



Western

Annual
IMPACT

Our strength is in our uniqueness

Inspired by the vision of Jeff, BA'82, and Shelley Parr and their family, hundreds of annual donors have stepped up to help students thrive by supporting the Parr Centre for Thriving, which funds projects that encourage participants to learn about their unique strengths and talents.

Anjali Singh couldn't quite understand why she completed tasks, including studying for exams, so differently than her friends. "I felt insecure," says the arts and humanities major. "I think I had a bit of imposter syndrome and I often compared myself to my peers. I thought because I was doing things differently, it meant I was doing them wrong."

For Anjali to become successful at university her thinking needed to shift, and thankfully it did after attending a strengths-based program funded by the Parr Centre for Thriving.

"For a student to feel successful, they need to feel supported," says Sara Wills, who has worked with the Parr Centre since it was founded in 2020. "The Parr Centre provides opportunities and access for students to focus on and learn about their whole self, including essential elements of well-being and resources that can support their success."

One of the initiatives recently funded by the Parr Centre, and the program Anjali completed, uses the CliftonStrengths® tool to help students understand when they are at their best, and how to apply their natural talents in any situation.

"I would recommend this program to everyone," Anjali raves. "After I did a session, it's like a lightbulb went off. It was so affirming. I finally understood the way I am, and why it's perfectly fine to be different since we all have our unique strengths."

Now travelling across Europe, Anjali is working in a hostel in Spain. "I was nervous coming into university the first year, like most students. There is

a lot of comparison and doubt that can come into play and the program helped me work past that. I was able to understand what I'm good at and focus on developing those skills instead of fixating on my weaknesses. I honestly feel it has made me stronger in the world."

Thriving through belonging

The Parr Centre funds innovative projects across campus that help Western staff support student mental health and thriving.

The Cultivating Thriving Educators program encourages educators to discover their own strengths and apply them to improve their teaching methods and program design and make authentic connections with students.

After hearing about the program, Western staff member Dr. Sonya Malone, BSc'99, was quick to investigate it. "I thought, 'I'm all about helping students thrive – why don't I take this opportunity to learn more?' At every turn, participants were encouraged to spend time brainstorming about ways to incorporate their learning into practice," says the family physician. "The collaboration was wonderful!"

Crossing paths with colleagues who took the program along with her, Dr. Malone notes they all recognize the impact the program has had on their work. "If you want to better understand the needs of students, and how to evolve your work to meet these needs, this is the program for you!"

Excited to return to campus, Anjali plans to continue her involvement in the programming offered through the Parr Centre, including strengths-based learning experiences. "It made a world of difference for me. I would like to continue to help others to experience the same shift in thinking I did. Our differences are our strengths, not our weaknesses."



Western student Anjali Singh on her hostel balcony in Spain. "Taking CliftonStrengths® funded by the Parr Centre for Thriving at Western has made me stronger."



Dr. Sonya Malone attended the Cultivating Thriving Educators program to better understand the needs of students.



A significant gift from Jeff and Shelley Parr and their family, along with donations from annual donors, brought the Parr Centre for Thriving to life.



“I believe
in you”

Favour Okpali received the Teoh Family '3259' Award for Black engineering students and is now fulfilling her dream at Microsoft in downtown Toronto.

***Feeling the faith from donors,
engineering student Favour Okpali
was inspired to go after her dreams.***

Favour Okpali literally screamed and jumped for joy when she heard the news – she had received an award. “I was in shock! I called my mom and she started screaming too,” says the student-athlete.

Favour’s academic experience at Western has been far from typical due to the pandemic. “My family lives in Toronto, so when school switched to online learning, I moved back home for my second year.”

For her third year, she was able to attend university in London once again. “I was so happy to be back on campus, but now I had the additional expense of food and rent, which I didn’t have at my parents’ house.”

To her great surprise, Favour applied for and received the Teoh Family '3259' Award for Black engineering students. “I’m so grateful Western has awards like this. It’s so easy for minorities to feel like they don’t belong. Receiving an award like this reminds me that I do.”

Taking a chance

Prior to university, Favour was quite unsure where to go after high school so she “took a chance” on engineering and discovered her love of coding. “I was hooked. I loved programming and problem solving. I was going to be a software engineer!”

For the past two summers, Favour has interned at Microsoft in the heart of downtown Toronto, gaining incredible work-life experience.

Favour is still as grateful today as the day she received the award. “It gave me the faith in myself that I needed. Knowing that someone would donate to my success – there really are no words.”

As Favour expertly navigates Toronto, she reflects on the award and what it meant to her. “It kept me motivated throughout the year because I knew someone believed in me. I hope one day I will be able to give back and help other Western students – the way the Teoh family helped me.”

Enduring gratitude

Giving back to Western for more than half a century, Susan Finley is enjoying the fruits of her donations.

It was 1957 and Susan Finley, BScN'61, was glowing in a pale blue chiffon gown just before a formal dance at Spencer Hall. At the time, Spencer Hall was a residence for female students attending Western.

Now in her 80s, Susan remembers it clearly. "On Sundays we dressed up for the main meal and the housemother was in attendance. We had 'high tea' served in the formal living room. There we learned the skill of balancing a teacup and saucer while socializing," muses the former nurse, reflecting on how far society has come.

