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## UA64/2 The Challenge: Magazine for the Center for Gifted Studies (No. 56 Spring 2024)

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*Western Kentucky University*

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# the **Challenge**

Magazine for The Center for Gifted Studies

*WITH AN EYE TOWARD EXCELLENCE*



The mission of The Center for Gifted Studies is to encourage excellence by providing educational opportunities and resources to three populations: gifted and talented students, educators working with gifted students, and parents of gifted students. Over the past few months, those efforts have taken the shape of Super Saturdays and IdeaFestival Bowling Green, seminars for parents, and professional learning in school districts and at state and national conferences. The mission goes on as we look ahead to seven weeks of residential summer programming, the TIP-KY recognition ceremony, and travel abroad to Ireland. Inside the pages of this issue, you can learn more about our recent adventures and look ahead for ways you, your children, or educators in your area can learn more about what it means to be gifted and how we can support our gifted and talented learners.

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# Letter from Julia



Dear Friends of The Center for Gifted Studies,

Forty plus years for The Center for Gifted Studies builds lots of relationships. So many of you have participated in our premier summer programs, SCATS and VAMPY. The Center has hosted one of the longest running Advanced Placement Institutes in the country. Then, let's add in Super Saturdays, Camp Explore, and Camp Innovate. Of course, many of you are graduates of our programs leading to the endorsement in gifted education or a master's or a specialist degree in gifted education. And some of you are travelers who have seen the world with The Center. Thank you for being a friend to The Center for Gifted Studies.

In addition to offering programs for children and adults, we at The Center are advocating for opportunities that allow learning to occur every day advanced students are in school. For that to happen, more advanced courses must be available for children and young people in Kentucky and elsewhere. All of us know that students cannot learn what they already know, making it clear that schools must put in place opportunities for students to make continuous progress. Please stay tuned about ways you can lend your voice to advocating for advanced coursework that will allow our children and young people to thrive in school.

We will celebrate 40 summers of VAMPY on June 29. We hope VAMPY alums, their families, and Friends of The Center will join us. Information will be posted on The Center's website, so mark your calendar.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Link Roberts".

Julia Link Roberts  
Mahurin Professor of Gifted Studies

## The Mission for The Center

We are committed to encouraging excellence by providing educational opportunities and resources to three populations: gifted and talented students, educators working with gifted students, and parents of gifted students.



## The Vision for The Center

An internationally preeminent center, The Center for Gifted Studies envisions expanding services in five areas: (1) offering educational programs for gifted children and youth, (2) providing professional development opportunities for educators, (3) enhancing communication and advocacy for gifted children, (4) conducting research and developing curriculum to remove the learning ceiling, and (5) building a testing and counseling component for gifted children and their families.



# the Challenge

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While Super Saturdays students are taking classes ranging from computational thinking to coding, to art, acting, mythology, oceanography, photography, and more, parents have learning opportunities, too. Center Executive Director Julia Roberts shared the basics of giftedness with parents on the first Super Saturday in February and emphasized the importance of being advocates for gifted education in our schools and with decision-makers from the local level to the state and national levels. The second Saturday featured a potpourri of activities for parents to engage their children in learning at home. Parents rotated through six stations and were actively involved in the following activities.

What makes a paper airplane fly well? WKU associate professor Andrea Paganelli and her son, Alex (SCATS 2023), invited parents to make rubber-band-powered paper airplanes and launch them through a hoop. Parents were reminded that the aerodynamics of a paper airplane determines the distance and ease at which

it flies, needing to have little drag and be light enough to defy gravity. Paper airplanes also use the forces of lift and thrust. Download a paper plane to try at [tinyurl.com/centerplane](https://tinyurl.com/centerplane).

Ashley Taylor of The Gatton Academy guided parents to explore the properties of a non-Newtonian fluid as they made their

own oobleck. Oobleck is made with two parts cornstarch, one part water, and a few drops of food coloring and takes its name from the Dr. Seuss book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. Non-Newtonian fluids change properties depending on the force applied to them; they sometimes act like a liquid and sometimes act as a solid. For

# Winter Super Saturdays Brings Learning Opportunities for Parents





Ca-TOWER-gories is a game where students brainstorm as many words as possible that fit within a category, topic, or theme. Ca-TOWER-gories can span a wide range of ages, topics, and levels. For example, in social studies, what are all the words that fit under community helpers, landforms, waterways, states, countries, or government? In science, what are all the words you can think of that fit into plants, animals, rocks and minerals, weather, or force and motion? Find lots more great strategies in Allison's latest book, *50 Hands-On Advanced Literacy Strategies for Young Learners, PreK-Grade 2*.

Eric Gilpin from Warren County Public Libraries reminded parents that in addition to books, our libraries circulate music, movies, magazines, and MORE. If you ever wonder what was included in the

more activities, go to [thespacegal.com](http://thespacegal.com) or check out *Stay Curious and Keep Exploring – 50 Amazing, Bubbly, and Creative Science Experiments to Do with the Whole Family* by Emily Calandrelli.

Do you have a child who likes to build with cardboard? Do they become frustrated when their creations come crashing down? Parents visited the Cardboard Construction Zone to learn a better way of building from The Center's Elizabeth "B" Joyce. She provided all the supplies and encouragement parents needed to create a sample board with examples of bends, brads, flanges, and other cardboard connectors. Get ready for your child's next building adventure at [tinyurl.com/centercardboard](http://tinyurl.com/centercardboard).

Another station combined science and art as magic milk turned into marbled milk paper. Add food coloring to milk and not a whole lot happens, but it only takes one simple ingredient to turn the milk into a swirling color wheel. The magic ingredient is Dawn dishwashing liquid, which reacts with the protein in the milk and alters the shape of the molecules, set-

ting them in motion. Mary Evans of The Center emphasized the importance of asking questions along the way such as: What do you wonder about? What happens if you . . . ? Could you try a different kind of milk? What prediction do you make? She modeled adding a sheet of watercolor paper to the top of the swirling milk to make marbled milk paper.

Literacy isn't just reading was the message of author and teacher Allison Bemiss as she led parents in meaningful hands-on literacy experiences. Games are a fun way to build vocabulary, and

"and MORE" category, here's a list of some of the items you might find in your local library: thematic activity kits for kids, sewing machines, a microscope, a digital film scanner, cake pans, ukuleles, wooden puzzles, a water table and water wheel, jewelry tools kit, and a metal stamping kit. These are perfect for exploring the often-uncommon interests of our children who love to learn.

As families joined back together, both children and parents shared in the excitement of what they had learned. Super Saturdays is not just for kids!

