to the slippery state when turned off. (Imagine touching a virtual object, such as the picture of a shirt on an online store website, with a haptic interface. Even after you release the digital shirt, you’d still feel the touch sensation. That would be weird.)

“The solution we came up with is simple but very effective,” Gurocak said. “It will be applicable to any MR device that uses this fluid.”

**TWO NEW PATENTED INVENTIONS BY HAKAN GUROCAK CAN HELP ADVANCE THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE.**
“IT’S VERY EXCITING TO ME PERSONALLY, AND IT WAS QUITE A LEARNING PROCESS TO GO FROM ‘I HAVE AN IDEA, I WONDER IF IT WOULD WORK,’ AND ENDING UP WITH A U.S. PATENT.”
—HAKAN GUROCAK
MINIATURE MR-BRAKE
Gurocak’s team used magnetorheological (MR) fluid to design a small passive actuator (brake) called MR-brake. MR fluids can be activated using a magnetic field. In the inactive state the fluid has a viscosity similar to low viscosity oil. Upon activation it changes to a thick consistency similar to peanut butter.

DESIGN IMPROVEMENT
The second patent, received Aug. 18, 2015, “Linear MR-brake as a high force and low off-state friction actuator,” is an improved internal design. “This enables a different kind of interaction with the device and potentially different types of interfaces that can be built,” Gurocak said. “It enables us to make the actuator much smaller but more powerful.”

Gurocak worked with WSU’s Office of Commercialization in Pullman to disclose the invention and file the patent application. It is a long process—Gurocak’s first patent took three years from filing the initial disclosure to receiving the patent. The Office of Commercialization will pursue additional commercialization activities, including licensing the patent to an industry partner or a start-up company. Although all intellectual property developed by faculty is owned by the university, WSU creates incentives for inventors by sharing revenues generated through the commercialization of their intellectual property.

Haptic interfaces are devices that provide force and tactile feedback to the user as they interact with objects in a computer-generated virtual world.

THE FUTURE OF HAPTICS
Gurocak named a couple of examples that illustrate the potential of haptics to improve our quality of life. For instance, while robotic surgery is already in use, it is limited by the lack of what’s called “force feedback” to the surgeon. Haptic technology can provide that feedback, ultimately enabling the surgeon to “feel” inside the patient’s body as he or she interacts with tissue while operating the surgical robot.

In medical training, anatomy studies currently involve cadavers, but the number of cadavers is limited. Many universities are trying to come up with a haptic interface that would make it realistic for digital models to be used instead. Students would interact with a digital patient, but it would feel like the real thing with the help of the haptic interface.

EDUCATING TOMORROW’S INVENTORS
The future of haptic technology depends on continuing training of new inventors with new ideas, and that is happening at WSU Vancouver. Gurocak’s former graduate students are listed as co-inventors on the patents. Doruk Senkal and Berk Gonenc were involved in the first patent, and Mustafa Alkan in the second. Senkal and Gonenc went on for doctorates, and Alkan returned to his native Turkey and started a company there.

Gurocak is delighted about the beneficial “side effect” of his patents—“not only developing the technology but in the process developing a highly skilled technology workforce who got to work on these things and contributed,” he said. “Regardless of the patents, that’s what universities do.”
Jennifer Schwartz was born with Turner syndrome, missing a chromosome. One of her symptoms is severe hearing loss. Her condition worsened after ear infections and complications from surgery two years ago. But now, at 34, she is a successful college senior who will graduate this spring with a bachelor’s degree in English, poetry editor of the Salmon Creek Journal and a talented singer.

Despite an array of medical problems, Schwartz exudes confidence. She succeeds in school in part because she talks frankly about her situation and needs. “I can communicate with my teachers,” she said. “The big thing is flexibility with deadlines and open dialogue so I can share my issues.”

The ADA has helped Schwartz and many other students who are challenged by conditions ranging from blindness and impaired mobility to PTSD and ADHD. Cognitive disabilities—which are often invisible—account for about 40 percent of disability types in schools; the rest are physical. Some students have both.

The ADA requires the university to provide resources, or “reasonable accommodations,” to students with documented disabilities, to ensure equal access and help students, faculty and staff with disabilities complete their classes and/or keep their jobs. (Students are not required to disclose their disability.)

The starting point for students needing accommodations at WSU Vancouver is the Access Center. Accommodations may include, among other things, adaptive classroom furniture, assistive technology, note taking and alternative testing arrangements.

**BEYOND THE ADA**

“The ADA is a major part, but just a part, of what is changing things for the better so students can achieve their goals,” Schwartz said. For example, she also credits assistance from outside organizations to buy hearing aids she otherwise could not afford.

Sometimes, the need is not material, but for empathy and understanding. “WSU Vancouver has been the best university I have attended in terms of how closely the professors work with you personally so students can succeed,” Schwartz said. “I have complications healthwise. When I was dealing with an ear infection, I was able to make up class work. Instructors provide PowerPoints of their lectures that students can access online. Professors take more steps at this university than they necessarily have to, to ensure students can succeed.”

