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For Additional Information

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Warren Wilson College senior honored as “civic trailblazer”

ELON, NC – Warren Wilson College senior **Bryan Thompson (they/them)** has been selected as the 2020 recipient of the John H. Barnhill Civic Trailblazer Award. Since 2011, North Carolina Campus Compact has presented the award annually to one college student in the state who has created and led innovative projects that address community needs.

Thompson started their leadership journey in 2017 as a Resident Assistant for Student Life and a Communications Assistant in the WIDE Office. Today they are the Student Crew Leader for WIDE and the President of the Black Student Union (BSU). Through Thompson’s vision, leadership and advocacy the BSU developed a set of demands that resulted in the creation of two new positions at the College - Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and a Director of DEI Initiatives. The institution has also committed to implementing equity requirements within every academic department resulting in the entire faculty engaging in a deep overhaul of pedagogical methods and curricula.

This spring, prompted by the murder of George Floyd, Thompson extended their leadership beyond campus to the Black Lives Matter movement within the larger Asheville community. An active member of Black AVL Demands, an intergenerational collective of Black leaders in Asheville, Thompson has helped organize, speak out, and lead marches, rallies, and vigils calling for justice and institutional reform. Thompson has also worked with others to host online rent parties to raise almost \$20,000 to help local residents facing eviction as the result of the devastating effects of racism and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since July, they have also served as Youth Program Coordinator for Youth Outright WNC a nonprofit organization that provides LGBTQIA+ youth in Western North Carolina with resources, support, and advocacy. There Thompson helps design and deliver youth programs to both the organization’s weekly youth group and the statewide GSA Network.

Thompson, who is majoring in Creative Writing, has even integrated engagement in their academic endeavors including participating in a creating writing class that worked with inmates of a local women’s prison. A talented singer, actor, and member of the theater crew, Thompson has also found new ways to channel art and scholarship to support their broader

mission as a community leader. One example is The Mothlight Book Club which Thompson co-founded. Through this community book club participants seek understanding through conversation and self-exploration.

Among all the commendations included in the numerous letters sent in support of Thompson's nomination, the most consistent compliments related to their character. Nominators spoke of Thompson's "amazing heart", "aptitude for scholarly inquiry, inquisitive nature and understanding" that sets them "apart from their peers", and their ability to seek out and connect with people with "diverse voices and life experiences, and to integrate those viewpoints into their own understanding and relationship with society." One nominator said that being in Thompson's presence is to "know love and feel joy" and another stated that "the world is a more beautiful, caring space because of Bryan's selflessness and dedication to doing the work."

The Barnhill Award is named for John H. Barnhill, who founded innovative student service programs while a student at Elon University and who later became the founding executive director of North Carolina Campus Compact.

Thompson will be honored during North Carolina Campus Compact's "Engagement Matters" Virtual Student Awards Ceremony on November 13, 2020.

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North Carolina Campus Compact is a collaborative network of 39 colleges and universities committed to educating students for civic and social responsibility, partner with communities for positive change, and strengthen democracy. Learn more at www.nccampuscompact.org.