## FALL SUPER SATURDAYS

The dates are set for the next round of Super Saturdays: October 19, 26, and November 2. Look for course descriptions closer to the date, and sign up for The Center's monthly newsletter for updates on registration opening and other happenings.



► [wku.edu/gifted/forms/updates-list.php](http://wku.edu/gifted/forms/updates-list.php)



# An Exploratorium for Ideas

Albert Einstein once said, "Creativity is seeing what others see and thinking what no one else ever thought." The Center for Gifted Studies embraces this idea with its annual IdeaFestival Bowling Green, a day for students to explore, discover, and innovate on Western Kentucky University's campus.

More than 800 students and educators from across the Commonwealth and beyond visited campus on February 15 to listen and learn through short talks and minds-on, hands-on activities designed to inspire curiosity. The morning session included the following innovators, entrepreneurs, and thinkers who shared their stories and took questions from students in Van Meter Hall:

**Sam Ford:** As Executive Director of AccelerateKY, Sam works on various initiatives to connect, inform, and inspire others in support of Kentucky's capacity for innovation. Sam works with organizations on innovation, audience engagement,



and storytelling strategies. He also serves as an Innovation and Culture Fellow for WKU.

**John Mittel:** While studying at the University of Louisville School of Medicine, John sought an alternative to sugary energy drinks, leading to the inception of caffeinated sparkling water, Phocus, in fall 2015. Mittel was later named to the 2021 Forbes Next 1000 List.

**Kesi Neblett:** Kesi, a native of Russellville, KY, and an alumna of The Gatton Academy, ventured from Kentucky to New York City. After graduating from

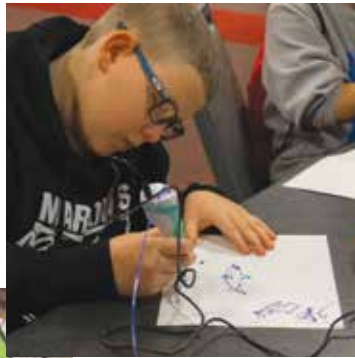
Columbia University, she worked as a financial software developer on Wall Street before quitting to travel the world and eventually joining Netflix's reality show, *The Mole*.

**Derek Stitt:** Derek is a physician, teacher, and podcaster with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. A native of Robertson County, KY, Derek

serves as an attending physician with the Mayo Clinic's Department of Neurology and provides clinical training in neuroscience.

**Kristina Villa:** Kristina is a farmer, communicator, and community coordinator. As Co-Executive Director for The Farmers Land Trust Inc., she has spent the past several years saving farmland from development and securing it for farmers.

Students spent the afternoon at the Downing Student Union, dividing their time among the numerous activities and a quick lunch at the Fresh Food Compa-



ny. When asked about their experiences, students shared that “building a bridge is harder than it looks,” and others mentioned how much they enjoyed making red blood models in the medical exploration room.

Artistic initiatives involved painting a giant mural designed by local artist Andee Rudloff, creating designs with 3D pens, and making dance moves with the WKU Student Chapter of the National Dance Education Organization. STEM themes included cave exploration, the upcoming solar eclipse, robotics, circuitry, coding, bugs, water quality, a synthetic cadaver, weather, and more. More than 20 stations were set up to generate curiosity and learning. A student from Owensboro summed it up well saying, “I liked it! (Idea-Festival Bowling Green) is a good mix of speakers and activities.”

Support for IFBG was provided by AT&T, The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, The Center for Gifted Studies, and The Gatton Academy.

## *With Appreciation*

Many thanks to the following groups and WKU departments that presented minds-on, hands-on activities and volunteered: AccelerateKY, American Printing House for the Blind, artist Andee Rudloff, The Gatton Academy, Green River Regional Educational Cooperative, Kentucky Engineering Exposure Network, Kentucky Science Center, Lost River Cave, Mahurin Honors College, Metals Innovation Initiative, South Central KY AHEC, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Warren County Public Library, WKU Department of Biology, WKU Extended Reality Lab, WKU Management Department, WKU Meteorology, WKU Office of Admissions, WKU School of Teacher Education, WKU Spirit Masters, the WKU Student Chapter of National Dance Education Organization, and Women in Games.



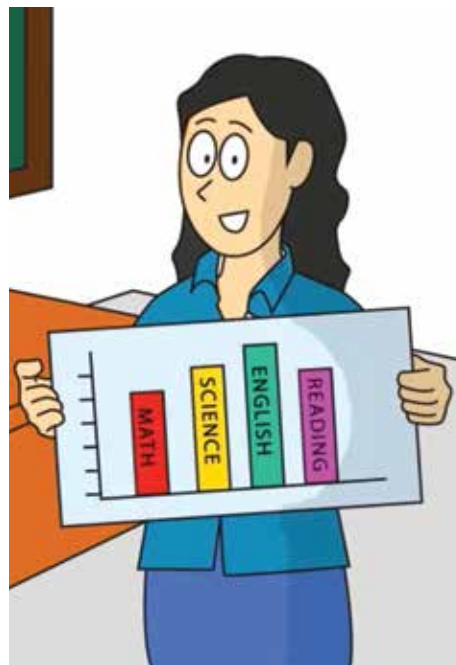


# TIP-KY Offers Resources for Educators and Families

Scenario One: Lydia is in fifth grade. She is scoring in the 96th to 99th percentile on grade-level assessments in all core subjects. Educators recognize she needs academic challenges that go beyond her grade level but can't pinpoint her academic ceiling in each area. How can teachers learn more about the level at which Lydia is ready to learn?

Scenario Two: Zack is in eighth grade. His parents say he is bored with school. His teachers have seen a decline in interest in his classes. His academic history suggests he has high ability, but his current grades do not reflect his higher grades from previous years. What can be done to learn more about Zack's abilities so he is appropriately challenged?

Scenario Three: Chloe loves math and science and shows high potential in those



classes. She wants to do more outside of school in these areas of interest. What can Chloe do for further enhancement?

The Talent Identification Program of Kentucky (TIP-KY<sup>SM</sup>) is helping educators, students, and families across the Commonwealth as well as other states with similar scenarios and more. TIP-KY offers above-level assessments for students in grades 4-8. Above-level assessments are designed for students in a higher grade but are administered to younger students. This assessment allows high-ability or high-potential students to discover what they are ready to learn beyond their grade level. Since TIP-KY's opening in 2022, more than 1,100 students in grades 7 and 8 have registered for the ACT, and more than 2,000 students in grades 4-6 have taken the I-Excel above-level assessment.