Rusty Wray, president of the Accessibility and Empowerment Club (formerly Students with Disabilities Club), starts the conversation with his professors before the first class. Macular dystrophy
has made him legally blind, and weak vision brings on sporadic severe headaches. He needs flexibility and empathy so that his grades don’t suffer because of attendance and testing policies.

“I’ve never had any problems,” Wray said, “in part because I’m proactive. I let them know I’ve been successful in other classes, and I want professors to know I work hard. I emphasize working together. I try to be solution oriented.”

Wray, 40, worked for years as a bookkeeper and restaurant manager before returning to school. He earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology at WSU Vancouver in 2015. Now he is working on a second bachelor’s degree, in sociology, and is the LGBTQ outreach coordinator at the Student Diversity Center.

He worked to change the name of the student disabilities club, he said, to emphasize empowerment. “We have an evolving view of the way we want disabilities seen on campus,” he said. “We promote student advocacy, building community and supporting each other.”

FACULTY VIEWS

Last fall, Michael Dunn, associate professor of special education and literacy, surveyed faculty members about their concerns in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. Responses indicate they want students to be open with them about their needs. They want to understand, and don’t want to cause offense unintentionally because of ignorance.

The survey also asked what tactics have been effective in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. The majority of responses mentioned open communication. “Encouraging students to talk to me directly regarding their needs and requirements,” one respondent wrote. “Asking the student directly what helps and what does not help,” another said.

Dunn and Wray led a recent workshop on accommodation strategies. Dunn listed the top five strategies for faculty that had emerged from his research:

1. Develop and sustain a practice of empathy.
2. Be willing to go the extra mile.
3. Dialogue with the Access Center.
4. Allow students to use technology.
5. Focus on the goal of a test or learning the content.

For example, allow extra time on the test, and forgive spelling errors.

Wray elaborated on what professors need to understand:

• No one size fits all when it comes to accommodations.
• You have to be willing to work with the student. The solution has to work for both student and professor.
• You might not get it right the first time; solutions may take time. Encourage students to talk about what worked.
• Students want to be successful. They have overcome challenges to get here. Understand how hard they worked to get here.

The ADA was enacted in 1990. But in many ways it is still being written. Anna Hixon, a junior whose father has multiple sclerosis, created a video for an animation class about challenges he faces in getting around. She hopes the world will keep striving for better solutions. “The ADA has taken so many steps to improve accessibility,” she said, “and hopefully the progression will not end here.”

—RUSTY WRAY
Join faculty, staff, family and friends as we celebrate commencement.

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SATURDAY, MAY 14
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LEARN ABOUT
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Reality Check:

Technologies That Will Change the Way We Work and Think

Friday, April 1
11:45 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.
FIRSTENBURG STUDENT COMMONS

to learn more and purchase tickets, visit vancouver.wsu.edu/css

RECHARGED

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11:45 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.
FIRSTENBURG STUDENT COMMONS

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Safety on college campuses is in the news—not usually in a good way. Last fall the news hit close to home when nine people were gunned down at Umpqua Community College near Roseburg, Ore., on Oct. 1.

WSU Vancouver Chancellor Mel Netzhammer sent a message to the campus community that very day. In it he said, “I am deeply saddened by the loss of life at Umpqua. I share their grief as I am sure you do.” He went on to send a message of condolence to Umpqua on behalf of the entire campus.

As much as Chancellor Netzhammer hopes never to have to send another such message, he is vigilant in his efforts to ensure he never receives one. WSU Vancouver is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for students, faculty, staff and visitors, and for that, Chancellor Netzhammer relies on Lt. Dave Stephenson.

Stephenson spearheads efforts to keep the campus safe. He leads a team of highly trained, certified commissioned police officers and security officers who protect the campus in many ways, from practice drills to on-campus escorts.

“I am personally invested in keeping the campus safe,” said Stephenson. “I consider myself the guardian and protector of the university.” Stephenson’s record speaks for itself. WSU Vancouver’s annual crime report reflects very low criminal activity.

A LEADER IN SAFETY

WSU Vancouver was first among the WSU campuses to publish a note about campus safety on course syllabi. The campus has a long-standing practice of conducting fire, earthquake and active-shooter drills. And its mass notification and announcing systems are more advanced than those of most campuses, according to Stephenson.

WSU Vancouver has conducted active-shooter drills since 2008. Statewide, WSU is making strides by adopting the “Run, Hide, Fight” protocol, which encourages people to:

• **Run:** Quickly assess your situation, have an escape route and plan in mind, leave your belongings behind and keep your hands visible for law enforcement.

• **Hide:** If you cannot exit safely, secure your area by locking or barricading the door, minimize noise and lights that might call attention to your location, and remain in place until authorities advise.

• **Fight:** As a last resort—and only when your life is in danger—you may choose to fight. Commit to your actions and use physical aggression against the shooter. Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

SAFETY IS NOT JUST ABOUT BAD GUYS

“In all areas of campus life, from the workplace and our research laboratories to commuting to and from our campuses, the number-one priority must be safety. There is nothing of higher importance,” said Interim President Dan Bernardo in a message to all WSU employees in February.

Indeed the threat may come in the form of an earthquake, a terrible storm or a particularly contagious form of the flu.