For Susan, her time at Western was the start of a varied career in nursing. "I worked in an early intensive care unit in Ottawa, I was in hospital nursing management, taught nursing in Ontario and Arizona, and was an inspector of schools of nursing for a few years."

Seeing the impact now

Susan has an enduring feeling of gratefulness for the strong professional foundation her

education created, which inspired her 55 years of support to the university. Her first donation, seven years after graduation, was for \$50 – a substantial gift in the 1960s. Since then, Susan has been a regular Western donor through annual contributions. "My financial advisor recommended I continue to donate to causes that are important to me right now, so I can see and enjoy the impact of my giving." She has also decided to leave a legacy gift to Western through her estate.

The advancement of research for older adults

Susan is interested in the advancement of health and nursing research, so it was a perfect fit when she was introduced to the work of Western professor Anna Garnett. "My area of focus is on the health of our aging population and their caregivers," says Anna. "The pandemic highlighted the need to focus on senior care. It really shone a light on healthcare shortcomings for that age group."

Wanting to ensure older adults have a voice and appropriate funding, Anna is helping to address equitable care through her research. "Often vulnerable populations are overlooked for access to health services and funding. The same is true for their caregivers who often leave work to care for their loved ones."

Susan's support has made a tremendous difference to Anna's area of focus. One of Anna's recent research studies hopes to understand the isolation older

Western professor Anna Garnett, whose area of research is to ensure older adults are represented in health spending and advocacy.



Susan Finley, right, reenacting a hypodermic injection on a fellow classmate who remains one of her closest friends, 65 years later.



Susan Finley, before a dance in 1957, her first year in nursing at Western.

adults experienced throughout the pandemic. "I'm looking at how we can leverage technology to support the social and mental well-being of this age group, and Susan's commitment allows me to really sink myself into it. It's a real gift."

Today's devotion, changing tomorrow

Throughout the years Susan and her husband John, who was an aviator and engineer, have had a strong devotion to the advancement of education, so it's no surprise Susan found Anna's research at Western intriguing.

Amazed by how her contributions have been so positively received, Susan is happy to continue. "It's rewarding to know my giving today has the potential to change the future."



More loudly. More often.

Deeply filled with gratitude for his parents and family, Dr. William “Barry” Mayo has spent almost three decades supporting Western in their memory.

In the spring of 1952, Dr. Barry Mayo, MD’58, interrupted his education at Western to fulfil a calling to become a missionary for two years. “It was such a positive and rewarding experience,” says the 92-year-old retired physician. When Dr. Mayo returned in the fall of 1954, he began medical school.

The shy young man grew to become class president, president of student council and valedictorian. Those monumental years also included meeting his wife of 64 years. “I met Helene in 1956 at a winter sleigh ride party. Just over two years later we were married. My time at Western was pivotal. I was educated by effective teachers, built warm friendships and doors were opened to many professional opportunities.”

A trained orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Mayo spent a lengthy and successful career at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan. “It was an amazing time to be a surgeon. There were so many advancements in the field, including arthroscopic surgery.”

A thank-you to family

Dr. Mayo credits the support of his family for enabling him to have the life of his dreams. “I have such a profound sense of gratitude toward my parents.

They supported me fully throughout school and my career.”

Dr. Mayo found himself feeling strongly compelled to show his gratitude to both his parents and Western for all he has accomplished. “I suddenly realized I needed to say thank-you more loudly and more often.”

To honour the memory of his parents, Dr. Mayo established the **Reginald and Verena Mayo Medicine Award**, which is given annually to an undergraduate student in the Doctor of Medicine program.

“It felt like such a perfect fit,” says Dr. Mayo, who, with his wife, went on to create four more endowments for students in need.

- **Helene Puskas Mayo Award in Education**
- **Reginald and Verena Mayo Nursing Award, also for Dr. Mayo’s parents.**
- **Ronald R. Mayo Award in Engineering, for Dr. Mayo’s brother, an established engineer who passed away at an early age from cancer.**
- **Sandor and Borballa Puskas Music Award, for Helene’s parents and her passion for the violin.**

The student impact

Western student Meghan Taylor was bestowed the Sandor and Borballa Puskas Music Award for the 2021-22 academic year. Scared and nervous, she felt financially insecure about her upcoming expenses.

“When I received the award I was so relieved,” said Meghan, whose student loan was lower than she expected. “The funds paid for the second installment of my tuition, which allowed me to keep my apartment,” says the talented music student. “I believe their giving has helped many students breathe a sigh of relief!”

Dr. Mayo and Helene enjoy reading the appreciative notes from the recipients. “It’s nice to be able to help out.”

Steadfast in his love for his family and Western, Dr. Mayo promises, “As long as I’m on this earth, Western will continue to receive my annual donation to help students who need it.”



Meghan Taylor was relieved by the financial impact of receiving a donor-funded award.



Helene and Dr. Mayo are inspired by their families to give. The proud Western donors have made a difference in the lives of students for nearly 30 years. Inset: The happy couple on their wedding day, 1958.



“I’m incredibly inspired by our donor community and the innumerable ways their generosity is supporting student success here at Western. It’s very exciting to watch this generosity in action—to see first-hand how gifts of all sizes are creating life-changing impact for students.”

Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor
Western University

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