The jewel of the assessment process is the comprehensive report from IDEAL Solutions® through The Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa. Students and educators receive reports explaining the level at which the student is ready to learn by subject, including a comparative analysis with other bright students. This information is not only helpful for students with future academic planning, but also for school systems regarding course adjustments that might be needed to accommodate students' needs.

"The I-Excel report is a wonderful tool to use when advocating for access to advanced coursework for students," said Lesli VanWhy, gifted and talented coordinator for Marion County. "It serves as credible evidence in the minds of the powers that be. The reports also help parents better understand their child's

ability level rather than just saying they scored high. Within the report, a student's performance is measured and then a Pyramid of Educational Options shows the next best steps for the student from general enrichment to grade-skipping and/or acceleration by two or more years."

Once students have a better understanding of what they are ready to learn, The Center has a long, rich tradition

of programming opportunities that are folded nicely into the components for TIP-KY. Over the past four decades, thousands of students have benefited from enrichment programs such as SCATS, VAMPY, Camp Innovate, Camp Explore, and Super Saturdays. Whether a student is seeking specific subjects to learn more about or wanting to discover new topics of interest, TIP-KY offers enrichment through The Center's programming.



**TIP-KY ONLINE**  
Visit [wku.edu/gifted/tipky](http://wku.edu/gifted/tipky) to learn more about the I-Excel assessment for students in grades 4-6 and the ACT for students in grades 7-8. The site features short videos that explain the benefits of above-level assessments.

On February 7, Dr. Mary Evans was recognized as a recipient of the Christopher Ware Staff Star Award given by the WKU Staff Senate. Mary is a valuable member of The Center team and the WKU community not only for her work but also for the optimism and warm spirit she brings to the Hill daily.

Mary, who has been involved with The Center since 1991, genuinely cares about everyone she meets, and you can count on her to share the optimistic outlook of any situation. She empowers people through her encouraging words and provides constructive feedback, always with an eye toward improving opportunities offered through The Center.

In addition to teaching and mentoring graduate students, Mary has taken the



## WKU CELEBRATES THE CENTER'S MARY EVANS

lead with planning the Super Saturdays program that serves students in first through sixth grades. She also provides guidance for the parents of advanced students and plans professional learning for superintendents, principals, and gifted and talented coordinators and teachers.

While there is much to be admired about Mary's work, what makes her stand out is her heart. Mary makes each member of The Center team feel valued and appreciated – even writing poetry to honor staff members as they celebrate a birthday or pursue other opportunities. The Center for Gifted Studies is a small staff that is able to do big things because of Mary's leadership, support, and kindness.

"OK, folks, it's Wednesday. We're halfway through. Tell me what has been memorable for you."

The answers come quickly as the 28 travelers gather around Center Executive Director Julia Roberts at the start of another day in and around London.

"The castle at Warwick. That was surreal to be in an actual castle."

"The Globe!"

"I loved the Easter service in St. Paul's."

"I really liked the National Gallery."

"I enjoyed sitting in Trafalgar Square and watching the people and that beautiful skyline looking out at Big Ben."

Travelers with The Center for Gifted Studies can be assured of a variety of activities during their time abroad, and the spring 2024 trip to London was no exception. In just 8 days, from March 30 to April 6, the group visited 21 sites or attractions ranging from the gravitas of Churchill's War Rooms to the playfulness of Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, home of the Harry Potter movie franchise.

"My two favorite highlights were the Warwick Castle (a medieval castle open to visitors) and the Harry Potter museum," said Cameron Knight, an eighth grader from Lebanon, KY. Laura Knoepfel, an eighth grader from Paris, TN, echoed



Cameron's choice of the Warner Bros. stop. "Seeing the behind the scenes that make the movies so magical was, indeed, magical."

Dashel Brown, a freshman at Frankfort (KY) High School, honed his photography skills throughout the trip and was happy to see one of London's most famous landmarks. "I have always wanted to see Big Ben in person."

Students and adults benefit from travel in many ways. "Travel opens opportunities!" said Julia. "The Center for Gifted Studies has provided multiple travel experiences for many years. Travel builds

# A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

## The Center Travels to England



confidence that one could do it again when provided with opportunities."

Solon Sims, an eighth grader from Danville, KY, stepped out of his comfort zone with a trip aboard the London Eye, the world's largest cantilevered observation wheel. "The views were breathtaking even though I was a bit scared of being at that height."

Fears dispelled, Solon and his fellow travelers capped their week with a unique view of the sprawling city. "Seeing the world from different perspectives is an important outcome from traveling," Julia said. "For most people, travel whets the appetite for traveling again and again."



Native Kentuckians in the past developed a conditioned response to hearing “they just said something about Kentucky on the news.”

Following a deep sigh, they would prepare for some ridiculous story such as “Kentucky Man Throws Christmas Ham at Woman” (2018) or “Kentucky Man Accidentally Dials Police While Planning Robbery” (2016).

Anytime Kentucky made headlines, it seemed to be for “news” that perpetuated the myth of Kentucky as a backward state worthy of ridicule.

Times are changing. “Kentucky Receives National Recognition for

over the course of their lives, according to Kristen Hengtgen and Hector Biaggi of The Education Trust in Washington, DC. The two examined current policies and existing data for their December 2023 report, “Increasing Access to Advanced Coursework in Kentucky.”

Kentucky received good marks on several measures that promote advanced coursework, including higher subsidies for Advanced Placement exam fees; funding of AdvanceKY, an organization focused on providing access and support for rigorous coursework; a strong and user-friendly data dashboard; and a dual credit attainment goal that seeks to have half of

are Black, Latino, or from low-income households, adding that in the average Kentucky district, 63% of students are listed as economically disadvantaged.

“This is a serious topic, and it has serious ramifications for the economic future for Kentucky students,” Hengtgen said at the 2024 Kentucky Association for Gifted Education Conference, held in Lexington in February.

Her statement echoed concerns raised by The Center’s Julia Roberts in an opinion piece in the Courier Journal in December 2023: “One in three Kentucky students were enrolled in an advanced course in 2022, which includes Advanced Placement, Dual Credit, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge AICE. However, disparities in access were evident, particularly for minority students and students from low-income backgrounds, with just 1 in 5 students from low-income backgrounds enrolled in an advanced course the same year. This disparity suggests there are students eager and ready for advanced courses who are not being identified through traditional means.”

The question then becomes how do we find these students and how do we provide the opportunities and support they – and, in turn, Kentucky – need?

# Keeping Pace in Kentucky – How Education Can Match the Business Boom

Economic Development” (2022) and “Kentucky has No. 8 Best Job Market in U.S. in 2023” reflect the current image of the state as a burgeoning center of growth and development.