Stephenson admits he loses sleep. Will a small incident turn into something bigger? Are we ready for whatever may come? Is it really going to snow tonight?

He said a huge part of cultivating a safe campus is identifying potential threats and developing a plan to combat them.

Lt. Dave Stephenson’s safety tips for prospective students shopping colleges

• The Jeanne Clery Act requires all colleges to report criminal activity annually by Oct. 1. That report is also required to be easy to find. Check the college’s annual safety (Clery) crime report.

• Read the police or public safety website to get a feel for the campus’s safety culture.

• Visit the campus to get a feel for whether it’s right for you.

• Ask questions at new-student and family orientations.

• Consider housing security. How is access controlled and what assistance and supervision resources are present?

• Take note of emergency policies and procedures, including weather, fire, power outage, natural disaster or any degree of manmade emergency.
SAFETY IS NOT ONE MAN’S JOB

Stephenson regularly reminds the campus community that every member has a role to play in campus safety.

“Leaders at all levels must take an active role in working with faculty, staff and students to foster an environment of safety awareness by providing necessary training and by setting an example for others to follow,” said Stephenson. “Individual faculty, staff and students should know the appropriate actions to take when an emergency arises.”

Stephenson asks that everyone review the Campus Safety Plan and visit the WSU Vancouver Police website for a comprehensive list of university policies, procedures, statistics and information related to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community.

PREPARATION IS KEY

In addition to drills, WSU Vancouver offers students, faculty and staff many kinds of training to maintain personal and campus safety. Courses in self-defense, CPR, incidents in the classroom and auto-prowl prevention are offered regularly. Prevention programs for drug and alcohol information and referral, and mental health referral are always available. A crisis communications team is trained annually and practices emergency notifications and timely warnings quarterly. Safety escorts, video surveillance, emergency phone stanchions and automated external defibrillators are just a few of the additional items that round out WSU Vancouver’s safety resources.

REPORTING WORRISOME BEHAVIOR

WSU Vancouver’s AWARE Network is dedicated to helping students by providing a forum for early intervention. Campus community members who notice a change in a student’s style or level of functioning may complete an assistance and referral form to inform appropriate university personnel, including Stephenson.

“Programs like our AWARE Network have become part of the national standard of care on college campuses,” Stephenson said, “and have been very effective in multiple instances and on several campuses.”

Check out WSU Vancouver’s safety record for yourself

Annual Safety Report (Clery Act)
Visit vancouver.wsu.edu and search “Clery Act”

Campus Safety Plan
vancouver.wsu.edu/safety-plan

Police Blotter
vancouver.wsu.edu/police-blotter

WSU Vancouver Environmental Health and Safety website
admin.vancouver.wsu.edu/ehs/environmental-health-safety

WSU Vancouver Police website
vancouver.wsu.edu/police

Learn how to prepare for the aftereffects of a major earthquake.

Attend a presentation in disaster preparedness and browse emergency products from local vendors. Learn more at events.vancouver.wsu.edu.

SPONSORED BY THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF WSU VANCOUVER AND WSU VANCOUVER PUBLIC SAFETY

March 24  Two presentation times:  Noon and 2 p.m.
DENGERINK ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, ROOM 110
WSU Vancouver’s newest degree—the Ph.D. in Prevention Science—is also one of its most distinctive. Including Pullman and Spokane as well, WSU offers one of only three prevention science Ph.D. programs in the country.

Prevention science is a young and growing field. Interdisciplinary in nature, integrating elements of behavioral and social sciences as well as health sciences and public policy, it focuses on the well-being of individuals and communities. Prevention programs seek to prevent threats to public health in such areas as substance abuse, obesity, youth development, child and elder care, education, juvenile justice, family dynamics and more.

At a time of increasing cost-consciousness over public spending, prevention science has a major role to play. Prevention scientists do the research that governments, nonprofits and philanthropists may use to determine which programs and policies are most effective and therefore worth the money.

“It is well established in many areas that prevention strategies are much more cost-effective than treatment, so our focus is on how to use research to develop effective prevention programs,” said Thomas Power, the Pullman-based director of WSU’s prevention science doctoral program.

In fall 2015, the first students in the Vancouver program began their classes. They are Eunsaem Kim, Valerie Jarvensivu, Karen Higgins and Stefani Mammenga.

Eunsaem “Sam” Kim

PHOTO: LAURA DUTELLE

EUNSAEM KIM

Kim (she goes by Sam) earned a bachelor’s degree in history in her native Korea, then moved to Pullman for another bachelor’s and a master’s degree in human development. She came to WSU Vancouver to work with Cory Bolkan, an associate professor and gerontologist in the prevention science program.

As an undergraduate, Kim sharpened her personal goals while interning at Adult Day Services in Bellevue, Wash. Once she receives her Ph.D., she wants to work further with an agency serving adults with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, and eventually start a similar program in Korea.

Her particular interest is promoting the well-being of patients with dementia “through novel and innovative interventions and enriched-care environments,” Kim said. For example, physical activity and the relationship between patients with dementia and their caregivers may hold promise.

“The field is pretty new,” she said. “I believe I can contribute to it.”

Kim especially likes the innovative nature of prevention science. In particular, she said, “We need to change the culture of dementia care, reduce bias and negativity. Alzheimer’s is a horrible disease, but we need to make people realize it can happen to anybody, and providing better care makes patients happy and leads to a better life.”

VALERIE JARVENSIVU

Jarvensivu holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in human nutrition science from the University of Alabama. “The WSU prevention science Ph.D. program was very attractive to me, because it is multidisciplinary and combines many of the fields involved in the search for successful interventions to prevent obesity,” she said.

Jarvensivu works with Jane Lanigan on a study to prevent childhood obesity. They want to find out if there is an association between phrases used to describe food to children and how well children like or are willing to try less-familiar foods. This winter they worked with children in WSU Vancouver’s Child Development Program, and in the spring they will take the study into the community.

PHOTO: LAURA DUTELLE
“Our nation is experiencing rising overweight and obesity rates that do not seem to be abating,” Jarvensivu said. “But there have been some positive effects in the preschool age group that look promising.”

A classical pianist and piano teacher while raising two children, Jarvensivu then took up ultramarathons and completed her human nutrition science degrees. Her long-term goal is to run a 100-mile trail race in the coming year.

Although she hasn’t set specific career goals, Jarvensivu said the program is preparing her well to contribute to the field, particularly working on childhood obesity prevention. “There is really an opportunity to reinforce healthy behaviors and work within the school and family contexts where so many daily nutritional and behavioral choices are made,” she said.

**Karen Higgins**

Things fell nicely into place for Higgins after she received her bachelor’s degree in psychology in the summer of 2015. With four children aged 3 to 14, she wanted to stay in Vancouver, and she segued right into the prevention science program two weeks later to work with Sara Waters, assistant professor of human development.

Higgins is working on Waters’s study of stress contagion between mother and child. The question is whether mothers who suffer chronic stress in their own lives, such as poverty or domestic violence, pass their stress along to their children.

“My specific area of interest looks to see if a mother’s resilience to her adverse life experiences can buffer the transmission of chronic stress to her child, thus potentially lessening the deleterious health effect of chronic stress,” Higgins said.

She is committed to prevention as a key strategy for improving the lives of people and the health of communities. “A huge portion of prevention is the translation of research,” Higgins said. And without community participation, prevention strategies cannot be effective. “To translate the research and make it applicable to the community, we need to be involved in what the community needs. We want to do what’s best for the community in the community’s eyes,” she said.

Higgins isn’t sure about her career path yet—maybe teaching or policy work—but she is certain about one thing. “I want to make sure I always work with children and families.”

The field of prevention science is promising, she said. “Government has a huge push on using only proven scientific programs for their funding. That will require more prevention science people who know how to evaluate and implement programs.”

**Stefani Mammenga**

After earning bachelor’s degrees in psychology and anthropology from WSU Vancouver in May 2015, Mammenga found the prevention science program uniquely suited to her interests. “This program chose me,” she said. She wants to work on improving health and health care within the queer community.

As an undergraduate, she worked as a research assistant to Elizabeth Soliday, associate professor of human development, who is now her graduate adviser. When Soliday moved to human development from the psychology department, she invited Mammenga to join the new program. “I had never heard of prevention science,” Mammenga said, “but after looking into the program, I was really excited to see that such an interdisciplinary yet focused field existed.”

She is currently developing a master’s thesis project to assess, via an electronic survey, WSU nursing students’ knowledge, attitudes, cultural competence and training perceptions regarding caring for queer patients.

Mammenga hopes eventually to work in nursing and medical curriculum development, and the prevention science program is giving her tools to implement change, she said. “What I especially like about the program is its interdisciplinary nature. It incorporates theory and methodology from several disciplines, including human development, communication, health science and public policy.” Like her peers, she hopes to make an impact in the field.