To ensure an advanced, diverse workforce that meets the needs of that development, state education systems must provide advanced coursework opportunities for students throughout their K-12 education.

Students who participate in advanced coursework tend to be more engaged in school, have higher graduation rates, and often find greater economic success

Kentucky’s high school students graduate with at least one dual credit course.

The dilemma is posed by schools and school districts that do not offer much advanced coursework, giving students very limited opportunities to learn at the level at which they are ready to learn. From the time children enter school, they must be learning every day. If other students are not ready to learn, that should not hold back students who need opportunities to learn at advanced levels.

The researchers also found that Kentucky mirrors the national picture with underrepresentation of students who



## Share Your Voice

If you are interested in joining The Center’s efforts to promote advanced coursework in Kentucky, please reach out to Julia Roberts at [julia.roberts@wku.edu](mailto:julia.roberts@wku.edu).



[wku.edu/gifted/vampyreunion](http://wku.edu/gifted/vampyreunion)

Hengtgen and Biaggi outline promising practices:

**Change the way students are identified for advanced coursework.** Washington, North Carolina, and Texas have successfully adopted “opt-in” policies that automatically enroll high-performing students into rigorous courses.

**Provide students with early and continuous opportunities to be inspired and to demonstrate their readiness for rigor.** A robust Primary Talent Pool program as outlined in the state statutes is a good first step to addressing this gap. As Hengtgen and Biaggi note, participation in elementary gifted programs and eighth grade Algebra I often leads to participation in advanced coursework.

**Create positive school climates that support students who are Black, Latino, or from low-income backgrounds.** Schools can provide student voice surveys, adopt affirming curriculum, develop partnerships with families, and strive to hire teachers who reflect the students in an effort to provide a place where students feel like they belong.

Schools across the Commonwealth of Kentucky need to ensure opportunities for high-level learning for all students who demonstrate their readiness to learn at advanced levels. Proficiency is grade-level learning, and it provides no goal for students who are achieving beyond that level. Advanced coursework must be in place to prepare young people for the economy of today and tomorrow.

**LEARN MORE**

- The Education Trust report “Increasing Access to Advanced Coursework in Kentucky” can be found at [tinyurl.com/edtrustky](http://tinyurl.com/edtrustky) or through [edtrust.org](http://edtrust.org).
- Julia Roberts’ opinion piece for the Courier Journal can be read online at [tinyurl.com/cjopinion](http://tinyurl.com/cjopinion).
- Building a Wider, More Diverse Pipeline of Advanced Learners outlines recommended policies and practices for K-12 learners. Read online at [tinyurl.com/pipelinewku](http://tinyurl.com/pipelinewku).

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Tyler Clark (Counselor)  
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*In memory of Mary Thomas*

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Susan Cook (Travel)  
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Holly Lewis (Travel)  
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Nashville, TN

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Donna Martray  
Elberta, AL  
*In memory of Carl Martray*

Jim & Diane Matherly  
Bay City, MI

Kenneth McIntosh  
Louisville, KY

Brian & Allison  
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Alvaton, KY

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Çurrie & Judy Milliken  
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Helen Moseley  
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Brad Mutchler  
Paducah, KY

Ekaterina Myakshina  
Bowling Green, KY

Nancy O'Neal  
Russellville, KY

Mary Ann Pardieck  
Columbus, IN

Shannon Pickett (Counselor)  
Glasgow, KY

Duncan Pitchford  
(VAMPY, Teaching Assistant)  
Chesterfield, VA

Jonathan Plucker  
Germantown, TN

Phoebe Pohlman  
Perryville, MO

Javier Ponce  
Nashville, TN

Frances Porter  
La Canada Flintridge, CA

Jahreé Rager  
Brandenburg, KY  
*In honor of Lou Bates*

Allison Ratterman  
Crestwood, KY

Jeffrey Ream (VAMPY)  
Las Vegas, NV

Amanda Richardson  
Westview, KY

Pat Richardson  
Louisville, KY

Dick & Julia Roberts  
Bowling Green, KY  
*In memory of Carl Martray*



Jennifer Robinson  
(VAMPY, Travel)  
Coxs Creek, KY

Ben & Patricia Segó  
Glendale, KY

David Shadowen  
Bowling Green, KY

Ridhima Sikka  
Elizabethtown, KY

Janet Skees (Travel)  
Louisville, KY

Adam & Sarah Greer  
(VAMPY, Counselor) Smith  
Memphis, TN

Joyce Ann Spiceland  
Bowling Green, KY

Frances Steenbergen  
Glasgow, KY

Jeff & Margaret Stein  
Bowling Green, KY

Bennie Stephens  
Center, KY

Kathy Strunk  
Gallatin, TN

Rena Subotnik  
Washington, DC

Beverly Swanson  
Owensboro, KY

Michael Taylor  
Vestavia Hills, AL

Carolyn Traum  
Princeton, KY

Brad Trevathan  
Culver, IN

David & Jill VonGruben  
Wildwood, MO

Kristen VonGruben (VAMPY)  
Fenton, MO

Jon Warren (Counselor)  
& Kara Hodges (Super  
Saturdays, SCATS)  
Antioch, TN

Kendrick & Claudia Wells  
Louisville, KY

Michael & Sherry Whitten  
Killen, AL  
*In honor of Lois Parker*

Mary Ellen Wiederwohl  
(SCATS)  
Louisville, KY

Amber Wilkins  
Russellville, KY

Scott Willoughby (Travel)  
Hardinsburg, KY

Joe & Judy Wisman  
Talent, OR

**IN MEMORY OF RENITA HINES**

D&J Farms  
Calhoun, KY

Carol Hall  
Evansville, IN

Amanda Hines (SCATS)  
Evansville, IN

Chester Humphrey Jr.  
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Counselor)  
Palm Springs, CA

Chivas Owle  
Casselberry, FL



Educators adopt many roles in the classroom – instructor, motivator, cheerleader, nurse – but none is more important to gifted education than that of talent scout.

As academic talent scouts, educators seek to discover students who demonstrate high potential. It's easy to spot those who earn high marks, but it's essential to also find those students who have the ability to perform well if provided a nurturing, responsive environment.

The state of Kentucky recognizes the importance of finding these students – so much so that the Kentucky Gifted Regulation (704 KAR 3:285) mandates that each district develop and support a Primary Talent Pool for “high potential learners” in kindergarten through third grade. The regulation defines high potential learners as those who typically represent the top quartile (25%) of the student population in the areas of gifted and talented: general intellectual ability, a specific academic area, creativity, leadership, or the visual and performing arts.

A minimum of three informal measures are used as evidence for a student's inclusion in the Primary Talent Pool (PTP). These measures rely on observation and professional judgment rather than being standardized or norm referenced with numbers and scores. A building level committee composed of an administrator, primary teachers, a school counselor, a gifted and talented teacher, and other personnel familiar with the child's abilities determines eligibility for services and what those services should be.

Primary portfolios, behavior checklists, anecdotal records, parent interviews and questionnaires, teacher assessments, work samples, products, or performances can all be considered as evidence for eligibility. Data from formal, normed measures can be used to discover students not found through these informal measures but are not used to



# Nurturing Young Talent

## Kentucky's Primary Talent Pool Sets the Stage for Excellence



exclude students. The PTP is intended to cast a wide net, and considerations should always err on the side of inclusion.

Once a student is selected to the PTP, a plan is developed to provide appropriate instruction in the student's area of strength. The PTP is not a one-size-fits-all program; instructional opportunities are designed to allow for continuous progress based on the individual needs, interests, and abilities.

Some PTP students may need to be grouped for reading and/or math and served by a regular classroom teacher who compacts the curriculum. Subject-area acceleration is appropriate for some

advanced PTP students who may receive services in a classroom at a higher grade level. PTP students selected in the area of general intellectual ability might be in ability groups in math and/or reading and also meet with the gifted/talented specialist. A student placed in the PTP for visual art may be served by an art teacher who would group the visual art students and serve them in a pull-out program that meets one hour each month. (Seeing a gifted/talented specialist once a month would not be an appropriate service delivery option for a student requiring services in math. Math is a daily subject, and services need to be delivered daily.)

## GIFTED IN KENTUCKY

Researcher Judy Galbraith conducted surveys and interviews with more than 400 gifted students to identify “The Eight Great Gripes of Gifted Kids” for her 1985 study. Listed first was “no one explains what being gifted is all about – it’s kept a big secret.” Though the field of gifted education has taken great strides since that report, many students and parents still aren’t sure what it’s all about. This four-part series will examine key elements of gifted programming in Kentucky beginning with this overview of the Primary Talent Pool. Future issues will include articles on identification, services, and the Gifted Student Service Plan.

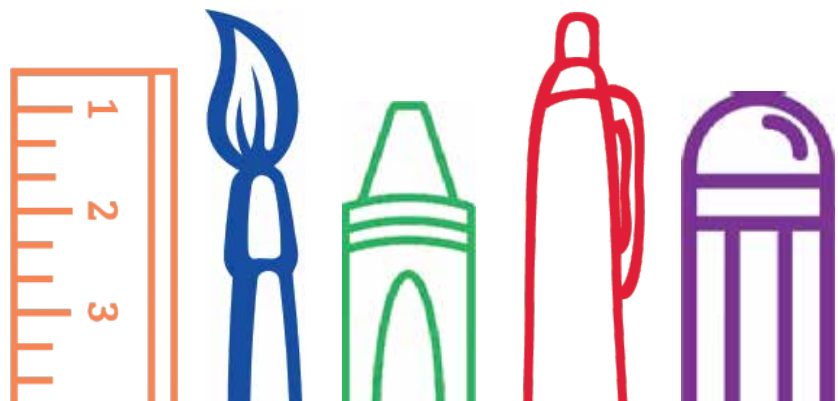
The services a student receives may change to match evolving needs and interests, but once selected, a student will remain in the talent pool through the end of third grade. Students may be considered for identification for the gifted and talented program that begins at fourth grade, but selection into the PTP does not guarantee a spot in the gifted program. Specific and more stringent criteria must be met for GT identification.

Having a robust PTP that finds children early and nurtures their exceptional abilities during the primary years ensures that more students, especially students who are just learning the English language, who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, or who are twice exceptional, will qualify as gifted, perform at higher levels, and be more prepared to take advanced coursework in upper grades.



## PRIMARY TALENT POOL TOOLKIT

The Center for Gifted Studies has developed an in-depth guide to the Primary Talent Pool in Kentucky. Find information and resources online at [gifted-studies.com/ptp](https://gifted-studies.com/ptp).





QuestBridge Managing Director John Gaines celebrates with Gatton students, from left, George Nguyen, Cameron Miller, Daniela Lopez Llorens, Lyla Wood, Mara Neace, and Allison Dixon. Not pictured: Benjamin McMahan.

# IT'S A MATCH! SEVEN GATTON STUDENTS RECEIVE QUESTBRIDGE AWARDS

Like many Gatton students on a Friday afternoon, Lyla Wood sat in the common area on her wing, her laptop positioned in front of her. Instead of looking at physics homework or biology lab notes, however, she eagerly refreshed a page until it finally read "update posted."

Lyla rushed to her room, plopped down on her rug, and opened her email. As confetti streamed down the screen, she read the words, "Congratulations, You've Matched." What began as an application for an opportunity that seemed "too good to be true" had become a thrilling reality. Lyla had just received the news that she would be attending Amherst College with a full scholarship through the QuestBridge National College Match Program.

# 2024 QUESTBRIDGE SCHOLARS

STUDENT	MATCH	INTENDED MAJOR
Allison Dixon	Davidson College	Chemistry
Daniela Lopez Llorens	Northwestern University	Biological sciences with a concentration in molecular genetics
Benjamin McMahan	Washington University in St. Louis	Physics
Cameron Miller	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Mathematics and computer science
Mara Neace	Grinnell College	Chemistry and mathematics
George Nguyen	Washington University in St. Louis	Computer science
Lyla Wood	Amherst College	Biology

QuestBridge is a nonprofit that connects high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds with leading institutions of higher education and other educational opportunities. Their National College Match Program is a scholarship application process that helps outstanding students gain admission and a full four-year scholarship to 52 of the nation's most selective colleges. The scholarship covers the gamut of expenses that make up a student's cost of attendance: tuition, housing, food, books, travel expenses, and other supplies.

The selection process for the National College Match Scholarship is competitive. Of more than 20,800 applicants in 2024, 6,683 students were selected as finalists. From the finalists, 2,242 students were selected as Match Scholarship Recipients. These students represent some of the most academically successful in the nation with an average unweighted GPA of 3.94 and more than 90% of them in the top 10% of their graduating class.

Seven Gatton Academy students matched this year: Allison Dixon (Central Hardin High School), Daniela Lopez Llorens (Hopkinsville High School), Benjamin McMahan (Spencer County High School), Cameron Miller (Central Hardin High School), Mara Neace (Model Laboratory High School), George Nguyen (Warren Central High School), and Lyla Wood (Edmonson County High School). These seven represent a third of the total 21 matches awarded in Kentucky.