“My graduate work could very well inform the development of a standardized evaluation tool to measure nursing students’ queer-relevant skills,” Mammenga said. “Such a tool could help propel health education institutions forward in improving queer-relevant training.”
The first year of college is a time of transition for students. And, statistically speaking, it’s the time when colleges lose the most students. There is no one reason. Understanding the academic expectations at the college level can be daunting. Figuring out the university system and the resources available to students can be mystifying. Students experience changes in the rhythm of their daily lives with family and friends. Change itself can be hard. WSU Vancouver hopes to contribute positively to redesigning this critical first year and ensuring student success. The university is one of 44 nationwide invited by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to participate in a program called Re-Imagining the First Year of College. With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and USA Funds, the project aims to ensure success for all students, particularly those who have historically been underserved by higher education: low-income, first-generation and students of color. “Once we admit a student, we have a moral obligation to help that student persist,” said June Canty, associate vice chancellor of academic affairs. Canty is leading the 11-member steering committee assigned to Re-Imagining the First Year of College. She has been committed to student success throughout her career, and has taught many first-year courses and advised hundreds of students. She has a passion for this work. “Through this project we will build a campus culture and infrastructure to support 21st-century learners,” said Canty. “We will create a campus climate where students feel like they belong and where they can see themselves being successful.” In colleges across the country the student body is changing. A “traditional” college student used to look a lot like a young, white, upper-middle-class male. No more. Today’s college student is more likely to be Latina, over 25, first in her family to go to college, and in need of financial aid. The demographic shift alone requires colleges to change the way they do business. Through the Re-Imagining the First Year of College project, member institutions will work together for three years to develop comprehensive, institutional transformation that redesigns the first year of college and creates sustainable change for student success. The project will focus on four key areas to help first-year students succeed: institutional intentionality, curriculum redesign, changes in faculty and staff roles, and changes in student roles. Re-Imagining the First Year of College seeks to inspire redesigned approaches that work effectively for all members of an increasingly diverse, multicultural undergraduate student body. Member institutions will form a learning community that will review and share evidence-based practices, programs and implementation strategies. Canty believes WSU Vancouver has an important role to play in the project because it’s unlike most of the other member institutions. “We have more experience than other colleges in the project with first-generation, financially fragile students. We have knowledge and experience to share,” said Canty. At the end of three years, the 44 member institutions will have contributed to a database that will house first-year-of-college best practices. The database will be open to the public so anyone can see what was done, in what setting and why it worked. ■
“FRIENDS WHO ARE ENGINEERS SAY 90 PERCENT of what you learn in engineering is not from the classroom,” said WSU Vancouver engineering major Michael Hamilton. “You have to do it on your own.”

The quest for experience, putting knowledge to work, gave Hamilton an idea. He’d organize a team and figure out how to launch a balloon into space. The team decided to join the Global Space Balloon Challenge, an international competition held each spring. With high-altitude balloons flown from every corner of the globe, the contest highlights intercultural awareness, collaboration, education and technology.

Calling the project “#cougballoon,” its Twitter handle, the team was among more than 300 from 48 countries to participate in 2015. They decided not to compete for any honors (such as highest altitude and best photograph) because of their lack of experience with balloons. Some competitors have deep pockets and have participated for years.

There was internal competition, however. In 2014, the WSU Physics and Astronomy Club in Pullman flew the WSU flag from a weather balloon that reached 98,000 feet. “Let’s beat them,” Hamilton told the Vancouver team—and they did. Their balloon took the WSU flag to 113,000 feet, “the highest the WSU flag has ever flown,” he said.

AN ALL-STUDENT PROJECT

Launched on April 19, 2015, #cougballoon was the first project of WSU Vancouver’s IEEE club (the initials stand for Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). Hamilton, a junior who served in the Marines for 20 years before enrolling at WSU Vancouver, was joined by a core group of 10 students.

“It’s a balloon that goes up and transmits information down, and we can see it live,” Hamilton said. “It’s simple.”

Well, not all that simple. Together they spent about 500 hours getting the balloon ready to fly, working mostly in Hamilton’s garage. The cost, covered by sponsors and friends, was about $5,000 for the enormous latex balloon, HD video cameras, GPS transmitters, data-processing equipment, parachute and a wide variety of other electronics required to make the launch a reality.
LEARNING BY DOING

By all accounts, last year’s experience is paying off. With all that was learned from mishaps in 2015, the 2016 #couballoon is expected to be far more efficient. “We have two pages of lessons learned,” Hamilton said. One big improvement will be the internet interface, so that observers on the ground can easily track the balloon’s altitude and location via a website. Hamilton is planning livestream video of the team on the ground explaining what’s going on with the balloon.

In addition, the balloon will carry some scientific experiments. Praveen Sekhar, assistant professor of electrical engineering, plans to send some still-to-be-determined experiments into space, and results will also be available to be monitored.

Two cameras aboard last year both failed on takeoff. With four cameras this year, “we’re hoping for good horizon views up and down,” Hamilton said. Each camera is designed to record the entire flight.

Hamilton is optimistic that the 2016 balloon will reward all the time spent. “It’s fun and a great learning experience,” he said. “The road to success is paved with failure.”

You can read about and see videos of #couballoon at cougballoon.com. For updates, including the 2016 launch date, follow @couballoon on Twitter.

The same group is preparing to launch another balloon this spring, probably in April. (The exact date will be determined by weather conditions.) As in 2015, they will launch from the National Weather Service facility at the Salem Municipal Airport. The balloon is designed to pop at a certain altitude and drift down by parachute. Last year it reached 21.4 miles. In addition to lightening the payload this year to reach a higher altitude, the team is also incorporating a satellite communication device that will send information to satellites 485 miles above the earth.

They managed to recover last year’s balloon after losing track of it temporarily when one GPS transmitter failed. What remained of it landed in the yard of a couple, Larry and Barbara Brown, near Scio, Ore.
In classrooms at WSU Vancouver, it’s not uncommon for a 16-year-old student to have a 40-something classmate, maybe a mother working on her bachelor’s degree at the same time as her college-aged son or daughter. The average age of a WSU Vancouver student is 26. The age range is 16 to 85. Ever wonder what the breakdown is? No matter your age, you’re never too old to learn.
This May, proud 60-something student Michael White will finish the degree he started in Pullman back in 1971. White took a break from his studies 45 years ago to work with children with Down Syndrome. He visited WSU Vancouver in fall 2014, then picked up where he left off.

“I want my older peers to know that YES, it really was a little uncomfortable being 60 years old and back in college,” White said. “I knew nobody. For the first couple hours I was really alone. But everywhere I turned there were truly caring people. The president of the human resources club invited me to join.” The staff in the Student Diversity Center gave White a sense of community. “It was there that I learned that not only was I not the oldest student on campus, but I wasn’t even close!”

Campus resources have helped White find success on his academic journey. He’s attended time- and stress-management seminars held at the Student Resource Center, received help with Microsoft Office software at the Writing Center, started an exercise regimen thanks to the fitness center’s personal trainer, and took a field trip to Mount St. Helens with the recreation program.

White isn’t just wrapping up his degree on campus, he has immersed himself in the student experience. He’s become a KOUG Radio disc jockey, worked on student government elections, volunteered as a teaching assistant, and logged countless hours in the library and in office hours with his instructors.

White’s post-graduation plans? He will further his studies at graduate school, eventually becoming a teacher and researcher. “I am not winding down into retirement,” White said. “I am off on a new adventure and have never been happier!”

His advice to other mature students considering college: “The best day to take the first step is today.”
Camille Bishop and Sasha Thomas, both 16, are sophomores at iTech Preparatory, a STEM magnet school located on the WSU Vancouver campus. They have also both been enrolled in college classes at WSU Vancouver and Clark College since their freshman year—of high school.

Bishop and Thomas are in the Early College Program, one that allows students to get a jumpstart on their college education while still attending high school. Students go through a rigorous screening process to ensure they’re ready—mentally, academically and emotionally—for college-level coursework. They must maintain a 3.0 grade point average in their college courses to continue. The payoff is worth it—the Vancouver Public School District picks up the tuition tab.

“Students are able to double-dip and get high school and college credit at the same time,” explained Jennifer Pongracz, dean of students at iTech Preparatory.

Being the youngest in class has advantages and disadvantages. Some of Bishop’s and Thomas’s classmates are old enough to be their parents or grandparents. Bishop sees the impact of a generational difference in her Art History 202 class at WSU Vancouver. “My older classmates have broader cultural knowledge about some things, like pronouncing artists’ names correctly, because they’ve traveled and heard about these people before,” Bishop said. Thomas, too, felt the gap, especially in his college-level computer programming class. “My professor would make jokes referencing the 1980s and ’90s that I didn’t understand,” he said.

The benefit of youth? Bishop compares her experience with that of her father, who is back in school. “It takes hours for him to pick up something I can learn more easily,” she said.

These eager students aren’t just balancing high school and college-level homework. Bishop is co-editor of iTech Prep’s yearbook, Key Club treasurer and school board representative. Thomas is headed to the Junior Olympics for fencing.

The Early College Program, both agree, is hard work that’s worth it. “You really have to do a lot of tough work. But if you’re ready, it’s a great opportunity,” Bishop said.
Q. WHY WSU VANCOUVER?
In 1997, I had just moved to Vancouver after serving in the Army for 5½ years. I was looking for a part-time graduate nurse practitioner program that would accommodate a bedside nurse’s schedule. The WSU Vancouver College of Nursing allowed me the flexibility to continue working at the hospital and complete a master’s degree.

Q. WHAT WAS THE CAMPUS LIKE THEN?
There were only four buildings on campus at that time—the Student Services Building, Library, Bookstore and Classroom Building. The Student Services Building (now Dengerink Administration Building) was where most of us hung out because there was food involved.

Q. WHAT TEACHERS DO YOU REMEMBER MOST?
Jackie Banasik taught pathophysiology as if we were in medical school. It was a videoconference class, and at the time it was tough, but I am so glad she made it that way! Renee Hoeksel was my clinical capstone project adviser. She helped guide the ideas that became my current business and career.

Q. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE GRADUATION?
The job market was tough in 2000, so I continued to work as a staff nurse for three years while starting my own business with some college friends. Today I am the senior educational associate for Acute Care Education, a regional provider of continuing nursing education for the Pacific Northwest. I oversee all corporate operations, management and educational program design for our company. From time to time, you will find me teaching a class using all those advanced acute care skills I acquired at WSU Vancouver.

Q. HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH WSU VANCOUVER?
I remain connected as a donor, community business member and alumna. I am a longtime member and current co-chair of the College of Nursing Advisory Board. My mother and father were both Cougars, and in 2001, our family founded the Shirley Mae Nelson Memorial Scholarship in memory of my mother, who passed away from a rare bone marrow cancer. She graduated from Pullman in 1950 and taught elementary school for 14 years. She always stressed the value of a college education.

Q. WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU EVER RECEIVED?
My mother and father said, “If we could give you $100,000, or a $100,000 education, we would choose the $100,000 education. Because with a $100,000 education you can always learn how to make a million dollars.”

Q. HOW DO YOU SHOW COUGAR PRIDE?
I always cheer for the Cougars during the Apple Cup. My husband is a Dawg so we have a good rivalry there.