"Not only is this the most students to match in a single class, it's more than we've had in Gatton's history," said Dr. Lynette Breedlove, director of The Gatton Academy.

For Lyla and her peers, the QuestBridge match brings their dreams to life. "I knew growing up I wouldn't go to college unless I paid for it," she said. "I think for me and a lot of other people, this is an opportunity to go to college."

When she travels from Edmonson County to Massachusetts and steps onto the Amherst campus this fall, Lyla is confident that she'll adjust quickly to the demands of college life. "I'm not going to be as nervous on my first day of classes because I've done it here at 16 years old."



# 'The Neurodiversity Moment'

## Students Thrive in Strength-Based Classrooms

Matt Fugate is ready for a change. Fugate, provost of the Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity in Education, said the U.S. education system operates from an out-of-date “fix it” paradigm. What our current students need is a strength-based paradigm, particularly given the number of twice-exceptional students in our schools.

Speaking at The Center’s annual Twice-Exceptional Students Seminar, Fugate estimated 385,000 students in our classrooms can be described as twice-exceptional or 2e, those who are gifted and have a learning difference. (Gifted is not regulated nationwide as special education is, so specific numbers of 2e learners are not available.)

“Your twice-exceptional students have been sitting in classrooms and school buildings for far too long that are focused on a deficit model,” he said. “We spend too much time on what’s broken and not enough time focused on strengths, interests, and talent.

“How do we help our 2e children? By focusing on their strengths and leveraging those to help mitigate those areas where they’re challenged, where they struggle. We’re in the age of the neurodiversity movement.”

These students are great problem-solvers, Fugate said, and will be more

invested in a task if they have a problem to solve instead of learning skills in isolation. “We have to change the way we’re helping students connect with information.”

Many who are labeled with ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder) fit more appropriately as students with ADHG – attention divergent hyperactive giftedness, Fugate said. Twice-exceptional students are gifted first, and we can’t ignore that. “We recognize the challenges because the challenges are real. But we’ve got to use the things that make them unique.”

Fugate suggested six strategies that can be beneficial to 2e learners:

**Foster creativity:** Create classroom spaces that nurture exploration and inquiry. Welcome questions, even when not asked at quite the right time.

**Build self-awareness:** These students can be taught to reflect on feelings and their reactions in certain situations, Fugate said. We have to build time for reflection into our school day: “We cannot ever separate the social-emotional from the academic.”

**Help students find their happy place:** Give these students moments when they can escape and daydream. Daydreaming is not necessarily inattention or procrastination, he said. Often it is the incubation that fuels creativity.

**Provide choice:** Allowing for student choice in topic and/or in product benefits gifted and 2e students alike.

**Provide time:** These students may have processing issues and need a little longer to think.

**Provide challenging and meaningful experiences:** Learn students’ strengths and areas of interests to develop appropriate opportunities in a focus area.

## Characteristics of 2e Students

Excellent problem-solvers	Highly independent in areas of strength but requires frequent teacher attention when working in areas of deficit
May have attention deficit issues	Highly critical of self and others (shift spotlight to someone else who is struggling as a protective factor)
Inquisitive (sometimes at inappropriate times or in inappropriate ways)	Loner mentality (not sure where they fit)
Highly imaginative	“Street-wise”
Willing to take academic risks (in areas of intense interest and when nurtured in the right environment, even when it’s challenging)	Wide range of interests
Use humor to divert attention from learning deficits	Heightened focus in areas of interest (can be difficult to get kids to transition)
Sometimes appear immature	

SOURCE: Matt Fugate, Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity in Education



It's not everyday an astronaut visits The Center for Gifted Studies, and the astronauts who stopped by in January are truly unique.

Marvin and Marsha Mallownaut, fresh from their December 19 flight to space aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard, showed just a little wear and tear after their experience as part of the third payload launched by the National STEM Scholar Program.

Designed to inspire and support middle school science teachers, and thereby ignite students' passion for science, the National STEM Scholar Program invites a cohort of 10 teachers to WKU's campus each summer. Professional learning that builds on exploration and collaboration includes a set of lessons that allow earthbound students to take an active role in space exploration.

Enter Marvin and Marsha, marshmallows that take to the sky in the name of science. This year, their mission was to determine the effects of flying debris. Students in STEM Scholar classrooms across the nation performed experiments and

# Science Gets Real

## Middle School Students Connect to Space Exploration



made predictions and will compare their findings to those observed in space. At their post-flight unboxing, the mallownauts survived, although some did show evidence of minor injury.

What's next for Marvin and Marsha remains to be seen as the 2024 cohort of STEM Scholars arrives on campus May 26.

*The National STEM Scholar Program is made possible through the generous support of the National Stem Cell Foundation.*

### 2024 National STEM Scholars

The newest cohort of middle school teachers features educators from nine states: Katie Duff, Manhattan, IL; Heather Febres, Orlando, FL; Angela Kopp, Overland Park, KS; Bridget McDonald, Katy, TX; Sarah Nelson Wiese, Omaha, NE; Samantha Poll, Hampden, ME; Nicole Slowik, Vestavia Hills, AL; Kourtney Taylor, Stanford, KY; Eliza Vela, San Antonio, TX; and Michael Vigeant, Lafayette, TN.



# Why Join Your State Organization: If Not You, Then Who?

Joining your state organization that advocates for gifted students and advanced learning opportunities is important and likely not very expensive at all. Why would signing up as a member of your state advocacy organization be a good idea?

The number one reason to join your state organization is to stay up to date with opportunities as well as to know what is current and proposed policy and legislation. The need to know constitutes the backbone of effective advocacy. It is impossible to be an effective advocate at any level without information and/or the knowledge of where to locate information. Staying up to date with policies and

legislation in the state as well as opportunities for children and young people with gifts and talents is very important. What is in place at the state level affects what will be or could be available in all districts. “Being in the know” enhances the possibilities of being an effective advocate. State organizations issue newsletters, host webinars, and hold conferences – all ways to stay informed.

A second reason to join your state organization is that numbers count. An advocate can speak out; however, the likelihood of being effective in advocacy is greater when one joins with others who are speaking out with the same message.

**JOIN  
KAGE**

The Kentucky Association for Gifted Education offers individual and institutional memberships starting at just \$30 annually through its website, [kagegifted.org](http://kagegifted.org).