CHECKING IN WITH SUSAN THORNTON, NURSING ‘00.
what’s happened

AWARDS AND HONORS

April Tovar, student financial services manager, was awarded the Distinguished Service Award at the Washington Financial Aid Association annual meeting. This award honors a WFAA member who has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to Washington students and the financial aid profession over a sustained period of time.

The success of the Business Growth Mentor & Analysis Program in the Carson College of Business was recognized with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ Regional and Economic Development Award last October at the AASCU annual meeting in Austin, Texas.

Michael Dunn, associate professor of special education and literacy, was elected to the International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities. His research is aimed at helping struggling readers and writers manage academic tasks, and how persons with disabilities respond to intervention.

Renee Hoeksel, professor in the College of Nursing, is a 2016 inductee to the Washington State Nurses Association Hall of Fame. This honor recognizes the dedication and achievements of Washington state registered nurses who have made significant lifetime accomplishments in the nursing profession.

Carson College of Business professional sales program students will represent WSU Vancouver in national and regional business sales contests this spring. Brett Ellibee and Honor Stevenson will participate in the National Collegiate Sales Competition at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, with Peter Collier attending as coach and alternate. Micah Harpel, Sydney Hickey, Aleksy Kruglikov and Cameron Sanborn will advance to the Western States Collegiate Sales Competition at Chico State University in California.

Three WSU Vancouver students are winners of the 2015/16 NW Energy Experience Prize. The annual competition, sponsored by the Bonneville Power Administration and Portland General Electric, and facilitated by Oregon BEST, awards $250,000 to top engineering students to collaboratively innovate solutions to real-world challenges facing regional power utilities. Winners work in three cross-university teams with electric utility companies to develop solutions that improve power system reliability, efficiency and safety.

Ozgenur Kavas, mechanical engineering major
Goal: Design a robotic system that attaches safety harnesses to high-power electrical transmission towers, preventing maintenance workers from falling.

Ian Lofquist, computer science major
Goal: Develop a power systems protection system that leverages data-mining techniques to detect fault signals from video streams collected by unmanned aerial vehicles.

Francesca Wignes, electrical engineering major
Goal: Using residential metered electricity usage data, develop emerging wireless technology solutions to help reduce energy use during peak hours.

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education, the professional organization for development and marketing in higher education, has awarded WSU Vancouver’s 25th anniversary collateral with a silver award in District VIII. District VIII includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska and western Canada.

what’s next

TUITION IS GOING DOWN FOR FALL 2016. YEP. THAT’S RIGHT. DOWN.

On June 29, 2015, the Washington State Legislature approved the state’s two-year budget. Included was a 5 percent reduction in WSU’s in-state undergraduate tuition for the 2015/16 academic year. Tuition will be reduced by an additional 10 percent for the 2016/17 academic year. Students entering in fall 2016 will pay 15 percent less than if they had started at WSU in fall 2014.

Washington is the only state in the country to lower tuition for public universities and colleges. The state budget backfills the loss in tuition revenue, leaving WSU’s budget even. That’s good news for students, who will get the same high-quality WSU education at a new, lower price.
**Investing in the future**

**OPSAHL DAWSON IS CHANGING THE IMAGE OF ACCOUNTING.**

**If you think of accountants as a little boring, you haven’t met Aaron Dawson.**

Dawson, 37, and his wife, Jen Dawson, 36, and partner Matt Lee, own Opsahl Dawson, certified public accountants with offices in Vancouver and Longview. “Accounting for the new age is our motto,” Aaron Dawson said.

They count on their staff—including six WSU Vancouver graduates and another currently enrolled student—to help them serve the next generation as well as longtime clients.

“Our biggest asset is our staff,” Dawson said. “We have the best technology available; we are fully paperless; and we offer flexible work arrangements. Work-life balance is important to Millennials, and the opportunity to work remotely has helped immensely with employee retention.”

For three years in a row, the Vancouver Business Journal named Opsahl Dawson a Best in Business winner. VBJ also named the company one of the healthiest in town for promoting wellness in various ways, including weight and fitness challenges, standing desks and healthy snacks. Accounting Today, a national trade publication, named the company one of the top 100 firms to work for in 2015.

Revenues have doubled since 2009, when the Dawsons bought the company that George Opsahl had founded 30 years earlier. “The fun part about doubling in size is bringing in new team members,” Dawson said. “The bigger our team gets, the more fantastic people we are able to bring on.” The staff now numbers 31.

In 2015, Opsahl Dawson gave $25,000 to sponsor WSU Vancouver’s Notable Alumni Award as well as accounting fellowships. “It’s a way of investing in the future of our firm and our community,” Dawson said.

“We find young professionals are an amazing, energetic workforce,” he added. “They are well motivated, well educated and have really good computer skills, people skills and teamwork skills. We are excited about recruiting with the local college.” The company has hired several Cougs right out of school.

**YOUNG AND MOTIVATED**

Aaron was 30 and Jen was 29 when they bought the company. The couple met as students at Western Washington University and gained professional experience at large CPA firms in Seattle.

Aaron grew up in Longview, where his father was an accountant and George Opsahl was a longtime family friend. When Opsahl and his partner, Terry Shepp, offered to sell the firm to the young couple, the Dawsons moved to Southwest Washington. They currently live in Ridgefield with their three children, ages 4 to 6.

The Dawsons are proud of the success of the ownership transition, including 100 percent client retention and growth. Much of their recent growth has come through referrals.

“You’d be surprised how many people find us...
because we have a nice website,” Dawson said. “My passion about the website is to make it sound interesting and kind of exciting. Most people don’t think of accounting as a real exciting profession, but we think it is. We like to bring the energy!”

In 2014 the firm moved its Vancouver branch from East Vancouver into their new Vancouver building near the Vancouver Mall. This office is now the firm’s headquarters.

Last summer Opsahl Dawson bought another accounting firm, Marshall Waldman, and merged it into the Vancouver office.

“Seven years ago we started with a part-time office in Vancouver,” Dawson said. “Now we have 15 full-time people. Not only has the firm grown, but the Vancouver location has grown from one of the smallest firms in Vancouver to one of the most substantial.”

Dawson currently serves with Leadership Clark County. He is on the WSU Vancouver Carson College of Business Board of Advisors. Members of the firm are involved with the college’s Business Growth Mentor & Analysis Program, and Dawson also mentors accounting students to make sure they’re squarely on the path toward tomorrow’s more exciting accounting career.

“The thing I really pay attention to is teamwork,” Dawson said. “The most important part of our business is how we are working together as a team. Everybody needs to be working toward the same goal. We like to staff the company with people who work hard and have positive attitudes.

“We’re here to serve our employees, so we want to make sure the work environment is as positive as it can be by offering flexible schedules, positive training and the best technology tools available—and we give people ownership in their jobs,” he continued. “If you give people the right tools, they’ll do amazing things.”

This spring, WSU Vancouver scholarship recipients and scholarship donors were celebrated at an event in their honor held at the Hilton Vancouver Washington. Scholarships remain a top fundraising priority for WSU Vancouver, with more than 82 percent of students needing scholarships or financial aid.

Thank you to our generous donors, who have collectively invested nearly $4.5 million in support of WSU Vancouver students—and congratulations to the students who worked hard to earn their scholarships.
CHANCELLOR’S SEMINAR SERIES:
“Reality Check: Technologies That Will Change the Way We Work and Think”
11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

RESUMES LAB
9:10 – 10 a.m.

RUN FOR COUGS 5K
10 a.m.

“JUGGLING CHILDREN, WORK AND AGING PARENTS: THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SANDWICH GENERATION”
Noon

RESEARCH SHOWCASE
10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

JOBS AND INTERNSHIP-SEEKING STRATEGIES WORKSHOP
Noon – 1 p.m.

2016 PROFESSIONAL WRITERS SERIES
Sallie Tisdale, “Hello World: The Personal Essay”
7 p.m.

19
RESUME AND COVER LETTERS WORKSHOP
3 – 4 p.m.

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

“LEGACIES OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: AN INDIGENOUS FORUM”
6 – 8 p.m.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS GRADUATE SCHOOL FAIR
11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

LUZ MARÍA GORDILLO, “THE POLITICS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: MOVING TOWARD GENDER EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”
Noon – 1:15 p.m.

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
6 p.m.

A-F
MESA DAY
8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

LINKEDIN LAB
10:30 – 11:30 a.m.

ALIA GURTOV, “WOMEN IN PALEO-ANTHROPOLOGY: ONE CAVEWOMAN’S ENCOUNTER WITH HOMO NALEDI”
Noon – 1:15 p.m.

COUGS IN THE COMMUNITY
May Day Flowers
2 – 4 p.m.

RE-IMAGINED RADIO: “GUNSMOKE” AND “THE SHADOW”
7 p.m., Kiggins Theatre

2016 COMMENCEMENT
1 p.m., Sunlight Supply Amphitheater

SUMMER SESSIONS BEGIN—MAYMESTER, MAY 9 – JUNE 3; AND EARLY 6-WEEK, MAY 9 – JUNE 17

PREVIEW DAY
1 p.m.

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

MEMORIAL DAY—CAMPUS CLOSED

8-WEEK SUMMER SESSION BEGINS (through July 29)

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
1 p.m., Vancouver Community Library

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

LATE 6-WEEK SUMMER SESSION BEGINS (through July 29)

PREVIEW DAY
1 p.m.

LATE 6-WEEK SUMMER SESSION BEGINS (through July 29)

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

MEMORIAL DAY—CAMPUS CLOSED

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
6 p.m.

BUSINESS GROWTH MENTOR & ANALYSIS PROGRAM ALLIANCE FORUM
8:30 – 10 a.m.

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
6 p.m.

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
6 p.m.

A-Z OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS WORKSHOP
6 p.m.
“I chose WSU Vancouver because of the financial aid I was awarded and because it is so close to my home. As a first-generation college student, I faced a lot of challenges in figuring out how to pay for college, but WSU Vancouver made it simple. The staff, faculty and professors are great, and I’ve made wonderful friends here. There is a true feeling of community at WSU Vancouver, and it is growing. I love being a VanCoug!”

—Tasi Salanoa
psychology major