- 1 person = A fruitcake
- 2 people = A fruitcake and a friend
- 3 people = Troublemakers
- 5 people = “Let’s have a meeting.”
- 10 people = “We’d better listen.”
- 25 people = “Our dear friends”
- 50 people = “A powerful organization” (Henderson et al., 2004)

Being a member of the state gifted organization is likely something to continue over a lifetime. After all, if advocating for advanced learners is important when your children are in school, it is equally important for grandchildren and the community in general. Remember, economic development depends on young people being prepared to venture forward as leaders in business, education, industry, medicine, and various key opportunities in your community.

In Kentucky, the gifted organization is the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education (KAGE), and members benefit in multiple ways. Quarterly newsletters and an annual conference provide insight and updates on gifted education for educators and parents (the next KAGE Conference will be February 10-11 at the Marriott Griffin Gate Resort in Lexington). KAGE also sponsors annual workshops and provides professional learning through the KAGE Foundation. Fees for professional learning are used to provide financial assistance to young people attending summer programs for gifted students. The state office for KAGE is located at The Center for Gifted Studies.

*If not you as an advocate who is a member of the state gifted organization, then who?*

## REFERENCE

Henderson, A., Jacob, B., Kernan-Schloss, A., & Raimondo, B. (2004). *The case for parent leadership*, KSA Plus Communications/ Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

The definition of what it means to be gifted varies from state to state, but one thing remains constant: Gifted students are gifted 24/7 and not just during their class time with a specialist.

Unfortunately, few general education teachers receive professional learning into how gifted minds work and how best to serve these students. According to the National Association for Gifted Children, teachers who attend professional learning sessions are more likely to foster higher-level thinking, consider individual strengths and weaknesses, allow for more student expression, and provide a variety of challenging learning experiences.

Likewise, parents often are at a loss at how to support their gifted children. While some issues that arise are common, gifted children have unique needs that aren't addressed through typical parenting websites or articles.

Over the past year, The Center for Gifted Studies has traveled across the

# Have Message, Will Travel

## Center Promotes Understanding of Gifted

Commonwealth to remedy that gap in knowledge. The Symposium on the Importance of Advanced Content brought leaders in education and industry to Frankfort to discuss policy and practices that will

prepare students for future employment. Sessions on higher-order thinking activities, school-based gifted and talented committees, and above-level assessments were provided onsite in districts and co-ops from Ashland to Eddyville. Staff provided full-day professional learning to district decision-makers and led sessions at district professional development days. In addition, several Center staffers led sessions at the annual Kentucky Association for Gifted Education conference in Lexington.

Back home at WKU, The Center offered parent seminars during fall and winter Super Saturdays sessions, sharing strategies on how to advocate, understand, and encourage gifted learners.



**Contact Us** If you are interested in professional learning for your school or district, contact Julia Roberts at [julia.roberts@wku.edu](mailto:julia.roberts@wku.edu).

## BG NATIVE JOINS CENTER STAFF



Sandy McAllister serves as the Coordinator for Programming and Grants for The Center and the Kentucky Association for Gifted Education. She graduated from Boston University with a bachelor's degree in English and from the University of Massachusetts with a master's degree in education. She worked in Northern Virginia and Maryland as a resource and classroom teacher for high school students with

learning differences and as a tutor before taking time away from work to stay home with her children. Having been gone long enough, Sandy and her family relocated to her hometown of Bowling Green, where she has worked in various nonprofit roles. Outside of work, Sandy enjoys reading, cooking, spending time with family, and working with her husband to restore their historic home.





# The Plight of Boys and Men

When an invited speaker starts his talk with a disclaimer, you can't help but sit up a little bit straighter in your chair. Something interesting is coming.

And so it was on March 5 as Wedge Visiting Scholar Richard Reeves addressed the crowd at WKU's Eva & Jim Martens Alumni Center. Reeves, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and author of the book *Of Boys and Men*, made it clear from the get-go: His focus on issues surrounding boys and men does not detract from issues surrounding girls and women. This is not a zero-sum game, he said, and there is room for tending to both genders.

## LEARN MORE

READ: *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It* by Richard V. Reeves (ISBN 978-0815739876)

VISIT: The American Institute for Boys and Men can be found online at [aibm.org](http://aibm.org).

His current focus is on men and boys, however, because the numbers cry out for attention and not much is being paid.

Reeves created the American Institute for Boys and Men as a non-partisan, issue-based think tank that reports numbers, raises questions, and suggests solutions. "There is so much bad stuff out there, bad social science, bad commentary," he said. "Our job is to report the facts, however uncomfortable."

Research shows four areas of concern: mental health, education, wages and work, and family and fatherhood.

Reeves addressed mental health first, noting "the word crisis is not hyperbole in this case." Suicide rates are four times greater for men than women, with about 40,000 men lost to suicide in 2022. "We're losing too many of our young men. We cannot afford to lose a generation of young men."

At the same time, the number of male psychologists has dropped from 60 percent to 20 percent. No one has yet looked to see if this decline has had any effect on the current mental health

situation for men, Reeves said, but it is an example of the importance of paying attention to data.

Looking at the data for postsecondary education is also sobering for men, with women being more likely to enroll and complete a degree. "The single biggest risk for not completing college is being male," Reeves said.

He again was careful to note that one gender does not need to succeed at the expense of another, but attention must be paid to both and to other factors such as race. Black women and Black girls are making extraordinary progress compared with Black men and Black boys, he said.

When it comes to wages and work, women have seen wage increases across the board while men have only seen increases for the top earners, Reeves said. Most men, he added, will earn less than their fathers.



The traditional view of family and fatherhood is also due for a revision, Reeves said. Women with a four-year college degree are more likely to have children inside a marriage, otherwise the norm is to have children outside of marriage. "The idea that to be a good dad you have to be a husband is an idea in the rearview mirror."

All of these changes are happening rapidly, Reeves said. And that's something interesting to think about.

*The Wedge Seminar has provided free lectures and workshops for educators and the public at WKU since 2003. Thanks to the Wedge family.*

In this edition of *The Challenge*, we kick off an occasional series called "A Few of Our Favorite Things." We often get requests for recommendations of books, websites, etc., that would appeal to gifted and talented students. We are happy to share our ideas with the caveat that families should always preview materials. What one family finds suitable, another family may not.

Just in time for summer reading, we share A Few of Our Favorite Books. Check out the list below to discover your next good read!

# A Few of Our Favorite Books

## **Dark Life and its sequel Rip Tide** by Kat Falls ([katfalls.net](http://katfalls.net))

The ice caps have melted, the seas have risen, and all the humans have huddled on what land is left. That is until the government offers free land under the sea. Join the next group of pioneers as they learn to farm seaweed and fish and build houses that sway with the currents. Then there are the pirates to contend with . . .

## **Gregor the Overlander** and sequels

by Suzanne Collins  
([suzannecollinsbooks.com](http://suzannecollinsbooks.com))

*Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins combined the idea of *Alice in Wonderland* and New York City to create this subterranean world where humans, bats, cockroaches, spiders, mice, and (of course!) rats must co-exist. Throw in a young "warrior," his baby sister, and prophecies that can be interpreted in multiple ways — it all adds up to a nonstop read-a-thon.

## **The Frog Princess**

by E.D. Baker ([talesofedbaker.com](http://talesofedbaker.com))

This is not your typical princess story. Here, the princess kisses the frog — and becomes a frog! Not to be confused with Disney's *The Princess and The Frog* (which borrowed from this book), this cleverly written story follows the tomboy Emerald and her quest to avoid her mother's version of happily ever after.



## **The Book with No Pictures** by B.J. Novak ([thebookwithnopictures.com](http://thebookwithnopictures.com))

Adults who are fans of *The Office* will know Novak, who plays Ryan on that show. This book is kid friendly and is meant to be read aloud. There is no better way to share the power of the written word!

## **Geronimo Stilton series** by Elisabetta Dami ([geronimostilton.com](http://geronimostilton.com))

Geronimo is a newspaper editor who would love a quiet life, but he always gets dragged into all sorts of adventures with his family. The text comes alive through unusual use of fonts, colors, type placement, etc. It can serve as an inspiration for young writers too.

## **Found (part of the Missing series)** by Margaret Peterson Haddix ([haddixbooks.com](http://haddixbooks.com))

This is a brain bender of a series! We can't tell you too much because we might accidentally share a spoiler. What we can tell you is this: Adopted children find out much more about their birth families than they ever expected. It involves the FBI. And time travel. And that's all we're saying.

## **Calvin & Hobbes** by Bill Watterson

Oh my, but can some kids really relate to Calvin and how he feels about school! There is so much to enjoy about these books, and most of all is Calvin's imagination.

The natural beauty of Ireland takes a star turn on the itinerary for The Center's fall break trip. The picturesque Cliffs of Moher are familiar to many, but the unusual landscape of the Burren, the deep harbor of Cobh, the tumbling waters of Torc Waterfall, and the wild, natural beauty of the Dingle Peninsula will provide plenty of spots for photography and oohs and aahs.

Not to be outdone, manmade spectacles St. Patrick's Cathedral, Trinity College, and Kylemore Abbey top a list of must-see stops in the cities and across the countryside. Travelers will depart Nashville, TN, on October 4 and return October 13. A guide will accompany the group throughout the trip to provide information about the history and geography of the country.

The Center's Travel/Study Program, which is open to eighth-grade and high school honors students and interested adults, is designed to challenge, excite, and enrich the lives and minds of participants while fostering awareness and appreciation of other cultures.

# EXPLORE THE EMERALD ISLE

**Fall Break in Ireland: This October 4-13 trip will include a stop at Blarney Castle, of course, but that is just one place on a long list of historic and beautiful sights. Find details and an application at [wku.edu/gifted/travel](http://wku.edu/gifted/travel).**

## THE 2024 FALL BREAK ITINERARY

### Friday, October 4

Depart Nashville for Ireland.

### Saturday, October 5

Arrive in Dublin and take a private coach tour, including a visit to Kilmainham Gaol. Check in at our hotel.

### Sunday, October 6

Attend church services at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Ireland's largest church. After lunch, take a walking tour of Trinity College, founded in 1592. Visit the Old Library of the College, which houses the Book of Kells, the richly decorated medieval manuscript containing the four gospels in Latin. End the day strolling down O'Connell Street to see monuments to Irish patriots.

### Monday, October 7

Leave Dublin for Glendalough, the "valley of the two lakes" and site of a monastic settlement founded in the 6th century.



From Glendalough, travel to Kilkenny for lunch and a stroll through the town. Leave Kilkenny for Waterford, the oldest city in Ireland. End the day with a tour of the House of Waterford, the manufacturing center for the famous crystal. Spend the night in Waterford.

### Tuesday, October 8

Travel from Waterford to visit the Rock of Cashel, a symbol of royal and priestly power for more than 1,000 years. Leave Cashel for

Cobh and a visit to the Cobh Heritage Centre to learn about the town's role in Irish emigration and as a port of call for transatlantic liners including the Lusitania and the Titanic. Travel from Cobh to Killarney with a stop en route to visit the remains of Blarney Castle and kiss the Blarney Stone.

### Wednesday, October 9

Leave Killarney to spend the morning in Killarney National Park, going first to see Torc Waterfall and then visiting Muckross House and Traditional Farms. In the afternoon travel to the Dingle Peninsula and follow the famous Sleat Head Drive to see some of Ireland's wildest natural beauty and most ancient Christian sites before returning to Killarney.

### Thursday, October 10

Depart Killarney for Shannon to visit Bunratty Castle & Folk Park. The castle has been restored to its original 16th century state. In the afternoon travel to the breathtaking Cliffs of Moher before heading east through a vast limestone plateau called the Burren, an area noted for an astonishing array of plants that grow in crevices of the stone. Spend the night in Galway.

### Friday, October 11

Travel west from Galway into Connemara, a wild region encompassing bogs, mountains, and rugged coastline. Take the Sky Road with splendid views of the mountains and Clifden Bay and head to Letterfrack for a visit to Connemara National Park, famous for its lakes and wildlife. In the afternoon, visit Kylemore Abbey and its Victorian walled gardens. Travel on to Cong, a picturesque village on the shores of Lough Corrib. Return to Galway for the night.

### Saturday, October 12

Leave Galway for Newgrange and Knowth to visit the prehistoric passage graves constructed more than 5,000 years ago. Travel on to Dublin for some shopping and sight-seeing before preparing for the trip home.

### Sunday, October 13

Depart Dublin for Nashville.

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# CALENDAR

- SCATS** (*Grades 6-8*)  
June 2-14
- VAMPY** (*Grades 7-10*)  
June 16 – July 6
- Camp Innovate** (*Grades 3-5*)  
June 17-21
- Advanced Placement  
Summer Institute: Bowling Green**  
June 24-28
- Advanced Placement  
Summer Institute: Virtual**  
July 1-5
- Camp Explore** (*Grades 1-3*)  
July 8-12
- Advanced Placement  
Summer Institute: St. Louis**  
July 15-19
- Berta Seminar**  
September 24
- Fall Travel to Ireland**  
October 4-13
- Fall Super Saturdays** (*Grades 1-6*)  
October 19, 26, & November 2
- Twice-Exceptional  
Students Seminar**  
October 23